



# John Baillie on the theology of revelation

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What do we mean by revelation? It is a question to which much hard thinking and careful writing are being devoted in our time, and there is a general awareness among us that it is being answered in a way that sounds very differently from the traditional formulations.<sup>1</sup>

John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*

How does man obtain knowledge about God? This is, perhaps, the most enduring question of Western theology. The area of theological concern here is *revelation*. This is the subject matter of John Baillie's book *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, which was a response to a critical period of change in theology in Britain from the 1930s to the 1950s.

The book is an edited version of his Bampton Lectures given at Columbia University in New York in the summer of 1954. Baillie's stated objective was 'to survey the considerable body of recent thought and writing concerning revelation.'<sup>2</sup> The book covers an important period in which views of revelation that had long been in circulation on the continent now made their way into British universities and churches. Baillie brings before his reader several dozen recent authors who had written on this topic, including William Temple, Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, C. H. Dodd, Paul Tillich, and the Niebuhr brothers. With differing degrees of subtlety, Baillie evaluated these writers and introduced his own preferences on revelation.

Revelation arose as a major issue in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons. The church was losing



secular power and theology had lost its pre-eminence in universities. Other disciplines such as sociology, biology, geology, historical research and textual study were growing in confidence, and organising themselves into societies that were keen to show their contribution. The influence of these disciplines on theological thinking was growing. There were increasing objections to both the Protestant principles of biblical inspiration, sufficiency and authority, and the Roman Catholic principle of church authority in deciding doctrine. Theologians felt the need to regain academic respectability: theology and philosophy had grown apart and, with philosophy becoming the more fashionable subject, many theologians now sought to situate themselves within the latest philosophical thinking, as Aquinas had done five centuries before. Philosophy had shaken off Aristotelian hegemony, and theology based on Aristotle's concepts looked hopelessly out of date. Many theologians understood just how deep the roots of Greek philosophy were in Western Christianity, and tried to fill the void that the removal of Greek ideas had produced.

These new views of revelation were slow to gain acceptance in the Britain and, as Baillie notes, it was not until the 1930s that church leaders began to openly promote them. It is this breakdown of agreement on revelation that this essay traces, using as its main source *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*. I will analyse Baillie's contribution using two themes that are prominent in the book: first, the Thomist distinction between reason and revelation, and second, the propositional view of revelation. Baillie documented and applauded both of these changes in the majority view concerning revelation.



## **Revelation v. reason**

The first change had taken place through the erosion of the prevailing view on the distinction between reason and revelation, which Baillie defined in the following way:

Throughout the greater period of Christian history the question was not thought to be a difficult one. It was answered in terms of the distinction between revealed and natural or rational knowledge [...] this way of defining revelation as

communicating a body of knowledge [...] was long to remain unchallenged.<sup>3</sup>

Baillie regarded this as an artificial distinction whose passing would not be mourned:

[...] many theologians in their anxiety to establish or conserve a clear distinction between divine revelation and what they have called rational knowledge, have made this task much too easy for themselves by speaking as if, while the former is something given to us, the latter is something we create for ourselves, as if it were spun out of our own substance; as if the former must be explained by beginning from the realities apprehended, whereas the latter could be explained by beginning from the apprehending mind. They have thus [...] been guilty of a lowering of the dignity of reason in order to exalt the dignity of revelation; and no good can come of such procedure. The fact is that no true knowledge [...] can be explained by beginning from the human end [...]<sup>4</sup>

The division of theology into ‘natural’ and ‘revealed’ elements has its roots in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Following Aristotle, Aquinas taught that knowledge of God is transmitted in two main ways: naturally and supernaturally. The first occurs via the natural world as perceived by reason, the second is more definitely pre-packaged and is transmitted via exclusive channels, chief among them Scripture, but also including direct revelation. The first is called ‘natural theology’ or ‘general revelation’, the second is called ‘special revelation’. Aquinas emphasized man’s ability to comprehend certain truths about God from nature alone, while maintaining that human reason was still secondary to God’s revelation, as taught by the church. Aquinas was careful to distinguish what could be learned through ‘natural reason’ from doctrinal tenets, calling the truths gleaned from nature ‘preambles to the articles of faith’.<sup>5</sup> That is, reason may lead to faith, but it cannot replace faith. Aquinas undoubtedly had huge faith in human reason, or, more likely, faith in the reasoning ability of himself and other intellectuals. This binary view of reason and revelation

survived the disruption of the Protestant Reformation at least in part (despite the disagreement of those such as Luther who believed the human mind to be corrupt and doubted that there was any intrinsic value at all in ‘natural theology’). This view was reinforced by the second generation of Reformers, notably Calvin,<sup>6</sup> and only began to break down at the end of the eighteenth century.

