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# Intertextual Reception: Re-thinking the Concept of Revelation in Light of Divine Immanence and the Dignity of the Person and the Cosmos

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## LEUVEN ENCOUNTERS IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY X

Conference Theme: The Letter and the Spirit: On the Forgotten Documents of Vatican II

Plenary Session I, 27 October 2015, on the question,

“Is Divine Revelation Compatible with Human Freedom? *Dei verbum* in Light of *Dignitatis humanae* and Vice Versa”

Reply, ©Thomas Hughson, S.J:

*“Intertextual Reception: Rethinking Revelation in Light of Divine Immanence and the Dignity of the Person and Cosmos”*

Intertextual reception of *Dei verbum* and *Dignitatis humanae* has a prospective, speculative rather than a retrospective, historical-theological orientation. That is, I take for granted and begin from historical-theological contributions such as the five-volume *History of Vatican II* edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak and John W. O’Malley’s *What Happened at Vatican II*.<sup>1</sup> In the final essay in volume 5 of the *History of Vatican II* and in the Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, gen. ed., Joseph Komonchak, English version ed., *The History of Vatican II*, Vol. 1–5 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995–2006). See Christophe Theobald, “The Church Under the Word of God,” *History of Vatican II*, gen. ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English ed., Joseph A. Komonchak, Volume V: *The Council and the Transition, The Fourth Period and the End of the Council September 1965–December 1965* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 275–372 and John W. O’Malley *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard

to O'Malley's book, Alberigo and O'Malley respectively cast their gaze toward the future and continued reception of the momentous council.<sup>2</sup> In adopting that direction of thought a temporary primacy falls to synchronic rather than diachronic interpretation of a few conciliar texts. The inquiry to follow, for example, addresses how the conjunction of *Dei verbum* and *Dignitatis humanae* opens a theme for further theological reflection and reception.<sup>3</sup> A directional trope specifies the theme. The inquiry seeks a concept of revelation as ascending from below no less than descending from above. The aim is not to polarize two logics, from above and from below, but to balance the predominance of the descending preconception associated with the act, content, and medium of revelation.<sup>4</sup> But first I'd like to discuss the broader and prior question of compatibility between divine revelation with human freedom.

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University Press, 2008). For pneumatological analysis see Thomas Hughson, S.J., "Interpreting Vatican II: 'A New Pentecost'," *Theological Studies* 69, 1 (2008): 3–37.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age," in the *History of Vatican II, Volume V*, 574–644.

<sup>3</sup> O'Malley, 310, advised intertextual reception and theological reflection on latent, comprehensive unity among the documents.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) sets forth a theology of (Special) revelation mediated by human experience. His proposal is tantamount to an ascending theology of Special revelation

## I. The Horizon of the Compatibility Question Omits Something

The provenance of the question about compatibility is the still influential heritage of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenments. The original horizon was centered in an outlook in the French, German, English, Scottish, South and North American Enlightenments. Though not possessed of a uniform outlook and agenda there were family resemblances on reason and freedom, granting the contextuality of both. The fate of this heritage has been troubled by history and contested in thought. Nonetheless in the 1960's Karl Jaspers once stated that, "I myself cannot but hold with Kant that if revelation were a reality it would be calamitous for man's created freedom." And yet Jaspers' relativizes his principle by accepting cultural, philosophical, and political pluralism. He goes on to say that, "I want no thinking that would ultimately bar revelation."<sup>5</sup> But revelation and freedom are in a problematic relationship insofar as human freedom puts revelation on trial by not assuming their compatibility despite emancipation from legal structures of religious coercion in liberal democracies.

