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Revelation and the Unity of the Truth

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Abstract

In his assessment of Paul Tillich's theology, Dirk Martin Grube states that revelation pertains to knowledge about knowledge instead of knowledge about the world. This concept of revelation raises two interrelated questions: 1) Can revelation be restricted to an epistemological metalevel without conveying propositional content?; 2) Does knowledge based on revelation potentially conflict with other forms of knowledge? This article denies the first and affirms the latter, thus arguing against Grube's thesis and uses the importance of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection as a litmus test.

Keywords: Paul Tillich, Dirk-Martin Grube, revelation, faith and science, propositional truth, historicity of the resurrection

The question how the Christian confession relates to knowledge in general does not only pertain to abstract epistemological issues, but is relevant for the relationship between faith and science and for the unity of truth. Revelation – or the belief in revelation – influences one's perspective on reality.

Dirk-Martin Grube's book on Paul Tillich, *Offenbarung, absolute Wahrheit und interreligiöser Dialog*, unlocks the complicated structures underlying Tillich's thoughts on revelation and truth.¹ It offers clear insights

¹ D.-M. Grube, *Offenbarung, absolute Wahrheit und interreligiöser Dialog. Studien zur Theologie Paul Tillichs* (Tillich Research 14), Berlin/Boston 2019, 124-156. I want thank my colleague for his short reply to my response to his book at the conference 'Paul Tillich on Religion and Culture' held in Amsterdam, 4th of October 2019, and for his helpful reflections on the first draft of this article.

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into the work of this German-American theologian, and particularly into his concept of revelation; it is a treasure trove, a *Fundgrube*. Nevertheless, the publication also evokes some fundamental theological questions.

Grube argues that for Tillich the knowledge of revelation is knowledge about knowledge instead of knowledge about the world and he expresses his agreement with him on this point.² Few theologians will object against the statement that revelation also includes knowledge about knowledge, but the claim made by Grube's 'instead of' is stronger and more exclusive. It implies that revelation does not convey new information about the world.³ This has far-reaching implications for the character of revealed truth and for its relationship to truth as such. First, we will look at Grube's rejection of the propositional character of revelation. Next, we will consider whether Tillich's view of the independency of faith and knowledge – seen through Grube's lenses – helps to avoid or solve conflicts with other forms of knowledge or whether it implies some sort of theory of double-truth. Finally, we will reflect on the historicity of the resurrection of Christ, to argue against Grube's view that revealed truth does not describe reality but only steers the descriptions of reality on a metalevel.

Faith, Knowledge and Propositional Truth

Grube argues that for Tillich revelation does not offer new knowledge about the world, but pertains to the character of our knowledge. Revelation does not reveal facts, but offers a new perspective on the facts. Although revelation is not propositional it still is relevant for our knowledge.⁴ This raises the question whether revelation can be separated from its propositional content. In a certain sense, propositions, expressions that assert a truth, are almost indispensable to express one's convictions. For example, Grube's claim that revelation is *erkenntnisrelevant* is also a proposition, though, of course, he does not claim that it is revealed.

- 2 I will mainly focus on chapter V of Grube's book, titled 'Glaube und Wissen bei Tillich: Die Offenbarungserkenntnis als Erkenntnis über die Erkenntnis statt Erkenntnis über die Welt' in: Grube, *Offenbarung*, 124-156.
- 3 For Tillich and Grube revelation belongs to a '*ganz andere Art*' of knowledge, which is situated on a different epistemological level. Grube concludes that the knowledge of revelation cannot be in real conflict with knowledge about the world, but only with knowledge about knowledge. Grube, *Offenbarung*, 124, 151.
- 4 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 133.

Revelation is not identical with the Bible as a book. There are also other forms of revelation, sometimes called general or universal revelation. Moreover, the person and work of Jesus Christ is God's revelation by excellence and the Christ-event is more comprehensive than the witness of the apostles, leave alone its possible expression in propositional statements. Still, the witness of prophets and apostles regarding the acts of the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ – the only access we have to salvation history – can also be formulated in propositions. The shortest and most powerful confessional statement in the New Testament is 'Jesus *Kurios*'. If we define a proposition as a sentence or expression that asserts a truth and can be either true or false, then this confession – just like most other confessional statements – is a proposition, even though it is more than just that. The Christian faith, summarized in the early confessions of the church, consists of confessional propositions, which Christians claim to be true.