Turning to Scripture itself, biblical teaching on revelation is complex and unclear. In places, the Bible clearly teaches elements of natural theology, e.g. Rom 1:20, ‘For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse’, and Psalm 19:1–2, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.’

Scripture, however, never clearly sets the boundaries of this natural knowledge of God and appears to contradict the significance of it in other places, especially with reference to the corrupt mind of man (e.g., Rom 8:7, 1 Tim 6:5). The Bible also contains many references to the significance of Scripture, but nowhere defines what Scripture is or relates the work of Scripture to the work of natural theology. The distinction between natural and special revelation is not found in the Bible and it, arguably, contains no explicit doctrine of revelation. The many references to ‘revelation’ can be put together in many different ways<sup>7</sup> and the ambiguities of Scripture were settled by creeds and councils. Christianity moreover, came into close contact with Hellenistic culture, which held up the ideal of rationally certified knowledge as the basis for the good life:

What we may call (for lack of a better term) the “classical” concept of revelation is bound up with the notion of a twofold knowledge of God. That there are two sources of religious knowledge, not just one, has been virtually the consensus of Christian theologians throughout the history of the church, but there has been less agreement on what the two sources are and how they are related to each other. Paul’s argument in Romans 1–2 has commonly been the scriptural foundation for the discussion [...]. Revelation, then, is the supernatural

communication of truths inaccessible to natural cognition, and its subjective correlate is the faith or belief that assents to it.<sup>8</sup>

This binary view of revelation has had many detractors, for example James Barr:

A common modern usage has been to speak of ‘revelation and reason’ as the two possible forms of access to the knowledge of God. For Biblical study this contrast has a double disadvantage; firstly that this contrast and the definition of its terms are not drawn from Biblical thought, and secondly that it implicitly lumps together all human knowledge of God apart from direct Divine action as ‘reason’ and all human knowledge which depends on such action as ‘revelation’.<sup>9</sup>

Baillie began by discussing the former view of revelation. He argued that revelation was a body of knowledge consisting of two types that were available through two complementary channels. There is a general revelation via reason, ‘the unaided exercise of [...] powers of thinking’, and a special revelation via ‘direct communication from God Himself.’<sup>10</sup> These two sources of revelation are separate yet overlapping and complementary. The former is more active, the latter more passive.

According to Baillie, the Reformation left the Thomist distinction intact, the Reformers being trained in the same philosophical tradition. He identifies Calvin’s colleague Melancthon in particular as a theologian who gives reason a large place in the Christian understanding of God – in contrast to Luther, who was very sceptical of human reason. These two prominent theologians represent opposite ends of a spectrum of positions within the Reformation movement.

The beginnings of the modern doctrine of revelation came with Kant’s (and Hume’s) withering critique of natural theology. Kant is regarded as a leading figure in the Romantic movement through his criticism of the rationalist theology of G. W Leibniz. Kant rejected natural theology and talked of faith as the instrument for knowing God: ‘I must, therefore, abolish knowledge to make room for faith’.<sup>11</sup> The ‘faith’ that Kant talked of, however, was highly rational and scarcely

comparable with the Christian view of faith. It was, in effect, a type of non-speculative reason, since Kant rejected the idea of supernatural revelation.

The next movement offered, not an enhancement of the need for revelation, as one might have expected, but a third option. Schleiermacher and Ritschl argued that it was within the experience of the believer that authentic information was to be found. Like Kant, Schleiermacher did not accept the idea of supernatural revelation. As Kant found a new way between the empirical and rationalist schools that had dominated philosophy up to that point, so Schleiermacher pursued a similar task with regard to previous theological traditions:

[Schleiermacher] departed altogether from the old dichotomy of reason and revelation and found what seemed to be a middle way between the two. His theology rests neither on authoritatively communicated truths nor on truths excogitated by the speculative reason but on what he calls the religious self-consciousness of the Christian community [...] not as a kind of cognition, but as a variety of feeling. In this he found few to follow him; but his more general contention that theology takes its rise in the religious consciousness, and that all its doctrines are but explications of this consciousness, became the foundation of much Protestant thought throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Schleiermacher was, of course, influenced by Hegel, who was a colleague at the University of Berlin, in seeking for a ground of faith that was based neither on submission to revelation nor the findings of speculative reason. Schleiermacher's successor was Albrecht Ritschl, who also maintained a 'single source' of faith in distinction to the double source of traditional theology.