Intertextual reception of *Dei verbum* and *Dignitatis humanae* opens discussion on at least two factors related to the question of compatibility. First, explicit respect in *Dignitatis humanae* for critical reason as the preparation for liberty in religious matters helps interpret *Dei verbum* on freedom in receiving revelation. *Dignitatis humanae* represented what might be

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that simultaneously respects the descending 'from above' aspect of grace in persons and in divine initiatives in history. His theology does not, however, deal with divine immanence in nature and the cosmos.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Jaspers, E. B. Ashton, trans., *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* (London: Collins, 1967),

called a renewed Catholic epistemology and analysis of faith that approves the human duty to seek and find valid judgments about God and religion. *Dignitatis humanae* by endorsing the human and civil right to religious liberty taught that freedom in the search for the truth in religion deserves protection. *Dignitatis humanae* committed the church to uphold the process of searching for truth in matters of religion and not only to the church's mission to transmit the gospel. Together *Dei verbum* and *Dignitatis humanae* create space for seekers as well as dwellers, to borrow categories from Charles Taylor.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the horizon of the question about compatibility omits something about freedom. The omission concerns not freedom of choice but the fulfillment of freedom in love. Neither document addresses this theme but both in association with the event and all documents of Vatican II can be understood to presuppose it. Bernard Lonergan's philosophy of freedom offers an excellent account of love as the fulfillment of freedom. Freedom comes to its highest fulfillment not in value judgments by which a person or society brings about moral self-transcendence and self-governance. Love exceeds moral self-transcendence and it involves more than immunity from coercion.

Raymond Moloney remarks that Lonergan's view of freedom poses an alternative to "a narrow notion of freedom as simply emancipation rather than as loving the good."<sup>7</sup> Immunity from coercion is a negative freedom with a heritage of emancipation, but positive freedom is

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<sup>6</sup> See Christoph Theobald, "The Theological Options of Vatican II: Seeking an 'Internal' Principle of Interpretation" in Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald, eds., *Vatican II: The Forgotten Future*, Concilium 2005/4 (London: SCM Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Moloney, 809.

love for the good.<sup>8</sup> The good, notes Lonergan, always is concrete, as definite as people with proper names and as functional as the good of order whose interlaced structures of cooperation enable people in a society to meet their needs by obtaining their particular goods.<sup>9</sup> For Lonergan, though, appreciation for a significant value, when definite and pervasive, is called falling in love and the consequent condition is being-in-love as an ontological modification of the subject. Being-in-love is living in the pervading light of major appreciations and judgments of value.

He describes being-in-love as a dynamic state with an habitual vision of things from the perspective of appreciated goods. For Lonergan, being-in-love becomes an ontological condition of the subject. The love might be for the truth, spouse and family, tribe, society, nation, nature, science, art, friends, neighbors, co-workers, a hockey team, etc. It can be love for the good, for God, gospel, eternal life, and for neighbors. Freedom as love was omitted from the horizon of the question about whether or not divine revelation is compatible with human freedom. If the question about compatibility were revised in that frame of reference the question would be, is divine revelation compatible with human love?

*Dei verbum* adopted, not without conflict, a personalist concept of revelation as divine self-manifestation that displaced the propositional, command and obey model in the First

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979; originally Herder and Herder, 1972). He develops the centrality of love especially but not only in chapter 4 on the human good.

<sup>9</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 27.

Vatican Council's document on revelation and faith, *Dei filius*.<sup>10</sup> *Dei verbum*'s personalist perspective on did not and because of their parallel genesis during the council could not end up explicitly in *Dignitatis humanae*. Still, the dynamic of love surfaces in paragraph 2, section 11 of *Dignitatis humanae*. There the document describes Christ refusing to impose his truth by force since his rule, "extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men [sic] to Himself." To conclude, receiving *Dignitatis humanae* intertextually with *Dei verbum* broadens and deepens negative freedom as immunity from coercion by linking it to love for the good, above all divine revelation in Christ. Reception of divine revelation in faith involves love for the good. Belief in Christ, most clearly in the Gospel According to John, has the dynamic of love, the fulfilling of freedom. Revelation, then, is a manifestation of divine love compatible with the peak of human freedom which is human love for and commitment to the good.

