

Divine Revelation and Human Authenticity

Notes towards a Phenomenology of Becoming Fully Human

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The topic of the article is the anthropological approach to revelation – as a path to the transformation of the subject and the theological source of its full, mature form. It is about creatively going beyond the previous models of revelation in the perspective of their synthesis. Revelation understood as the appearance of God, the transmission of knowledge, or personal communication leading to the development of a divine-human community should also be perceived as an important factor in the constitution of the person. Thanks to it an origination of subjectivity in its fullness takes place, which theology usually describes as salvation, divinization or *deiformitas*. The article proves that the tools proper to the, broadly understood, phenomenology are not only useful for the theology of revelation but are even requested by it. If one momentum of revelation is a fully formed self, a person in a network of relationships, then her proper description should encompass a phenomenological-existential analysis of what personal maturation to the full form of subjectivity entails. Ultimately, the inclusion of the subjective realm, based on an expanded understanding of revelation, is of great importance. This article is not so much an attempt to present another version of a phenomenological theology of revelation, but rather a theological justification of its application.

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” (Ex 34:29 f.)

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me (ἔστιν ἀλήθεια Χριστοῦ ἐν ἐμοί), nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.” (2 Co 11:10)

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός). The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)

The topic of my paper is revelation as seen from the perspective of human subjectivity. My primary concern will be to illuminate the connection between the event and the idea of revelation and the autonomous character of human subjectivity. In order to approach the topics just outlined, I will first present a concept of revelation (1), then attempt to point out the very relationship between subjectivity and revelation (2) and, at the final stage, I will outline a sketch of the argument for the appropriateness of phenomenology for its study (3).

The perspective of my presentation is related to the heritage of a broadly, ecumenically understood Christian theology. So, coming from the perspective of dogmatic theology, my approach will be somewhat unusual. I suppose for this perspective an organic connection of theology and philosophy, i. e. their mutual subsidiarity (method of circulation), while preserving their genetic and methodological distinctiveness. I take the Chalcedonian Creed as the background of such a methodological option: having a connection without presenting a mixture of methods.

1. What is Revelation?

Revelation can be understood as an idea and as an event. Researchers agree that revelation as a technical term is a modern idea. The emergence of the idea in a technical sense is linked to its systematic use. For idealist systems such as Hegel's and Schelling's, it primarily means a technical term that allows for a broader synthesis of different strands of the world picture. Around the same time, 'revelation' appears in theology as a technical term. Its use is linked primarily to apologetics and epistemology. The term revelation fulfills a key role in theology in the post-Tridentine context, allowing, in the fervor of the period of dramatic confessional controversy aroused by the Reformation, to substantiate claims to truth. In this story the emergence of the idea of revelation, its separation, its formalization, both theological and philosophical, coincide with its reduction to mere concept. When revelation as a formal concept enters theology and philosophy it is practically and theoretically reduced to the status of an idea itself. Only in such a broad historical perspective can one understand the entire argument of the early Marion, in which he defends the validity of his work on revelation, his philosophical approach to revelation by reducing it to the very idea of its possibility.¹ Such a stance reveals not so much Marion's beliefs themselves – as he proves in his recent comprehensive monograph on the subject – as it points to the concrete legacy of the modern understanding of revelation from Suarez through Kant and Hegel to Heidegger.²

Although revelation becomes an idea, a technical term and the subject of separate reflection by theology and philosophy in modernity, it is difficult to argue that pre-modern theology did not have such a concept at all. The modern understanding of revelation builds on earlier models and at the same time forgets them by reducing it to a technical term/idea. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council did a titanic job. Based on the detailed studies of the theologians of the *Ressourcement*, it managed not only to return to the pre-modern heritage creatively, but to place additional emphasis on the existential nature of revelation.³

¹ This period finds its culmination in: *Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Stanford 2002, 234–247.

² Id., *D'ailleurs, la révélation. Contribution à une histoire critique et à un concept phénoménal de révélation*, Paris 2020, 63–153. Marion's historical analyses not only complement, but even replace, the classical narrative of the history of the understanding of Revelation presented by the *René Latourelle, Théologie de la Révélation*, Paris 1963 (eng. translation 1966).

³ *Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum"*, n. 2: "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come

In doing so, an intellectualistic understanding of it, proper to modernity, was transcended. The Council detected in the tradition and, thus, accentuated for contemporary theology the existential aspect of revelation by capturing it as God's self-giving: it is factual, historical, and effective. Revelation, therefore, is no longer just an idea necessary to build a certain system of theological beliefs in their specificity on, rather revelation refers to the historical fact of God's self-giving to man.