Baillie, however, suggested that Schleiermacher and Ritschl had suppressed the idea of revelation and that this 'represented a loss of the most serious kind'.<sup>13</sup> He was, however, sympathetic to their motivation. Baillie argued that the idea of revelation had become rigidly associated with verbal inspiration, and that Schleiermacher and Ritschl had discarded the whole notion of supernatural revelation

in order to remove the idea of verbal inspiration to which (like Baillie) they were antipathetic. Baillie concluded on an optimistic note, stating that the loss of the discredited double source view of revelation was no bad thing, and that ‘a new and better understanding of the meaning of revelation is beginning to emerge.’<sup>14</sup>

What Baillie failed to mention was that there was a considerable diversity of views within the church during this whole historical period. While the Thomist view succeeded in gaining mastery in the official dogmas of the Roman Catholic church, it was much less successful elsewhere. The Reformation did not leave these views wholly intact, but made significant changes. General revelation is revelation in ‘things’ not in ‘words’, and it is not the same as natural theology. Natural theology is dependent upon reason, but general revelation is a much more limited concept, and is totally subordinate to special revelation. As Gerrish explains, Luther’s view of natural theology was a long way from that of Aquinas:

Somewhat different is Martin Luther’s twofold knowledge of God, general and special. If the Thomistic version of a rational knowledge of divine things traces its lineage back to the natural *theology* of Plato and Aristotle, Luther’s notion of a general knowledge of God has affinities rather with the Stoic tradition of natural *religion*, on which the Apostle Paul himself drew in Romans 1–2. Thomas’s rational route to a limited knowledge of God was open only to a few: even the things demonstrable by reason must be taken on faith by those of us (the vast majority) who lack the talent, time, or energy for rational inquiry. Luther’s general knowledge, by contrast, is the possession of all. And it is Luther’s version of the two-fold knowledge of God that is formalized in seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism as the contrast between general revelation and special revelation: the distinction is not drawn, as in Thomas, between a natural knowledge and a revealed knowledge but between two kinds of revelation. There is an innate notion of God, closely connected with the voice of conscience, that assumes definite characteristics by observation of God’s self-disclosure in the created order, including human nature. But it is insufficient for

salvation because the good pleasure of God cannot be grasped apart from God's communication in Scripture. [...] It is not difficult to see why this notion ran into "serious trouble" in the Age of Reason.<sup>15</sup>



## The propositional view of revelation

The second change that Baillie explored was the decline of the propositional view of revelation. To quote one of the chief actors in the propositional debate, Carl Henry, '[...] a proposition is a verbal statement that is either true or false; it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed, doubted or denied.'<sup>16</sup> Baillie strongly rejected the view that the Christian faith can be represented by propositions, and thus took great pleasure in what he regarded as the terminal decline of the propositional view:

[...] it is not information about God that is revealed, but very God Himself incarnate in Jesus Christ our Lord. [...] The recovery of this fundamental insight is the first thing we notice as running broadly throughout all the recent discussions, marking them off from the formulations of earlier periods. From a very early time in the history of the Church the tendency had manifested itself to equate divine revelation with a body of information which God has communicated to man [...] Behind this tendency lay a strong sense of the necessity of preserving unity of doctrine throughout the Church [...] Its natural culmination was in the simple identification of revelation with the total content of Holy Scripture [...] until finally the Roman Church, at the Council of Trent, defined that the whole of Scripture, as well as a body of unwritten tradition, had been given *Spiritu sancto dictante*, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

What might replace this 'propositional' view of revelation? Baillie proffered several answers, all of them rather indistinct. As noted above, the propositional view was stereotyped as being 'information



about God’, in contrast to revelation as the self-disclosure of ‘God Himself’. This sounds like a huge improvement, but quite what it means, or whether it really means anything, is difficult to ascertain.