## **II. Rethinking Revelation in Light of Divine Immanence, Human Dignity, and the Dignity of the Cosmos**

To rethink and re-imagine revelation in *Dei verbum* in light of divine immanence involves attention to nature and the cosmos not only historical salvation. Such attention was not to the fore in *Dei verbum*. Its originality lay elsewhere. The document's principal contribution to the reform undertaken by the council was twofold. For one thing, it adopted a personalist

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<sup>10</sup> See Theobald, "The Church Under the Word of God" in *History of Vatican II*, Alberigo,.

concept of revelation as divine self-manifestation that displaced Vatican I's propositional model relayed to Vatican II in the Preparatory Theological Commission's text, "De Fontibus Revelationis."<sup>11</sup> Revelation as divine self-manifestation expands the idea of revelation to a comprehensive model not limited to but including propositions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See detailed study of "De Fontibus Revelationibus" by Karim Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: A Redaction History of the Schema De Fontibus Revelationis (1962–1965)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Retrieval of revelation as verbal message does not necessarily mean re-assertion of Vatican I. Interest in a propositional model of revelation that upholds Scripture but avoids fundamentalism has a place in current Protestant theology of revelation. See, besides Gunton's *A Brief Theology of Revelation and Reason and Revelation*, Finnish Pentecostal theologian Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), chapter 1. For a propositional model in philosophical theology, see Richard Swinburne, "Revelation" in Kelly James Clark, ed., *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 115–130 and Stephen Davis, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30–53.



The second major contribution of *Dei verbum* was to elevate the normative role of Scripture in the life, teaching, ministry, and theology of the church. The Scriptures are written and so filled with revelatory propositions, from Jhwh's self-declaration to Moses, "I am who I am," to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Anointed one from God. Tension between the Scriptures replete with propositions and a non-propositional, personalist model of revelation eases once propositions are understood as existential assertions rather than only as official doctrinal formulae. The self-manifesting, personalist concept of revelation includes words not only deeds. It also means that creation as General revelation no less than Special revelation in salvation history is divine self-manifestation.

The First and Second Vatican Councils affirm General revelation under the heading of natural theology. In *Dei filius* Vatican I had upheld that God as "the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the things that were created, through the natural light of human reason."<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth reproached this teaching as wrong and harmful to faith. Lonergan to the contrary developed a natural theology based on the intelligibility of the universe.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless

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<sup>13</sup> The First Vatican General Council, *Dogmatic Constitution, Dei Filius, on the Catholic Faith*, J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J., Seventh Revised and Enlarged edition, Jacques Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 2001), n. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 680–699, and Bernard Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in *A Second Collection*, William F. J. Ryan, S.J. and Bernard J. Tyrell, S.J., eds., originally presented

Lonergan distinguished potential for this knowledge from its historical actuality in any or all people's lives. He did not deny it was possible for fallen humanity. He qualified the potential by stating that, "I do not think that in this life people arrive at natural knowledge of God without grace, but what I do not doubt is that the knowledge they so attain is natural."<sup>15</sup>

At Vatican II *Dei verbum* re-iterated Vatican I on natural knowledge of God. Section 3 begins with the proposition that "God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men [sic] an enduring witness to Himself [sic] in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20)." Then Section 6, paragraph 2 explicitly appropriates Vatican I. Avers paragraph 2, "As a sacred synod has affirmed, God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (see Rom. 1:20)...." *Dei verbum* thereby re-situates natural theology within the framework not of a propositional but of the personalist concept of revelation as divine self-manifestation. Creation too is divine self-manifestation that Catholic tradition, witness both Vatican I in *Dei filius* and Vatican II in *Dei verbum*, has seen as harmonious with Special revelation from Abraham, Moses, the prophets, wisdom literature, to and centrally, Jesus. Special revelation does not nullify General revelation or render it negligible.<sup>16</sup>

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at the 1968 Catholic Theological Society of America convention (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 117–133.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in *A Second Collection*, William F.J. Ryan, S.J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S. J., eds. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 133.