Of course, this aspect of revelation can be overemphasized. In the context of modernity, the orthodox Protestant view of the authority of Scripture was often phrased in the categories of propositional truths. Exemplary of this position is the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982): 'We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute' (Article 6).⁵ This statement followed the previous *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), that 'Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.'⁶ Both statements reveal a modern understanding of biblical truth and were prompted by the rejection of historical-critical exegesis. The Chicago statements nowadays are far less popular among evangelicals than they used to be. While modernity was characterized by rationality and the autonomy of the individual, postmodernity is highly relativistic.⁷ The switch from the modern to a so-called postmodern context offers new challenges and leads to new answers, also among evangelicals.

This does not mean, however, that propositional truths should be completely rejected. According to Grube, revelation does not increase our

5 Compare to, for example, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 'Articles of Affirmations and Denial', *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*, www.alliancenet.org/the-chicagostatement-on-biblical-hermeneutics, accessed 22 November 2019.

6 Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 'A Short Statement', Article 4, *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-inerrancy accessed 22 November 2019.

7 On the challenges for the authority of Scripture in a postmodern context, see also H. van den Belt, 'Scripture as the Voice of God: The Continuing Importance of *Autopistia*', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13 (2011): 434-47.

knowledge of nature or history and contains no information about facts, not even supernatural facts.⁸ Without propositions that formulate it, however, the confessional content of the Christian faith can hardly be expressed. As soon as you say ‘I believe (...)’ you imply that you believe something to be true, not only on a metalevel of knowledge about knowledge, but also on the factual level. Any answer to the question why you believe any aspect of the Christian faith to be true, will likely refer to some sort of revelation.

Of course, much depends on the precise definitions of ‘propositional’ and of ‘revelation’. For the distinction between propositional and nonpropositional concepts of revelation, Grube refers to John Hick. In his *Philosophy of Religion* Hick argues that the propositional view of revelation dominates medieval theology and nowadays both Roman Catholicism and conservative Protestantism. ‘According to this view, the content of revelation is a body of truths expressed in statements or propositions. Revelation is the imparting to people of divinely authenticated truths.’⁹

This intellectualistic picture of orthodox forms of Christianity, however, is a caricature. Views in which revelation is seen as exclusively or even mainly consisting of the imparting of propositions, would be very one-sided and are very rare. Orthodox Protestants acknowledge that faith based on revelation consists of more than the intellectual acceptance of truths. It also implies trust based on a relationship with the God who has revealed himself in Christ. Faith implies an existential relationship with God, experienced in genuine Christian spirituality and expressed in a radical Christian lifestyle.

Grube argues from Hick’s distinction that a Christian concept of revelation must meet two conditions: 1) It cannot be a set of propositions concerning facts; but 2) still it must preserve its cognitive relevance, that is, it cannot be completely irrelevant to knowledge, for example, by being merely relevant in a moral sense.¹⁰ The simplest solution seems to be the acknowledgement that revelation – at least in some sense – does have a propositional character, although it is not exclusively propositional. Christians express their faith in confessional propositions in the firm conviction that they are true because they correspond to revealed truths. For them, their confession is not an invention based on opinion, but a proposition based on revelation. The claim that revelation is not propositional is an overstated

8 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 140.

9 J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs 19904, 56.

10 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 133.

reaction to the alleged claim of orthodoxy that all revelation is propositional. Grube's view suffers from its dichotomic character. Because he only leaves two options: completely propositional or not propositional at all. He chooses for the latter option. Revealed truth does not describe reality but steers its descriptions from a metaperspective.

Dualism

For Grube faith and knowledge are independent and therefore knowledge based on revelation (*Offenbarungserkenntnis*) cannot conflict with ordinary knowledge.¹¹ He follows Tillich, linking his position to the second model in Ian Barbour's famous taxonomy. Religion and science are independent; both can be true as long as they are kept in separate domains.¹² Tillich argues against the alternative model of conflict, because, as we have seen, knowledge gained through revelation does not add anything to our knowledge of nature and history, but is rather situated on a different epistemic level.

I agree that revelation constitutes a new and comprehensive understanding of reality.¹³ I can also understand that this model of revelation is helpful in discussions regarding creation and evolution and I agree that the real conflict there lies between a scientific or materialistic and a theistic worldview.¹⁴ If evolution turns into evolutionism it becomes an ideology that excludes faith in God as Creator. Moreover, faith in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth is a specific lens to look at the origin of the universe. It is a way of looking at things, rather than a conflicting set of scientific data.