The alternative to the propositional view seems to comprise a number of elements, which may or may not work in tandem. Firstly the place of the Bible has to be adjusted. The Bible now becomes not revelation in itself but a ‘record of revelation’, and the revelation is not just in the giving but also in the receiving:

It is clear that this represents a very radical departure from the ecclesiastical formulation which identified revelation with the written word of Scripture and gave to the action of God in history the revelational status only of being among the things concerning which Scripture informed us. [...] We must, however, think very carefully what we mean when we say that revelation is given in the form of events or historical happenings. [...] The question thus arises as to whether even such events [...] can properly be spoken of as revelation if, in fact, there should be nobody to whom they reveal anything. [...] Surely not. We must therefore say that the receiving is as necessary to a completed act of revelation as the giving. [...] The illumination of the receiving mind is a necessary condition of the divine self-disclosure.<sup>18</sup>

So the Bible is incomplete and needs to be understood for it to be regarded as revelation. Does this not also mean that *any* texts or events can serve as inspiration? Baillie affirmed this, quoting from Paul Tillich (‘there is no reality, thing or event which cannot become the bearer [of revelation]’<sup>19</sup>) and William Temple (‘all occurrences are in some degree revelation of God’<sup>20</sup>) as proof.

The notion of illumination as a corollary to inspiration is not new, and is based on passages such as John 14:26, ‘But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’, and Ephesians 1:17–18, ‘that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation

in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you'. Yet this new idea of illumination seems different from the traditional doctrine, since this form of illumination can be applied to any event, idea, or text. Baillie did have some reservations about this notion of illumination since it suggested that a complete natural knowledge of God is possible without special revelation, which seems to imply theism. Baillie moderated this idea by adding the requirement that the Spirit of God must sanction events before they are revelatory:

[...] revelation is always given us through events; yet not through all events, but only through such as appear as God's mighty works; and through no event in its bare character as occurrence, but only as men are enabled by the Spirit of God to apprehend and receive its revelatory power.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, Baillie agreed with Temple that the fullness of revelation can only be given through the life of a person, so only incarnation can give full revelation. No evidence, however, is given for this assertion.

While the strengths and weaknesses of the propositional approach to Christian doctrine have been debated for centuries, Baillie's portrayal of the debate between revelation as either propositional or non-propositional seems rather crude. He failed to examine the reasons behind the long tradition of doctrine in propositional form or the problems associated with the erosion of this tradition.<sup>22</sup> According to Alister McGrath, a propositional presentation of the faith was part of the legacy of Aquinas: 'Aquinas tends to regard faith as relating to propositions about God; Luther understands it to relate to the promises of God.'<sup>23</sup> Luther's more mystical approach, however, was not shared by the majority of the Protestant Reformers, and Calvin notably mirrored Aquinas' method in dividing the faith into statements in the *Institutes*.

That the Christian faith can be summarised in propositions is not controversial. The Ten Commandments, the Law and the Beatitudes are all propositions that God used to summarise the faith. None are complete and none are designed to serve as an entrance exam, but doctrine has to be phrased in words, just as any meaning has to be, in

order to be communicated. Even events that are not verbal or textual have to be capable of being translated into words, and the whole Bible is an attempt to put into language events and thoughts that in their full reality do not exist in words. Paul in many places summarises the Christian faith in a single sentence (e.g., 1 Timothy 1:15, ‘Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst’) and Jesus does the same (e.g., John 3:16, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’). Propositions begin at the very start of creation – what are the words of creation if not propositions? Revelation in word was a correlative to revelation in nature. There was direct, verbal communication between God and man; Gen 2:16–17 and 3:8 both indicate the necessity of revelation spoken directly to man as imparting a knowledge otherwise inaccessible. The discussion between Eve and the snake is basically a discussion involving the validity of propositional truth. Eve learns the value of propositional truth the hard way. The serpent suggests a rather postmodern interpretation of God’s command regarding the tree, but Eve soon learns that the command was literal. The Fall then breaks direct verbal contact between God and man. The lack of direct contact results in God using prophets and apostles as intermediaries. Revelation now becomes redemptive in nature, but the form is still verbal.

The most characteristic form of revelation in the patriarchal period comes through the Angel of the Lord, who communicates verbally (e.g., Gen 16:7ff.). Jesus trains his disciples in propositional form, ‘teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matt 28:20). Paul asserts the value of propositions in 1 Cor 15:3–4, ‘For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures’. The great theologians all understood the limits of language and the fact that faith can only be partly represented in propositions, but propositions are the tool of the theologian nonetheless. Calvin likens the Scriptures to a pair of spectacles through which we are enabled to view the world with clearer vision: to see things as Adam must have seen them before disobedience clouded his eyesight. From this

perspective, revelation is not just supernaturally conveyed information but divinely improved vision.