Indeed, the true history of the theology of revelation is quite rich. Textbook theology has distinguished three historical patterns, paradigms or models of revelation: epiphanic, informational and existential.⁴ Allegedly, the first dominated the reflection on revelation in the patristic era, the second in the Middle Ages and the modern era, and the third is in accordance with the 20th century renewal of theological reflection and its peak in the doctrine of *Dei Verbum*. Usually, the connection that exists between these types of reflection is rarely noticed, especially the fact that the last one builds on the first two, incorporates them and complements them in an important manner. After all, the fact that the revelation of the Trinity signifies God's gift of himself to humankind, does not exclude – in fact it even presupposes – that this gift must be based on God's manifestation in history and the story he has told us about himself in that history. The epiphanic and epistemic moments are components in understanding revelation as the gift of the divine self. In the world of personal relations, after all, such a gift must include both moments indicated above, although as a whole its meaning transcends both the phenomenal dimension of the world's existence (the event of manifestation) and any concept that can be formulated about it (the cognitive moment).

Yet, the theology of revelation of the Second Vatican Council demands further development. Its synthetic nature, in which event and idea have been reconciled by being framed in the key of Trinitarian self-giving, requires another reconciliation, another synthesis so to speak. Vatican II's theology of revelation in its reconciliation of fact and idea accentuates the objective dimension of the event of God's historical self-giving. Karl Rahner, for example, was aware of this, but in the end his theology of revelation got endangered by a perhaps over-emphasized subjective moment. It is sometimes forgotten that the need to supplement the subjective dimension by emphasizing the objective side in understanding revelation

to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: 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. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."

⁴ This is the commonly accepted taxonomy of revelation models (M. Seckler, J. Schmitz, W. Beinert, G. Ruggieri), see Max Seckler, *Der Begriff der Offenbarung*, in: Walter Kern, Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, Max Seckler (eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, Vol. 2: *Traktat Offenbarung*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 1985, 60–84; Hans Waldenfels, *Einführung in die Theologie der Offenbarung*, Darmstadt 1996; Salvador Pie-Ninot, *La teologia fondamentale* (Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea 121), Brescia 2002, 226–230. Avery Dulles presents his own taxonomy (the five fundamental models of revelation are: doctrinal, historical, experiential, the model of dialectical presence and finally the model of revelation conceived as 'new consciousness'), which, however, falls fundamentally within the aforementioned three models, being their explication and expansion of them (see Avery Dulles, *The Models of Revelation*, Garden City 1983, 27 f.).

was recognized just as clearly by Joseph Ratzinger. It was Ratzinger who tried to flesh out the necessity of such a synthesis based on his study of St. Bonaventure's theology of history. Ratzinger intuitively perceives in Bonaventure's conception the conviction that the integral form of revelation consists of both an objective moment (the giving of itself by the Trinity) and a subjective moment (something that in today's dialogical terms would have to be expressed by the idea of *subjective reception*).⁵ In Ratzinger's opinion, Bonaventure's texts allow us to conclude that he was convinced that the integral conception of revelation includes its reception.⁶ The act of revelation is not the only act of God, but encompasses also its effect on the addressee. Revelation exists only when there is an actual reception of it. Very similarly, moreover, revelation occurs in every act of communication. One can only speak of communication when the message has been received. Ratzinger's analysis of Bonaventure's theology has great importance for reflecting on the topic of revelation. The discovery of the dialogical, responsive nature of the Trinitarian giving results in a significant, far-reaching inclusion of the subject in the act of revelation itself. Indeed, we are faced with something like this in the case of St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*, in which Francis is treated as a kind of icon of Christ, a reflection of the revelation that took place in Christ.

All this allows us to expand the understanding of revelation proposed by the Second Vatican Council. But its interpretive schematics that are partially expressed in the existential category of the gift need to be supplemented. Thus, it might be necessary to conceptualize revelation from the perspective of the receiving subject and its transformation.⁷ For the subject is not merely the addressee of this gift. Likewise, revelation is not merely a purely external act of the God who objectively acts in relation to the subject. God ultimately reveals himself in and to the transformed subject (*theosis, deiformitas*). This subject, encompassed by God's Trinitarian (personal) self-giving, becomes a permanent moment of the revelation itself, insofar as revelation reaches the subject, finds it in its existential situation and accomplishes its transformation. This always occurs with divine-human synergy. Revelation, like grace⁸, presupposes liberty and the disposition to act and accomplishes their transformation. So, the gifted subject (like Marion's *adonné*⁹) becomes a momentum of revelation,

⁵ Ratzinger's thesis was so shocking that Michael Schmaus, a reviewer of the young Bavarian theologian, decided to reject it in habilitation procedure. It seems, however, that he was the one who was wrong, and that the young Ratzinger's interpretation was as relevant and accurate as possible. For more details of these dramatic events cf. Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI. Ein Leben*, München 2020, 297–312.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras: Habilitationsschrift und Bonaventura-Studien* (JRGS, 2), Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2009, 100: "[...] zur Offenbarung gehört die innere, gläubige Annahme des Gesagten, die Erkenntnis des 'pro me' der betreffenden Vorhersage. Von wirklicher Offenbarung kann nur die Rede sein, wo es nicht beim äußeren Wort bleibt, sondern wo es zu einem wahren inneren Kontakt mit Gott, zu einer inneren Erleuchtung des angeredeten Menschen durch Gott kommt."

⁷ This dimension of Revelation is pointed out by Gerald O'Collins, *Revelation: Toward a Christian Theology of God's Self-Revelation*, Oxford 2018, 30–38.