<sup>16</sup> For an account of the prototypical cosmic covenant between God and humanity, see Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*

In terms of *Dei verbum*'s personalist model General and Special revelation are successive stages in divine self-manifestation. The latter surpasses and corrects but sublates the former. Special revelation in history builds on and subsumes without destroying General revelation in nature and the cosmos. That, I take it, represents Catholic tradition on the topic. What I wish to propose develops that tradition by reverting to a starting-point in divine immanence that offers a way of rethinking both General and Special revelation. Estimable theologians such as Lonergan, Avery Dulles, and Gerald O'Collins focus on Special revelation taking place in and as history.<sup>17</sup> In accord with Catholic tradition they accept the validity of General revelation under its aspect of being open to natural theology. But they do not undertake rethinking revelation in light of divine immanence. Natural theology and its offspring, classical Western theism do not encourage

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(London: Sheed & Ward, 1992). Murray argues for a cosmic-covenantal structure built into Israel's earliest understandings of divine creating that passed into subsequent covenants.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald O'Collins covers the literature on and develops the concept of revelation in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). He pauses at General revelation but quickly points to Israel's subsuming of natural into historical religion, 59. See also Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd edition, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 79–108. On natural, General revelation Dulles remarks, "[n]atural revelation is only preliminary" for Jews, Christians and Muslims all of whom look to God's self-disclosure in historical events, 82.

conceptual movement from divine transcendence to divine immanence except in pantheism and objectionable versions of panentheism.

Two postconciliar factors commend new attention to divine immanence. One is that in the half century since the council ended an awakening to the ecological crisis has altered non-theological and theological understandings of nature and humanity's place in it. The altered understandings have entered into and become to some extent formative of the context into which Vatican II is still being received. Almost all Christian churches now teach that nature and the cosmos are inherently real and good in their own right independent of their utility for humanity. Ecological ethics finds a place in the moral theology of most churches. The work of Denis Edwards exemplifies postconciliar Catholic theology coming to grips with the question of causal divine presence in the evolving cosmos. Evolutionary, temporal movement internal to creaturely dependence on the Creator challenges churches and theologians to integrate the focus on divine transcendence with new attention to Trinitarian immanence in creation and redemption.

Secondly, such a shift in focus also off-sets the idea of transcendence carried by the informal presence of classical Western theism. John W. Cooper sums up Western theism. It "asserts that God in himself is maximal Being—absolutely self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, omniscient, completely act and most excellent in every way."<sup>18</sup> Most familiar under the heading of Deism the utterly transcendent Creator of Deism empowered all creatures to be and to act. Creatures depend on the Creator but the Creator/creature difference easily is thought and imagined as distance and absence. God is like an absentee landlord.

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<sup>18</sup> John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 14.

God is thought of as otherworldly and to that extent absent from this world. Celestial otherness becomes remoteness and casts God in the role of the Creator distant from the world of human dwelling and suffering, a world of many people with ears open but who hear only, as they feel, the silence of God which they may interpret either as divine indifference or the non-reality of God. The impression of divine absence has become a pervasive pre-understanding of God's transcendence. That situation recommends attention to the immanence of the creating Trinity. True, the high sacramentality of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and the Anglican Communion immerses members in signs of divine action, and the Eucharist communicates Christ's physical presence. Nevertheless, with the exception of ecotheology, for the most part I do not observe or overhear lived awareness of the Trinity immanent in the cosmos outside church walls. Concentration on transcendence, sometimes in opposition to secularity, conveys an impression that the revealing God comes into the world from an immeasurable distance tantamount to practical absence. Both classical Western theism and renewed Trinitarian theology carry a potentially misleading idea of divine transcendence as absence from the world.

#### *Aquinas on Divine Immanence*

More in detail, what are transcendence and immanence? I continue to think that Thomas Aquinas has much to say to moderns and post moderns on this topic. So did organizers of a 2005 conference at the University of Utrecht in 2005 on transcendence and immanence. One of the contributors in the published proceedings, philosopher Gregory Rocca, expounded Aquinas on

divine transcendence and immanence.<sup>19</sup> Rocca argued that in Aquinas the premise for attributing both transcendence and immanence to God is belief in and doctrine on *creatio ex nihilo*. The language and thought of transcendence and immanence are creaturely apprehensions of one divine act of creating under two aspects. Both transcendence and immanence conceive God in relation to what is other than God. There is no transcendence in God except in the relation of creation to God.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast in the Trinity the Father does not transcend the Son, or the Father and Son together transcend the Spirit. The inner-Trinitarian relations of origin do not involve transcending because one and the same divine nature is that of each distinct divine person. Aquinas admits a certain kind of divine immanence of the persons in each other. But this manner

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<sup>19</sup> Gregory Rocca, 'Creatio Ex Nihilo' and the Being of Creatures: God's Creative Act and the Transcendence/Immanence Distinction in Aquinas," in Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot, eds., *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009), 1–17.