This ‘propositional view’ can doubtless be taken too far, as it may have been in the competing catechisms following the Reformation, but it seems simplistic to regard knowledge of God as being either totally propositional or totally non-propositional. Divine revelation need not directly involve propositional content; in some cases of divine manifestation, the proper response may be total silence before the mystery and complexity of the divine, but, similarly, in many cases the usual way of gathering, consolidating, validating and communicating knowledge will be to put ideas into a verbal and propositional form. As William Abraham asserts:

It is sometimes thought that having propositional content precludes further exploration. Bultmann captures the issue nicely. “God the mysterious and hidden must at the same time be the God who is revealed. Not, of course, in a revelation that could be grasped in words and propositions, that would be limited to formula and book and to space and time; but rather in a revelation that continually opens up new heights and depths and thus leads through darkness, from clarity to clarity.” [...] Bultmann is mistaken to think that grasping a revelation in words and propositions is incompatible with a revelation opening up new heights and depths. These are not at all mutually exclusive.<sup>24</sup>

Baillie seemed to assume that with Bultmann, Barth and Temple the argument had been won. Many recent writers, such as Colin Gunton, have however emphasised the need for a propositional foundation: ‘Some propositions may be merely abstract, but the kind of ones with which theology is and has been centrally concerned are not’.<sup>25</sup>



## Conclusions

Baillie’s book suffers from a number of weaknesses. One of the most noticeable was that he took a non-historical approach that leaves the reader with little idea of how these huge changes came about.

According to Baillie, the consensus on revelation held until about the beginning of the nineteenth century. New views on revelation then penetrated the church rapidly through the secular philosophies of Hume, Kant and Hegel. This is, perhaps, a rather clumsy simplification. Lacking any historical analysis of revelation, Baillie portrayed current issues as if they were novel. His failure to relate current debates to historical precedents was a serious flaw. For instance, he noted '[t]he desire which is so manifest among present-day thinkers to understand faith as personal trust rather than as assent to doctrine [...]'<sup>26</sup> and then went on to quote four contemporary writers – Temple, Hebert, Brunner and Barth – but made no reference to previous examples of this dispute. Both the 'assent to proposition' approach and the 'personal experience' approach are long-standing positions. Indeed, the longevity of this debate suggests that it may well be fundamental. Luther played a significant role in the debate, raising objections to propositional doctrine that were not resolved. There are long-standing 'experience' traditions within both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Luther, Spener, Fox, Wesley, and Ritschl are just a few of the most influential names in this experience tradition.

Baillie was not even-handed in his treatment of both sides of the propositional truth debate. He used his rejection of propositional truth to dismiss the 'verbal inspiration' point of view, refusing to distinguish it from dictation theory. Baillie is, of course, generally very capable (even too capable) of preserving fine distinctions, so this refusal to understand the existence of multiple positions on verbal inspiration and inerrancy looks deliberate. He does not mention Calvin's sophisticated writings on 'organic inspiration' which suggest a necessary interaction between God the Holy Spirit as primary author and the biblical writer as secondary author. Baillie names and quotes opponents of the theory at length but does not provide a single name or quote from its supporters, instead the reader has to trust the summaries of the position presented by the author. He regards the movement towards catechetical formulas as politically motivated and uses his distaste for catechisms to suggest that the propositional view as a whole was redundant. It almost seems as if evangelical writers had not engaged with non-propositional views until Barth began to espouse them.<sup>27</sup> Barth had a profound impact on evangelical thought

and many evangelicals have since engaged with the neo-orthodox view of non-propositional truth either to oppose it<sup>28</sup> or to seek some form of compromise.<sup>29</sup> Baillie was, perhaps, rather premature in announcing the demise of the propositional view.

Nevertheless, Baillie was a capable writer who covered difficult philosophical ground. He was a sophisticated thinker, though he suffered from a desire to assert an ‘either-or’ when biblical theology seems to assert a ‘both-and’. The Bible quite evidently contains a definite strain of natural theology, and this need not be contrasted with revelation. The Bible stresses in different places sometimes the human and sometimes the divine origin of its text; it seems clear that different parts of the Bible differ with respect to these elements. The Bible contains both bold propositional statements and discrete lists of propositions that seem to sum up the entire faith, and yet it also contains much that is impossible to synthesise, categorise or summarise. I fear that Baillie’s impatience with imperfect statement and paradox meant that his treatment of Scripture was philosophical rather than biblical. The assertion that propositional knowledge is independent from and inferior to personal knowledge was a fixed idea of Baillie’s although it was much disputed by conservative theologians and philosophers.