⁸ The analogy of Revelation and grace is a fundamentally interesting perspective which cannot be elaborated here more deeply. At the same time, important questions come to mind in its perspective: where does it come from? What is the primary concept here? The need to bring the two concepts closer together is apparent. From such a perspective it seems that revelation is the primary concept of theology. Similarly, it should be the basis for understanding grace. Revelation is grace. The content of this grace is what Rahner describes as the divine, Trinitarian self-giving to man. At the same time, grace deepens the understanding and perception of Revelation as such. It is also a mode of divine revelation. God reveals Himself most profoundly in the gift of Himself (grace).

⁹ Marion, *Being Given* (see fn. 1), 248 f.

an icon so to speak.¹⁰ Revelation takes place not only in favor of the subject, outside of it as it were, but in it and with it. Moreover, in a similar way it is graspable not so much and not primarily outside of the subject, but rather in it insofar it is for it. We should add that when we speak of the subject, we always have in mind a subject which is embodied in a community, we imagine, therefore, a relational subject. Thus, it is only in such a subject that revelation reaches its ultimate fulfillment. According to the theological ideas inherent in St. Paul's writings, this fullness has already been accomplished inchoatively in the crucified and risen Christ and awaits its final fulfillment in all those who receive Christ. And we would probably have to add that this fulfillment will also encompass the entire cosmos.

In a way, revelation also becomes an anthropological constituent and is therefore, conceptually and structurally, an integral part of theological anthropology. Its meaning is the thorough transformation of humankind into the likeness of God. I propose to call such a conception of revelation an *integral model* of it. It is integral because it incorporates all of the previously mentioned main models of thinking about revelation in the history of theology, namely the epiphanic, the instructive-propositional and the historical-soteriological model, and adds a new anthropological emphasis to them.

2. Revelation and Authentic Subjectivity

In the light of the previous remarks, one can ask the fundamental question whether such an integral conception of revelation will also constitute an essential background for a much-needed overcoming of one of the greatest problems of modern philosophy of religion and theology, as well as pastoral ministry, in the form of humanistic atheism¹¹. At the same time such an approach allows for the alignment and reconciliation of subjectivity and community, in a way even for subjectivity and objectivity. Revelation takes place in and for the subject, this means that it takes place in the network of those relationships in which the subject finds itself – not only in those relationships that connect and bind it to God, but also in those that connect and bind it to others. Revelation similarly takes place as the unity of God's objective and external action together with the internal transformation of the subject, which is immersed in a community, and together with the cooperation of that subject and the community which is its life's environment and context.

Another important dimension of such an integral view of revelation needs to be highlighted. It concerns the perspective of authenticity and the subject's autonomy, which is so important for the modern mindset. Especially Charles Taylor has shown in his studies that the first aspect of the above-mentioned core ideas is the very product of modernity.¹² A

¹⁰ Here, of course, it is necessary to keep in mind the hierarchy that exists between Revelation taking place in the humanity of Christ and in man, who receives this Revelation by becoming its icon. Revelation through the mediation of the humanity of the Incarnate Logos is exemplary, causal, always already first.

¹¹ The phenomenon was studied by Henry de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, San Francisco 1995.

¹² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge 1991, 22 f.: "What I am suggesting is a position distinct from both boosters and knockers of contemporary culture. Unlike the boosters, I do not believe that everything is as it should be in this culture. Here I tend to agree with the knockers. But unlike them, I think that authenticity should be taken seriously as a moral ideal. I differ also from the various middle positions, which hold that there are some good things in this culture (like greater freedom for the individual), but that these come at the expense

valuable aspect of his analysis of the phenomenon of modernity's notion of authenticity is to underline both the dangers and opportunities that come with it. Authenticity, thus, belongs to the great achievements of modern thinking and as such has to be interpreted on the basis of the dialectic characteristics it possesses. In themselves, these dialectics do not invalidate the positive aspects of thinking in terms of authenticity. Therefore, the theology and philosophy of revelation should address the modern aspirations of authenticity and autonomy in some fundamental way.¹³

Here we face a powerful paradox. Doesn't revelation – understood as the essential foundation of human subjectivity, or even its source, – exclude the authenticity and autonomy of the subject and the community? Shouldn't the notions of autonomy and authenticity imply a rather radical self-referentiality of the subject? Revelation, on the other hand, is essentially heteronomous, coming, as Marion expressed it, *from elsewhere*. While for the case of authenticity the matter does not seem entirely hopeless, it is, nevertheless, difficult to see a congruency and connection between the idea of revelation on the one side and human subjective autonomy on the other side right away. These two quantities seem to be dialectically exclusive, especially where anthropological concepts are governed by a negative dialectic, i. e. the dialectic of contention, revolution, and struggle. Precisely for this reason – in order to grasp the full complexity of the paradox of the relationship between revelation and human subjective autonomy – one must reject thinking in dialectical terms and adopt a more dialogical paradigm, based on a more relational ontology.