<sup>20</sup> See the incisive argument by Rudi te Velde in "God and the Language of Participation," against attributing to God an "unmediated absoluteness" independent of creation, in Goris, Rikhof, and Schoot eds., *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thoma Aquinas*, 10–36. At the same time in Western cultures not saturated in theism or any idea of God, there is the danger of people imagining an unmediated nothingness preceding and enveloping that which has come to be as of 13.7 billion years ago in the Big Bang.

of presence cannot be understood or conceived as at all like the immanence of God in creatures. The immanence of God in creatures is the existing of creatures in continuous dependence on God. No such dependence occurs in the Trinity. The divine persons do not create each other and so are not immanent in each other in anything at all like divine immanence in creatures.

Rocca rightly notes that, “God’s nature becomes transcendent and immanent, if you will, once creatures are in existence but that [divine] nature has been the foundation for such transcendence and immanence from all eternity.”<sup>21</sup> Both transcendence and immanence are relations of creatures to Creator.<sup>22</sup> Rocca quotes Aquinas, “But a thing’s existence is more interior and deep than anything else...and hence it is necessary for God to exist in all things, and intimately so.”<sup>23</sup> Aquinas’s *Summa contra Gentiles* says that God exists in all things, “*per*

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<sup>21</sup> Rocca, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Lonergan conceives this in terms of ‘contingent predication’. See Neil Ormerod, “

<sup>23</sup> Rocca, 14, quoting Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 8, a. 1. See St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Volume 2, Existence and Nature of God* (Ia. 2–11) Latin text. English trans., Introduction, Notes, Appendices & Glossary by Timothy McDermott O.P., Additional Appendices by Thomas Gilby O.P. (Great Britain: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1964) Question 8, a. 1–4 God’s existence in things. The McDermott translation runs, “Now existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else,” and continues “for everything as we said is potential is potential when compared to existence [*cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt*]. So God must exist and exist intimately in everything.”

*modum causae agentis* (ScG III, c. 68, n. 9),” that is, “in the fashion of an agent cause...,”

presumably by analogy with an efficient cause. Earlier chapters in the *Summa contra Gentiles* III showed divine causality had to be simultaneous with its effects.<sup>24</sup> Aquinas explains that God’s transcendence in the act of *creatio ex nihilo* grounds divine immanence in whatever comes into being. God is immanent because transcendent. The logic, of course, is impeccable. There can be no divine immanence in anything and everything created except in logical and conceptual consequence from the existence of what God has created. In that respect God’s transcendence grounds immanence not the other way around. God is immanent because transcendent.

Yet I think the logical, conceptual priority of transcendence cannot also be an ontological priority. God did not first create what is not God then become immanent in it. In the order of being immanence is equi-primordial and co-extensive with transcendence. That is why the immanence of God in creation is a transcendent immanence, as Aquinas and Rocca hold. There is no transcendence and no immanence prior to *creatio ex nihilo*. Divine causality is simultaneous with the totality of created effects. But Aquinas and Rocca hold that immanence in

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<sup>24</sup> Rocca, 13, quoting Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, c. 68, n. 9. The reference should be to c. 68, n. 11 not n. 9. See *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Three: Providence, Part I*, Vernon J. Bourke trans., Introduction, and Notes (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975 [originally *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, Hanover House, 1956]), 226.



what has been created depends on and derives from transcendence in the act of *creatio ex nihilo*. The possibility of a creating immanence does not arise in Rocca's perspective.