Still, faith in God as Creator can conflict with science, exactly because it also has a propositional content. The confessional phrase 'in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' is more than a new perspective. It conveys knowledge about the world that is more than just knowledge

11 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, volume I, Chicago 1963, 156 [henceforth ST I-III]; compare to Grube, *Offenbarung*, 128, n8.

12 For a detailed discussion of the models, see I.G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, New York 1997, 77-105.

13 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 142-143, n47.

14 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 131. I agree with Alvin Plantinga that 'there is superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism.' A. Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, Oxford 2011, ix.

about knowledge. Reflecting on how God made heaven and earth and us as human beings can cause tension with the way this process is reconstructed in the natural sciences, exactly because of that content. In the context of Medieval theology, the Aristotelian concept of an eternal world conflicted with the Christian notion that God created heaven and earth ‘in the beginning’. Generations of theologians have sought to overcome the implied tension between philosophical and revealed truth.

In our modern and postmodern contexts, the fact that the universe has a beginning is less contested. The confessional proposition, however, that God by a specific act, created human beings in his likeness and image, conflicts with evolutionistic theories. The tension is soluble, but it exists exactly because the content of the biblical witness does not fit well in an evolutionary narrative of the origin of the species. To argue that there is no clash at all is an easy solution that does not satisfy the parties arguing about the relationship between faith and science. Indeed, the conflict is often caused or at least aggravated by a materialistic or naturalistic interpretation that excludes the possibility of divine intervention from the outset. But the claim that revelation never pertains to facts is a wrong answer to a naturalistic interpretation of the facts.

It is too easy to solve the tension by interpreting revelation as a new perspective on reality. The clash is too strong for such an evasive reaction. Both outspoken atheists and convinced young-earth-creationists in their debates have a sense that something important is at stake. One does not have to agree with one of these parties to acknowledge that there is a clash because of the unity of truth. Both parties imply a certain coherence of the narrative of our origin based on the truths of the natural sciences and revealed truths. Both parties believe that these truths should be reconciled and that they can only be reconciled by denying one of them. Anyone who advocates a solution that will be potentially convincing should start with taking the clash serious. It will not help both parties to assert that there is no problem after all.

The Unity of the Truth

This leads to the question whether Tillich's view of revelation, as presented by Grube, leans towards a sort of double-truth theory. Under his thoughts on the independency of faith and knowledge and on the independency of revelation and historical reality lurks the danger of a split between revealed truth and historical truth. In his ethics Tillich rejects a split between theological truth and philosophical truth as 'schizophrenic', because independent theological ethics would lead to intolerable dualism.¹⁵ I agree with him there, but wonder why he advocates this dualism in his concept of revelation.

In my oral response to Grube's book I suggested that the main reason for Tillich and Grube to opt for the model that sees religion or faith and as independent entities lies in the desire to make revelation acceptable for the modern critical attitude that excludes the miraculous by eliminating the category of divine intervention from revelation, whereas traditionally that aspect of divine intervention – formerly called supernatural – is an essential condition of revelation. I also claimed that their proposal regarding the character of revelation can be boiled down to the popular phrase: 'It is true, but never happened'. A phrase that is characteristic of the way in which modern theology in general deals with anything miraculous in Scripture. Grube perhaps would formulate it more sophisticatedly: 'It is true, because it sheds new light on what might have not even happened'. In other words, revelation hovers above history.

In his reply, Grube answered that I pushed Tillich and him into the strict alternative of supernatural and natural, while it is their basic intention to overcome this alternative.¹⁶ At least, they do not oppose supernaturalism in the name of naturalism. Grube said that he plainly rejects the phrase 'It is true but never happened' as well my more sophisticated version, because in relativizing the historical he would not ascribe negative truth values to historical events.

I wholeheartedly accept Grube's correction. It is not helpful for a theological discussion to label one's opinion in a way that he does not recognize himself. Still, there seems to be an uneasiness in liberal theology in general with acknowledging that God acts in the realms of time and space.