Before we address such a view, we must realize that revelation is an event which possesses a heterological nature and structure. Such an approach can be found in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louise Chrétien, Michel Henry, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.¹⁴ In their works

“a certain important conviction constantly runs through. All the described projects are related to the attempt to transcend the modern dialectical understanding of human subjectivity as an entity enclosed in its radical autonomy. In the perspective of such a modern conception of the subject, reality and the idea of revelation represent an opportunity to transcend the autonomous and separatist understanding of human subjectivity. To put it theologically, the subject comes from revelation, it is the effect of a gift, a word spoken beforehand to any possible response. Subjectivity here means dialogicity, being oneself from another. It is in its very essence as autonomous as it is open to the otherness of the other. Being human here always means accepting oneself from the other, a resolute openness toward otherness. In this way, the philosophical use of the idea of revelation leads to an anthropology of inverted perspective, which is a corrective to the individualistic conception of man inherent in modern dialectical anthropologies. Its distinctive feature is not so much the dethroning of humans as an individual sub-

of certain dangers (like a weakening of the sense of citizenship), so that one's best policy is to find the ideal point of trade-off between advantages and costs. The picture I am offering is rather that of an ideal that has degraded but that is very worthwhile in itself, and indeed, I would like to say, unrepudiable by moderns. So what we need is neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise; and not a carefully balanced trade-off. What we need is a work of retrieval, through which this ideal can help us restore our practice.”

¹³ Cf. Robin Horner, *The Experience of God: A Phenomenology of Revelation*, Cambridge 2022, 34, 41.

¹⁴ Cf. my detailed analysis of these thinkers in: Robert J. Woźniak, *Różnica i tajemnica. Obajwienie jako teologiczne źródło ludzkiej sobości*, [sc. Difference and Mystery. Revelation as Theological Source of Human Self, R.W.], Poznań 2012, 158–182.

ject but giving them their ultimate and indelible dignity. In this way, reverse perspective anthropology fulfills all the great aspirations of modern philosophy of the subject. It turns out that the grammar of revelation works inside the grammar of a properly grasped difference, which belongs to the concept itself: For the mystery of revelation and the mystery of difference are inseparable.”¹⁵

Understood from such a so-called heterological perspective revelation is a relationship. As a relationship between the revealing Trinity and the subject who accepts its gift of self, revelation not only presupposes the subject, but creates it multidimensionally. Therefore, it can be said that both, the authenticity and autonomy of the subject, grow out of the Trinitarian gift of selfhood. The subject becomes its authentic self and grows into autonomy in relation to its source. So, any dialectical principle that forces a decision between one or the other upon us is suspended here, giving way to the dialogically oriented principle of the suspended middle. Paul’s ‘me-not-me’ experience comes in sight: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός). The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20) What do these words actually mean? Are they speaking of some paradoxical redefinition of one’s selfhood? They certainly don’t speak of the fact that Paul is no longer there. Instead, they say that all that Paul is and all that Paul experiences is related to the gift that God has made for him in the crucified and risen Christ— a gift that Paul willingly accepted allowing him to (re-)define himself. In these words, Paul reveals himself (sic!) as fully self-conscious and free – while at the same time profoundly defining himself by reference to the revealing God.

The so-called *elsewhere* of revelation brings humans (in a strong metaphysical sense) to their *own place*.¹⁶ Thus, existence, authenticity, and autonomy are radically transformed on a relational basis. This happens when the subject is snatched from nothingness by a creative act and, through this snatching, gets confronted in his own existence with God (in his primary revelation).¹⁷ This is precisely the case in Paul’s assessment of Abraham’s calling, which eventually becomes one of the most important views on the work of creation we can find in the Bible. Because according to Paul Abraham believed God “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ τοῦ ζῳοποιούντος τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα)”. This also happens when God pulls St. Paul out from under the layers of evil and sin by revealing himself as saving love and righteous mercy.¹⁸ In both cases, God in his gift becomes the real source of the human self. In both cases, the accepted gift of revelation has the effect that categories such as being, authenticity, autonomy cease to be dialectically strained and enter into dialogue

¹⁵ Ibid., 181 f. [Transl. R. W.]

¹⁶ This, in a way, is Marion’s main idea in his study devoted to phenomenology and Augustine, cf. *Jean-Luc Marion, In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, Stanford 2012.

¹⁷ One has to point out here to the interesting study of *Brian Robinette*, *The Difference Nothing Makes*. Creation, Christ, Contemplation, Southband 2023, 99–101.

¹⁸ Cf. *Pope John Paul II*, Enc. “*Dives in misericordia*”, n. 6: “The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil: mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man.”

with each other, into a relational synthesis of the Chalcedonian type 'without confusion and without separation.'¹⁹ They, thus, require a new way of conceptualizing.

One important remark should be added at this point: Revelation, even if it were to be conceived only as a pure possibility, allows it to grasp the suspended middle ground between I and you, mine and yours. The concept of revelation, as it works in Christian theology, thus contributes to a significant modification of the notions of authenticity and autonomy. Without depriving them of their peculiarity, semantic power, and existential importance it may offer a cure for the disease of dialectical antagonisms.