And yet just that possibility does arise in Aquinas. The Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae* q. 8, a. 1, *ad primum* states that while "[t]he perfection of his nature places God above everything...yet as causing their existence he also exists in everything."<sup>25</sup> Thus Aquinas notes that God's immanence belongs to the divine act of causing creatures. So the conceptual priority of transcendence is not an ontological priority since the act of creating brings about a creaturely relation to both divine transcendence and immanence. Here Aquinas does not insist on the causal, and so conceptual priority of divine transcendence in the act of creating.

Furthermore, divine, creating immanence has languished in theological, doctrinal, pastoral, and spiritual shadows. That neglect makes it appropriate, then, to emphasize that God's immanence in creation is equally first with transcendence. Simultaneity eludes discourse so in a series of statements why may not immanence instead of transcendence be the first divine attribute stated? Do we not and so can we not begin from divine immanence as the condition for the possibility of things actually existing, a condition known by inference from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*?

#### *The Trinitarian Aspect of Divine Immanence in Creatio ex Nihilo*

Furthermore, divine creational immanence is Trinitarian. The immanence of the divine Son/Word internal to Special revelation on Christ makes a difference in General revelation. I leave for another occasion discussion of the immanence of the Holy Spirit. A number of New Testament passages (1 Cor 8:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–4; Rev 3:14), most famously John 1: 1–14, attribute a creational role to Jesus. None of them allows the image of a

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<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, McDermott trans., Ia, q. 8, a. 1, *ad primum*, 113.

Creator in distant separation from creation. In John 1: 1–4 the creating Logos did not cease creating at the origin of the universe as if the Logos were the Deist watchmaker. Nor is there anything that suggests that the Logos’s creating terminated upon or Incarnation. To the contrary the Logos continued to create during and after the Incarnation. Paul proclaimed that, “There is one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things come and through whom we exist,” (1 Cor 8: 6). Hebrews 1: 3 professed that Christ is “sustaining the universe by his powerful command.”

Creaturely dependence on Jesus the Christ has not ended. It has been subsumed into the bond of faith, so that Christ our Savior also is our source of being. The Creed professes this in confessing “through him all things were made.” What the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) clarified as the divine nature of Jesus, the creating Word, is universally immanent in human existence and conscience no less than Jesus in his and Christianity’s particularity is active through the sacraments. Creaturely dependence on the creating Logos who is the Word made flesh pertains to the whole cosmos, every aspect and act of every existent, and to all spheres and kinds of human love, knowledge, and agency in history. Nothing in John 1: 1–14 or Hebrews 1: 3 compels imagining the creating Logos as a remote divine agent far distant from and above creation, earth, people, and history. In fact, when John 1: 9 avers that the Word is, “the true light that enlightens everyone,” this cannot point to a Logos removed from creation and humanity because the enlightenment occurs in the world.

Aquinas’s commentary on John 1: 4–5 provides further assistance on the immanence of Logos/Word enlightening conscience. What, he asks, is this “light of people [*homines*, not

*vir]*”<sup>26</sup> Aquinas does not think it is the light of faith in Christ or the light of divine glory in the beatific vision. Rather it has to do with what I will call the interpretative and effective rationality of humanity as a species that produces the capacity to make free, self-directed movement in lives open to the truth and to the vision of God. God, Aquinas points out, “teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and enlightens us more than the birds of the air,” (Job 35: 11).<sup>27</sup> That enlightening beyond natural instinct can mean only that the divine Logos acts in and so is present in the world in a unique way in humans. But interestingly it means that other animal genera and species also are guided in a qualitatively different degree by the creating, immanent Logos. In humans the immanent presence of the enlightening Logos is an aspect of their *creatio ex nihilo*. Moreover, and universally the divine Logos constitutes the universe, so to speak, from within the universe. The Logos is in the world and the world is in the Logos. This immanence seems to me clear and definite in Special revelation witnessed to in the inspired New Testament followed by the Christological tradition of interpretation in the councils from Nicaea to Third Constantinople.