Tillich and Grube deny that their position is dualistic because for them revelation is a lens through which reality is seen. They do not favour a split between revealed truth and historical truth, but locate them on two different epistemic levels. 'Historical truth describes reality and is thus a *first order* epistemic phenomenon. Revealed truth, however, does not describe reality but *steers* the descriptions of reality. It is a second order or metaperspective. In German I call it an *erkenntnisleitende Perspektive*.'¹⁷

¹⁵ Tillich, ST III, 267.

¹⁶ D.-M. Grube, 'Reply to Responses' at the conference 'Paul Tillich on Religion and Culture' (Amsterdam, 4th of October 2019).

¹⁷ Grube, 'Reply to Responses'.

In my view revelation can only open a completely new perspective on reality, because it really changes that reality. Revelation indeed is more than historical, but it also pertains to historical facts, the mighty deeds of God in salvation history, such as the calling of Abraham, the exodus of Israel, the delivery from the Babylonian captivity, and the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. Locating revelation exclusively on a different epistemic level than knowledge in general might differ from locating theological and philosophical truths on the same epistemic level, but this does not repair the dualism between revealed truth and truth in general, it even makes the problem worse by denying that there can be any clash of truths, revelation does not describe reality, but only open new perspectives.¹⁸

The Resurrection as a Paradigm Shift

This leads to my third issue, which in a sense is the litmus test of our disagreement on the character of revelation: the historicity of the resurrection. In my view, what God has done in history – in the fulness of time – in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is revelation in its most pure form. Although it opens new perspectives it also pertains to historical facts.

For Tillich and Grube revelation concentrates on the person and work of Jesus. The early Christian church learned to see Jesus of Nazareth from a new perspective, namely as the Christ. According to Grube, this new perspective is the most important aspect of the paradigm shift from Judaism to Christianity, a shift that includes the new understanding of time as an eschatological reality.

Grube already developed his thoughts on this issue at length in previous publications. Paradigm shifts are triggered by anomalies, that lead to a change of the theoretical background which in turn provides a new perspective that allows one to perceive things differently. The legitimate origin of Christianity hinges on the anomaly that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, appeared to a number of people as being resurrected. This changed

¹⁸ In the final conclusion of his chapter on faith and knowledge in Tillich's theology, Grube acknowledges that there may be some indirect connections or points of contact between knowledge about the world and knowledge about knowledge that potentially question the fundamental independence between the two levels. Grube, 'Reply to Responses'. Grube, *Offenbarung*, 153.

their ‘theoretical background knowledge’, and opened a new way of perceiving Jesus, namely as the promised Messiah.¹⁹

It is not my purpose here to discuss the whole concept of Easter as a paradigm shift, which does have attractive elements.²⁰ Instead I will concentrate on what it implies for the historicity of the Jesus’ resurrection. My main point is that an anomaly which is able to cause a paradigm shift must be rooted in facts. To use Grube’s example, in 1895 Wilhelm Röntgen per accident discovered that invisible cathode rays caused a fluorescent effect on a barium platinocyanide screen and thus discovered the X-rays. The experience of the fluorescent light led to a completely new paradigm. Under that paradigm, however, lay Röntgen’s valid conviction that his experience was based on the real existence of the hidden X-rays. An anomaly that causes a paradigm shift is always a real violation of scientific expectations. If an anomaly proves to be a mistake, then it will not be able to change the paradigm.

Theology differs from the natural sciences in this respect, but still a paradigm shift that is able to legitimize the Christian faith must be based on more than the experience of appearances, without a real resurrection underlying them. The resurrection, just like any other deed of God in salvation history, has to be more than a historical fact, to be able to be effective. For Grube the resurrection, however, is less than historical.

There is a slight development in Grube’s thought on this point. In his earlier publications Grube suggests that the paradigm shift presupposes that Jesus really rose from the dead. He argued against attempts to prove the historicity of the resurrection, but acknowledged that from the standpoint of Christian faith, the historicity of the resurrection itself may be more

19 D.-M. Grube, ‘Reconstructing the Change from Judaism to Christianity as a Paradigm Shift’ in: B.E.J.H. Becking (ed.), *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation: Essays on Ways of Worldmaking in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives*, Leiden 2011, 225-247, 228, 239. In Grube’s book, titled *Ostern als Paradigmenwechsel* he explores this idea, devoting specific chapters to its consequences for Christology and for the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, in which he argues that the Christian paradigm does not annul the legitimacy of the existing Jewish paradigm. D.-M. Grube, *Ostern als Paradigmenwechsel: Eine wissenschaftstheoretische Untersuchung zur Entstehung des Christentums und deren Konsequenzen für die Christologie*, Neukirchen 2012.