3. Phenomenology as a Tool for Studying Revelation in its Relationship to Human Authenticity

It should, therefore, no longer surprise us that the traditional categories of metaphysics become rather insufficient to describe the Trinitarian life of God, the humanity of humankind and their relationship. Thus, any applicable metaphysical categories must no longer be exclusive and self-sufficient. It should be emphasized that the issue here is not the total uselessness of metaphysical categories as such, but their insufficiency. For these categories never operate in an existential vacuum. Metaphysics and its language stem from the concrete experience of the world and constitute its elaboration on a merely conceptual level. Whenever metaphysics forgets this existential rootedness and, thus, the factual source of its own prosperity, it falls into (historical) crises that ultimately undermine its meaning. Just as primary and direct experience always needs reflection (indeed, some sort of metaphysical frame) so metaphysics itself needs a reference to reality and the human experience related to it. But without a metaphysical frame, referring to experience remains somehow half-hearted, chaotic, lacking organization and meaning. Without experience, metaphysics itself remains purely abstract and blind to the world it tries to describe. However, all this means that the various attempts to get rid of metaphysics are ultimately without validity. Because to demand the destruction and deconstruction of metaphysics misses the intentions from which it grows. So, philosophy and theology, including the philosophy and theology of revelation, need not so much the destruction of metaphysics but rather its correction and completion. In turn, such a historical correction should be based on an ap-

¹⁹ The Council of Chalcedon and its *horos* can be treated as a basic hermeneutical principle in theology of Revelation as well as in totality of theological thinking; cf. *Richard Price* (ed.), *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Translated Texts for Historians 45), Liverpool 2007, 207: "Following, therefore, the holy fathers, we all in harmony teach confession of one and the same Son our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and the same truly man, of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father in respect of the Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in respect of the manhood, like us in all things apart from sin, begotten from the Father before the ages in respect of the Godhead, and the same in the last days for us and for our salvation from the Virgin Mary the Theotokos in respect of the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation (the difference of the natures being in no way destroyed by the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved and coming together into one person and one hypostasis), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, Only-begotten, God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ, even as the prophets from of old and Jesus Christ himself taught us about him and the symbol of the fathers has handed down to us."

proximation of the categories of metaphysics and human experience. Especially today an experientially grounded metaphysics is called for, i. e. a metaphysics whose categories and concepts remain in relation to experience (broadly understood). To emphasize the aspect of experience, being 'broadly understood' acknowledges for metaphysics the necessity to appeal to both subjective experience (simultaneously in both its dimensions: individual and communal) and to empirical sciences, which, after all, are built on experience (properly understood) and methodologically calibrated. The symbiosis of metaphysics and experience, as described here, presupposes a willingness and a capacity for correction. The guiding idea is that metaphysics flows from experience and organizes it, while experience itself opens itself up to such ordering. Both, experience and metaphysics presuppose and correct each other.

Thinking about the unity and connection between metaphysics and experience brings us back to the problem of the concept of revelation. This is because revelation occurs – at least in Christianity – in conjunction with historically anchored human experiences. Take, for instance, the theology of St. Paul: His understanding of what has happened in his own life – an understanding which he expressed in his own words – was a turning point that made it possible to access revelation as a given within a concrete experience. Paul's theological thought may be surrounded and accompanied by metaphysical categories. Paul himself, however, does not do so, choosing a path different from speculation: i. e. providing, instead, a reflective insight into his own experience. This insight in its essence is an attempt to return to the thing itself. To a certain extent, Paul's theology, insofar as it is based on the experience of transformation, is akin to a proto-phenomenological description of the manifestation of God and the manifestation of humankind in their essential relationship.

The need for a new language to express the essence and content of revelation has been emphasized several times already. Thus, metaphysical and cognitive categories alone are not sufficient for such an expression. In order for them to be capable of approaching revelation, they must have their starting point in concrete experiences. In the case of revelation this is obvious, but even more so than in the case of metaphysics. There is no doubt that revelation takes place in history and in what constitutes its living fabric, i. e. in the event and the experience of such an event (both external and internal, individual and collective). Only a philosophy that is sensitive enough to appreciate the eventfulness of the event and its experience will be able to provide concepts to think properly about revelation.

The relationship between revelation and experience was recently highlighted by a number of philosophers and theologians; one might think of renowned authors like Chrétien²⁰, Jean-Yves Lacoste²¹ or Emmanuel Falque²².

²⁰ Chrétien was a very prolific writer who combined philosophy and poetry. Here one could list many of his books that treat experience, most often in the form of reflections on its various variants. As an example, I want to draw attention here to two such items that I consider particularly important, also from a spiritual point of view. These are the monographs on experience and the nature of space: *La joie spacieuse*, Paris 2007; and *L'espace intérieur*, Paris 2014.

²¹ *Jean-Yves Lacoste*, *The Appearing of God*, Oxford 2018.