In conclusion, it seems that the divide between systematic and biblical theology is very substantial, and that John Baillie is in the former camp. Baillie began his book by suggesting that the old model of revelation was perfect for schoolchildren because it was sensible and comprehensible.<sup>30</sup> He implied that this very simplicity is a flaw, that something so logical must be artificial. Is it possible that Baillie had such a love of the complex that he had contempt for the simple? It is possible that those groups in the church who have done the most evangelism have also sometimes been guilty of oversimplification, that in their enthusiasm for developing an attractive product they have left out any unattractive or paradoxical elements. Perhaps Baillie in his approach was guilty of the opposite offence, of denying the validity of any comprehensible and documented system of doctrine. Perhaps the two activities most likely to force a person to systematize are the urge to communicate (i.e., evangelism), and the requirements of leadership (i.e., the need to establish unity around an agreed standard of orthodoxy) – one suspects that Baillie’s approach

would be unsuitable for people involved in either of these activities. After all, what are the creeds but lists of propositions? In short, Baillie was over-optimistic in announcing the death of Thomist views of revelation, as the decades since the book was published have shown.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1956), 4.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3ff.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 21f.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (New York, Benziger Bros., 1947), II-II, q. 2, art. 10.
- <sup>6</sup> For instance: ‘That there exists in the human minds, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service [...] there is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God.’ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (3 vols: trans. Henry Beveridge; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–46), I.3.1.
- <sup>7</sup> ‘There is no biblical conception of revelation any more than there is a biblical conception of other crucial epistemic concepts. Indeed, to identify relevant material on revelation in scripture already presupposes that one is working with a concept of revelation brought to the text, for otherwise one would not know where or how to locate material on divine revelation in scripture.’ William J. Abraham, “The Offense of Divine Revelation”, *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 258, n. 18.

- <sup>8</sup> B. A. Gerrish, “Errors and Insights in the Understanding of Revelation: A Provisional Response”, *The Journal of Religion* 78 (1998): 65.
- <sup>9</sup> James Barr, “Revelation”, in *Dictionary of the Bible* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; original edn. by James Hastings, revised by Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1966), 847.
- <sup>10</sup> Baillie, *Idea*, 4.
- <sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (ed. Vasilis Politis; London: Dent, 1993 [1787]), 21.
- <sup>12</sup> Baillie, *Idea*, 12f.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Gerrish, “Errors”, 66f.
- <sup>16</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority, vol. 3: God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 456.
- <sup>17</sup> Baillie, *Idea*, 28f.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 64.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>22</sup> Rodney Decker says this on the origin of the term ‘propositional revelation’: ‘The term, as I understand it, originated in the early 20th century as a derogatory term used pejoratively by those who rejected the orthodox statement of biblical revelation and inspiration. As used by opponents of orthodoxy, the term was often used to portray a straw man position (that the Bible consisted only of a collection of what may technically be designated “propositions”).’ Rodney Decker, “May Evangelicals Dispense with Propositional Revelation? Challenges to a Traditional Evangelical Doctrine”. Paper presented at the 53rd annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Colo., November 14, 2001 (p. 3, n. 4). Carl Henry offers the following definition of propositional revelation: ‘We mean by propositional revelation that God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesmen in the express form of cognitive truths, and that the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates



- these truths in sentences that are not internally contradictory.’  
Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:456f.
- <sup>23</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 241.
- <sup>24</sup> Abraham, “The Offense of Divine Revelation”, 260, n. 27.
- <sup>25</sup> Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 10.
- <sup>26</sup> Baillie, *Idea*, 95.
- <sup>27</sup> Cornelius Van Til, who was an early critic of Barth (Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* [Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1946]), is an exception, but his criticism was so harsh and his writing style so difficult, that the book didn’t have much impact until a revised version was released in 1962.
- <sup>28</sup> Such as Van Til, *The New Modernism*, Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*.
- <sup>29</sup> Such as Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961), McGrath, *Christian Theology*.
- <sup>30</sup> Baillie, *Idea*, 3f.