#### *Trinitarian Immanence and Divine Self-Manifestation*

Rethinking revelation in light of divine immanence means that divine self-manifestation emerges from below, as long as ‘from below’ refers to God immanent to creation and history. The idea of revelation from below finds an index of initial plausibility in section 236 of Pope

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<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1–5*, Fabian Larcher, O.P. and James E. Weisheipl, O.P. trans., with Introduction and Notes by Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), nn. 95–107.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 101.

Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Speaking about the Eucharistic presence of Christ, Francis reflects that, "The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours."<sup>28</sup> The Lord comes from within, or to sharpen the difference from the usual image of revelation coming down from above, revelation and salvation as a whole come from below, that is, from the already present, laboring Trinity accessible to human thought and language only by Special revelation. But the point is that invisibility and inaccessibility to reasoning do not mean that God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is distant or absent from the world.

The paramount act of divine self-manifestation is the Christ event—Incarnation, life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection of Jesus the Christ linked to the person and mission of the Holy Spirit. That easily leads readers, homilists, and hymnody to interpret John 1: 1–14 as if describing a downward movement from heaven to earth, the divine descent of the creating Word. But the words in the passage do not say anything about descending or overcoming a distance. The text presents the Jesus who fulfills revelation as the creating Logos. The Logos, then, had been present but invisible, all but unknown, yet always immanent in what has come to be, never anything but intimately near. When John 1: 14 declares "And the Word became flesh," the assuming of Jesus' human nature was a matter of unexpected, unforeseen historical visibility and human agency for the already universally immanent Logos. The Incarnation was not a matter of

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

the Logos overcoming a previous absence and distance. Instead the Logos/Word already was and remains omnipresent and immanent in creation, including and especially in humanity.

John 1: 11 on the Word coming to his own despite people already being ‘his own’ similarly can be heard as if describing a descent by the previously absent Word. But the text does not say that. Similarly, Philippians 2: 5–11 on Jesus’ not clinging to equality with God in accepting human life, mortality, and even death on the cross, may be received as if the verbs denote descent from a remote, divine pre-existence with God. Again, the language in the text does not speak about kenosis overcoming prior absence or distance.

Putting together John 1 and Philippians 2 it can be said that the divine Logos did not ‘arrive’ on earth for the first time in Mary’s womb but had been immanently creating yet invisible in the cosmos and history all along. In an immanent perspective the Incarnation is the ‘sending’ of the Logos from full and enveloping divine light with the Father, inaccessible to mortal eyes, minds, and tongues, into an incomparable and incomprehensible new presence in the real, historically visible, active, free, loving, and judging humanity of Jesus. The already present and enlightening but invisible Logos irrupted into visible human history as Jesus. The Father sends the Word not from far to near but from near to a new kind of nearest.

*Is the Natural Sacred Access to Divine Immanence?*

Rethinking and re-imagining revelation in light of divine immanence does not by-pass or leave behind the cosmos as part of General revelation of the Creator. Nor is natural theology the sole path from the observed world to awareness of God. Experience of the sacred in nature

outlined by Mircea Eliade in his classic book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, beckons thought along the path of sensitivity to the sacred in nature.<sup>29</sup>

Israel struggled against polytheist and henotheist idolatries that arose from perceptions of something sacred in nature. And yet in the dialogical spirit of Vatican II, the church's wisdom in *Nostra aetate* shines forth in moving beyond simple condemnation of non-Christian religions tied to the cosmos. Section 2 in *Nostra aetate* teaches that, "From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense."<sup>30</sup>

The Latin original says, instead of "that hidden power that hovers over the course of things," "*illius arcanæ virtutis, quæ cursui rerum et eventibus vitæ humanæ præsens est.*" A better English translation would be "of that hidden power which is present to the course of things and to the events of human life." The Latin, that is, lets divine immanence in the cosmos come to view and more easily lets the connotations of the "course of things and the events of human life" carry reference to the cosmos, changes in seasons, birth, marriage, and death. The unfortunate English translation of hidden power "hovering" over the course of things pictures divine

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<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

<sup>30</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Declaratio de Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones Non-Christianæ: Nostra aetate*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_lt.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_lt.html)

transcendence looming over historical events, if not too far above them, rather than present in cosmic and natural changes. French, German, and Italian translations use a variation on the Latin word, *praesens*.