²² I'm thinking here of his theo-philosophical trilogy, and even more so of *Emmanuel Falque*, *Hors phénomène: Essai aux confins de la phénoménalité*, Paris 2021. The work shows great existential sensitivity to border situations. In it, experience in its life-like concreteness is the foundation and horizon of consideration.

Here, however, I would like to refer to the proposal of Robin Horner, who is very aware of the possible reception of the concept of revelation within the contemporary context; at the same time, she summarizes and synthesizes, in a rather original manner, the many paths of today's philosophical understanding of revelation. Her starting point is the possibility of outlining a theory of the meaningfulness of revelation under the conditions constituted by the contemporary mindset. So, the fundamental question in this perspective comes down to the following: "When we refer to revelation guided by a theological intention, what sense can we make of 'divine revelation' in contemporary, Western societies?" Horner answers this fundamental question in the following way:

"I appreciate that the whole notion of something like revelation sometimes seems to make little sense in modern life in the West. At the same time, I argue that this is because it is invariably considered first as a matter of belief/s rather than as a question of experience. That is not to say that belief is irrelevant to the question of revelation, but only to suggest that when the issue of belief becomes primary, the possibility of revelation can too easily be placed out of bounds in advance of all questioning. Belief or lack of belief becomes an obstacle not only to the possibility that God has spoken, but also to the far more engaging and existentially important possibility that God speaks now. In fact, the Christian witness is to a God who communicates – and not only communicates but is in dialogue with humanity".²³

Setting revelation solely and predominantly in the space of knowledge and doctrinal beliefs, according to Horner, limits the possibility of its perception within the modern horizon.²⁴ Accepting the primacy of the hermeneutics of revelation in terms of experience, on the other hand, opens some additional space for various maneuvers. So, it seems that Horner is not interested in reducing revelation to experience, as it was undertaken by the various strands of liberal theology, but with *centering* its multifaceted hermeneutics in experience and embedding it better in human existence.²⁵ In this regard, her proposal is important not only in view of today's context (progressive secularization), but also because it locates itself on the line of renewing the understanding of the theology of revelation in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

Additionally, the proposal for a phenomenological reading of experience from the perspective of liturgy, which has been recently proposed by Christina Gschwandtner, needs to be mentioned. Her project deals not so much with (religious) experience in general, but with its specific shape in the form of the (liturgically provided) religious experience.

²³ Horner, *The Experience of God* (see fn. 13), 4 f.

²⁴ Ibid., 6: "If we begin with the question of whether or not to believe in God, or with what should or should not be believed, then the idea of revelation has little purchase in experience. To use a pale but perhaps helpful analogy: to determine in advance whether one believes in love is of no significance until one finds oneself loving or being addressed in love. This is why the question of belief in God – or beliefs about God – cannot be the first question, even if it is not the last question."

²⁵ Ibid., 10: "In this book, experience does not simply mean 'my opinion' (as it sometimes does in a colloquial sense). While I consider the belief–experience distinction is a problem for a fundamental theology of revelation that also holds true at the level of common life, here I employ a technical notion of experience. I use 'experience' first to refer to what happens at the point of opening in the world which is a given instance of life, and second, to refer to conscious reflection on that experience as it is lived. These two senses of experience can be designated using the German words *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*."

Gschwandtner starts by asking the fundamental question of whether there is such a method of accessing and studying the liturgical performances that does not impose an external hermeneutics on it. She answers such a question by stating that

“phenomenology can provide such a method to think more carefully about religious experience, specifically liturgical experience, in a way that allows it to unfold from itself. Phenomenology seeks to depict experiences as they actually reveal and manifest themselves, to allow us to see them as they show or give themselves. It is a form of attention and depiction that has its own rigor. It gets beyond merely individual and empirical experience in order to examine broader structures and patterns in ways that would allow us to think more deeply about the character and meaning of such experience. The careful depiction of the phenomena tries to uncover their ‘truth’ (*a-lētheia* as uncovering of what has previously been covered up [lēthē]). It is therefore an eminently suitable method for examining religious experience as well.”²⁶

The quoted text seems to presuppose the existence of a relationship between revelation and experience, which is manifested in liturgical experience.²⁷ This experience, in turn, is not just a version of a transcendental experience. Rather it is related to such concrete realities as time, space, body, affectivity, community and is also connected with intentionality. Thanks to these various instances the identity of the believer is revealed:

“This means that liturgy is not only an eminently appropriate place for examining faith and religious identity, but that it conveys the very core of that identity as the primary locus for religious experience. Phenomenology, as the study of experience and its meaning, can start in no better place if it wishes to investigate the meaning of Christian religious experience, at least as it was practiced for most of Christian history and still profoundly shapes Christian identity in the Orthodox tradition.”²⁸

The centrality of experience is in both Horner’s and Gschwandtner’s cases a form of basic assumption that comes from their strongly phenomenological background. The background consists of the contributions provided by Marion and various other things, although Horner and Gschwandtner are emphasizing the role of liturgy differently. Nevertheless, they direct us, in fact, to the basic intuition of the phenomenology of revelation. One of the central moments of this project is the reflection on revelation taken *as a phenomenon*. Let us note that any phenomenological treatment of revelation has consequences in the sphere of theology as well – postulating that we have to apply the phenomenological method for doing theology.²⁹

²⁶ Christina Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude: Toward a Phenomenology of Orthodox Liturgy*, New York 2020, xi.

²⁷ Gschwandtner writes from the perspective of the Orthodox liturgical experience. Studies on the relationship between Revelation and liturgy are also undertaken in Catholic theology. Cf. Laurence Paul Hemming, *Worship as a Revelation: The Past Present and Future of Catholic Liturgy*, London 2008; Philip Caldwell, *Liturgy as Revelation: Re-Sourcing a Theme in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, Minneapolis 2014.

²⁸ Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude* (see fn. 26), xx.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, New York 2004, 28 f.: “For revealed theology, by the very fact that it is based on given facts, which are given positively as figures, appearances, and manifestations (indeed, apparitions, miracles, revelations, and so on), takes place in the natural field of phenomenality and is

In other words: A theology of revelation needs the tools proper to phenomenology. Only they allow for the expression of that ‘more’ (*surcroît*)³⁰ – as Marion would have said it – which takes place in revelation and, as such, gives food for thought not only to theology itself, but to human thinking as such. Marion is also one of only a few that allow for a satisfying, more integral grasp of the subjective side of revelation, i. e. its action in the subject.

At the same time, however, we need to discuss whether the strong opposition between the paradigms of phenomenology and metaphysics – something Marion and others are keen to uphold – is mistaken. If the history of concepts and theologies Marion and others are referring to points *de facto* to the historical sandbanks of metaphysical thinking this does not yet imply that designing adequate metaphysics is, *de jure*, impossible at all. In a parallel manner we could also claim that the phenomenon of revelation puts us in the position to rethink the relationship between metaphysics and phenomenology as allegedly two different ways of thinking and to reconsider how they relate to each other. Metaphysics does not necessarily include dogmatism, and phenomenology does not automatically stroll only through the land of shadows and shimmery manifestations. In transcending their dialectics, theology can be of service.

Phenomenology is thus an adequate tool for understanding revelation not because it is absolutely anti-metaphysical, but because it harbors the possibility of curing metaphysics. Marion’s famous principle ‘the more reduction, the more givenness’ (or “so much appearing, so much Being”)³¹ is an essential moment for the cure of the dead-ends of certain metaphysics, which can be described as giving in to the temptation of an over-objectification and reification of reality.³² The phenomenological cure of such a metaphysical attitude may open the way for the development of a deeper understanding of revelation. As much as the phenomenological approach complements and corrects metaphysics, it is also an attractive instrument for the theological approach to revelation, because it allows one to see realisti-

therefore dependent on the competence of phenomenology.” Cf. id., *The Visible and the Revealed*, New York 2008, xi, 7 f., 11nn.

³⁰ This category corresponds to Marion’s idea of excess, transgression and what the French philosopher calls ‘saturated phenomenon’. Cf. *Marion*, *In Excess* (see fn. 30), 109–127; *Surcroît* as a technical phenomenological term denotes the excess of the intuition over intention. Revelation is a kind of saturation phenomenon in the proper sense of the word. It is in it that excess is accomplished *par excellence*.

³¹ Id., *Being Given* (see fn. 1), 16.

³² Cf. *Gschwandtner*, *Welcoming Finitude* (see fn. 26), 6: “Jean-Luc Marion instead does not adopt a Heideggerian starting point, but argues that much of human experience (including religious experience) is not adequately understood in either Husserlian or Heideggerian terms. In his view, Husserl focuses only on phenomena that appear as objects and Heidegger is only interested in the question of the manifestation of Being or beings. Yet many phenomena, so Marion suggests, do not appear or manifest themselves primarily as objects or beings. Important historical or cultural events, works of art, the face of the beloved other, or the revelation of Christ are not adequately described as either ‘objects’ or ‘beings’ and, in fact, even their mode of appearing is quite different from that described by Husserl or Heidegger. Marion argues that instead such phenomena appear as ‘saturated,’ which is to say that no concepts can be imposed on them, but that they give themselves entirely from themselves. Instead of constituting such phenomena through the intentionality of consciousness, as was Husserl’s aim, in the case of saturated phenomena we are given abundant intuition that we cannot fully grasp or contain. Religious phenomena, that is, phenomena of revelation, are given to us and appear in our experience, but they do so in particularly overwhelming and bedazzling ways that require new phenomenological descriptions.”

cally, through the lenses of revelation, not only the structures of being, but also the experiential component that is important to it. What is even more important is the fact that it is phenomenology which makes both philosophy and theology aware of the subjective moment of revelation, or, more precisely, allows us to grasp the simultaneously occurring relationship between objectivity (externality) and subjectivity (internality). Since, thanks to a phenomenologically nuanced concept of revelation, subjectivity can be regarded as embraced by the gift of the Triune God and becomes truly *a gift and a givee* such that it can constitute itself as a momentum within revelation. Comparable insights, in turn, clearly apply not only to objective structures of being, but also to the subjective side of existing.³³ The transformation of the subject into the *adonné* is, therefore, necessarily expressed in a new form of experience.