Why may not a theology of revelation affirm divine immanence in nature as the root of, for example, indigenous, pre-Christian, shamanistic religions among peoples in the past and present? Were perceptions of divine immanence imbued in Native American sacred cultures? Is there something still to be learned, and learned about God, from, for example, Lakota Sioux shaman, Black Elk, born in 1863 and a Catholic convert in 1904.<sup>31</sup> He had standing because he had been a warrior with Crazy Horse and then had fought in the victory over General Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. Until his death in 1950 Black Elk was a trusted, diligent catechist not only among the Lakota Sioux but also among the Arapahoe and Apaches as well.<sup>32</sup> Black Elk set aside what was thought to be sorcery, along with what he evaluated as flim-flam. He re-interpreted but did not condemn the Sun Dance he had participated in many

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<sup>31</sup> See John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition*, Philip J. Deloria, Introduction, Raymond J. DeMallie, Annotations (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1932–2014).

For all the marvelous accounts Neihardt presented he omitted the apparently inconvenient religious and theological fact that Black Elk converted to Catholicism in 1904. For a critique of Neihardt's omission and an account of Black Elk as a Catholic catechist see Ross Enochs, *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: A Study of Pastoral Ministry, 1886–1945* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 75–88.

<sup>32</sup> Enochs, 85–86.

times. He did not depart from most Indian customs. He did not completely reject as incompatible with his new Catholic faith a way of life grounded in Native American experience of the natural world as a sacred environment with access to many intermediaries and the Great Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

In effect before his conversion Black Elk had found the world to be what in light of Special revelation is General revelation. Does Black Elk exemplify Native American appreciation for divine immanence in nature indissociable from its transcendent dimension in the Great Spirit, *wakan tanka*?

Since the 1970's quite a few formerly Catholic and Protestant Native Americans have deliberately re-appropriated pre-Christian experiences of the sacred in nature and the spiritual world of ancestors and spirits connected to nature. Their grasp of the devastation from colonialism and exploitation by white America has much to do with this. But like Black Elk many of them also practice Catholicism with respect for their Native American heritage, though often in urban environments with less direct connection to nature and tribal kinship. Is it far too late for an authentically Native American Catholicism to emerge from within the sacred milieu of Sioux tradition?

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<sup>33</sup> See Joy Porter, *Native American Environmentalism: Land, Spirit, and the Idea of Wilderness* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska press, 2012), chapter 3, "Spiritual Approaches to Life in America."



#### **IV. Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion hopefully contributes not only to rethinking General and Special revelation in light of divine immanence but also to theological and not only social-scientific reasons for learning about the religio-cultural ways of indigenous peoples. Sacral access to General revelation of the divine immanent in the cosmos remains a possibility for those already Christian no less than does natural theology.

An ascending General revelation of cosmic and natural sacrality need not be conceived as contrary to a descending Special revelation any more than commitment to natural theology in official Catholic doctrine contradicts Special revelation. Sacral experience of nature and the cosmos that is not specifically Christian, and in pre-Vatican II terminology ‘pagan’, is not by that fact alone anti-Christian. As is well known in the experiences of indigenous people converting to Christianity and in modern missiology subsuming pre-Christian religion into the Christian horizon does not necessarily mean negating everything pre-Christian in their lives. Some judgments of fact and value undoubtedly undergo change in conversion. But, equally well-known on the other hand is that conversion and sublation of a former way of life do not mean that previous inculturations of Christianity are completely normative for new Christians.

Nor, finally, does renewal of response to General revelation from within Special revelation instantiate the ‘return of the sacred’ that seeks to restore pre-modern Christendom. Attention to the numinous quality of the cosmos and nature does not negate the secularized emancipation of society’s main institutions from religious authority. It does keep the church open to respect for cultures and religions in Africa, Asia, and the Americas that have not lost touch with divine immanence.