All of these aspects have important consequences for the understanding of the relationship between revelation and human authenticity. For they, taken together, indicate that revelation does not alienate or eliminate the authenticity and autonomy of the subject – neither in a metaphysical nor in a psychological (experiential) realm.

While classical metaphysics was somehow occupied with describing the objective side of the subject's transformation in and through revelation, it remains rather clueless when it comes to the perception and explanation of the subjective, experiential component of this transformation.³⁴ Without such clues, however, a comprehensive vision of revelation that takes into account a fuller explanation of how revelation not only respects human autonomy and authenticity but transforms them and, in a way, ultimately constitutes them – in what is peculiar and essential to them –, remains out of sight. Yet, understanding revelation only in metaphysical terms does not allow us to see and describe what is most essential in it: the personal encounter that grounds existence and thrives with the whole plenitude of human existential experience. Such a phenomenologically balanced metaphysics and theology of revelation can be found, for instance, in the narrative of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and his treatise on the Trinity (*De Trinitate*). Not fully satisfied with the metaphysical considerations of the Cappadocians and others, St. Augustine seeks the truth of revelation, so to speak, not only in the economy of salvation but also in the human interior and experience as it occurs. To rephrase this rather chronologically and from a slightly different angle, St. Augustine's discovery of his own interiority through an in-depth³⁵, (pre-)phenomenological description of the fragility and transformation of the self leads him to a new grasp of the principles of theological hermeneutics, which is based on the suspension of the middle ground between objectivity and subjectivity.

³³ The famous principle of Lonergan ("Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity. It is to be attained only by attaining authentic subjectivity") turns out to fit like a glove to the question of Revelation in case one assumes that Revelation transforms the subject. Cf. *Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology*, London 1971, 292.

³⁴ This is why Marion makes a direct appeal to theologians: „Philosophy has neither the authority nor the competence to say more, but it leaves at least the right to appeal about it to the theologians. They must stop wanting to reduce the extreme givens of Revelation to objectivizing models, more or less exactly repeated from human sciences. For the same phenomenality covers all givens, from the poorest (formalism, mathematics), to the common (physical sciences, technical objects), to saturated phenomena (event, idol, flesh, icon), up to the point of the possibility of phenomena combining the four types of saturation (phenomena of Revelation)” (*Marion, In Excess* [see fn. 29], 53).

³⁵ Cf. *Charles Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 1992, 127–143.

4. Conclusion

The previous sections have reminded us of the need for an anthropological and soteriological expansion of the understanding of revelation. This has led us to assert the usefulness and relevance of applying phenomenology to theology. For if revelation leads to the transformation of human subjectivity (*theosis*, *deiformitas*) then its essential momentum becomes the subject with all its baggage of experience. It is not a matter of some reduction of revelation to an experience that could be studied phenomenologically, but a phenomenological description of the new experience of the transformed subject that allows for a better understanding of the nature, the purpose, the dynamics, and the structure of revelation.³⁶

Gegenstand des Artikels ist die anthropologische Betrachtung der Offenbarung als Weg zur Transformation des Subjekts und als theologische Quelle seiner vollen, reifen Form. Es geht darum, die bisherigen Offenbarungsmodelle in einer Synthese kreativ zusammenzuführen: Offenbarung, verstanden als Erscheinung Gottes, Wissensvermittlung oder personale Kommunikation, die zur Entwicklung einer gott-menschlichen Gemeinschaft führt, sollte zugleich als wichtiger Faktor für die Konstitution von Personalität verstanden werden. Dank ihrer ereignet sich die Entstehung von Subjektivität in einer Fülle, die von der Theologie üblicherweise als Erlösung, Vergöttlichung oder *Deiformitas* bezeichnet wird. Der Artikel tritt dafür ein, dass die Werkzeuge der Phänomenologie im weitesten Sinne in der Offenbarungstheologie nicht nur nützlich, sondern sogar unabdingbar sind: Wenn das Merkmal der Offenbarung ein voll ausgebildetes Subjekt, eine Person in einem Beziehungsgeflecht, ist, dann sollte die Beschreibung von Offenbarung mit einer phänomenologisch-existenziellen Analyse der persönlichen Reifung zur vollen Form der Subjektivität einhergehen. Letztlich geht es um eine Frage von großer theologischer Reichweite: um die Frage der Einbeziehung der subjektiven Realität in eine Theologie, die auf einem erweiterten Verständnis der Offenbarung beruht. Dieser Beitrag versteht sich somit nicht so sehr als Versuch, eine weitere Version einer phänomenologischen Theologie der Offenbarung vorzustellen, sondern vielmehr als eine Begründung für eine solche Theologie.

³⁶ Similar considerations, this time from the perspective of the renewal of dogmatic theology, were included in my book, cf. *Robert Woźniak, Praca nad dogmatem. Wybrane aspekty odnowy teologii dogmatycznej*, Kraków 2022, 177–241.