20 Gijsbert van den Brink advocated a similar approach using the concept of a paradigm shift to argue for the compatibility of faith and science. See G. van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak: Theologie tussen geloof en wetenschap*, Zoetermeer 2004, 260-281; G. van den Brink, *Philosophy of Science for Theologians*, Frankfurt 2009, 193-209. Compare to G. van den Brink, ‘Pasen als paradigmawisseling: Grube over het tegoed van Kuhn voor de christelijke theologie’, 815-821, 817.

urgent. Although he denied that ‘all-too-factualist’ interpretations, which pretend that Christianity hangs on the factuality of the resurrection, are essential, he did acknowledge ‘that the factuality of the resurrection cannot be marginalized. (...) Logically speaking, it is a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition for the emergence of that paradigm.’²¹ If it had been only a ghost of a dead person that appeared, there had been no anomaly.²²

In a response to Grube’s *Ostern als Paradigmenwechsel* Gijsbert van den Brink argued that if the explanation of the Easter event as a paradigm shift is correct, something must have happened at Easter not only in the minds of the disciples but also in reality by which the paradigm shift of the disciples was triggered. Grube replies that his view indeed implies that the resurrection is not so much important as a fact but in its function as an anomaly. The historical fact as such cannot explain the emergence of early Christianity, because it could have been interpreted in various ways, for instance as the appearance of a ghost. Grube’s presupposition, however, still was the historical resurrection of Christ.²³

Whereas he distanced himself from the progressive theologies of ‘the leftwing Bultmann-school’ in his earlier publications, in his new book on Tillich, the emphasis is different. Instead of maintaining that the historical resurrection is an insufficient but nevertheless necessary condition of the paradigm shift, Grube now not only stresses that the new eschatological perspective relativizes the question regarding the historicity of the resurrection, as he had done before, but goes one step further in denying the relevance of the resurrection as a historical fact altogether. The resurrection only functions as a new eschatological frame of interpretation. The appearances of the resurrected Christ can be explained by the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead and thus vindicated him as the Messiah. This can be the case, but it is not necessarily so. Facts are multi-interpretable and the

21 Grube, ‘Reconstructing the Change,’ 240 n26.

22 Grube, *Ostern als Paradigmenwechsel*, 75-76. Compare to his remark that belief in the resurrection ‘is relevant for the Early Christians not so much as a historical event but, rather, as an anomaly that gives rise to the paradigm-switch constituting the early church.’ D.-M. Grube, ‘The Resurrection of Jesus and the Foundationalism/Anti-foundationalism Controversy’, in: T. Boer, H. Maat, A. Meesters, J. Muis (ed.), *Van God gesproken: Over religieuze taal en relationele Theologie*, 144-155, 155 n18.

23 Responses of Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, Rick Benjamins, Gijsbert van den Brink and Grube’s replies were published as ‘Pasen als paradigmawisseling (Easter as paradigm change)’ in: *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* (2015), 799-838. For the references see Van den Brink, ‘Pasen als paradigmawisseling’, 819; D.-M. Grube ‘Antwoord op de responses van de collega’s’ in ‘Pasen als paradigmawisseling’, 822-838, 836.

appearances of Jesus could have been interpreted as the manifestation of a ghost, but then it would not have led to a paradigm shift.²⁴

The shift in emphasis is subtle, but first Grube asserted that the factual resurrection is an insufficient but necessary condition for the paradigm shift and that if it had been only a ghost there would have been no anomaly. Now he suggests that only the interpretation of the resurrection-experience as something else than the manifestation of a ghost is essential for the paradigm shift. Maybe this shift is partly due to the different discussion partners: ‘rightwing’ conservative Christians instead of ‘leftwing’ liberals.

Still, in the present interpretation of Christ’s resurrection as paradigm shift, the historical foundation of Christianity, which was already relativized in Grube’s earlier publications, evaporates. At Easter nothing really happened, or had to happen, in a historical sense, because revelation does not add information to our knowledge. Easter merely offers a new perspective on reality. In the light of this development, it is a bit strange that he still asserts that the question of the historicity of the resurrection has not become irrelevant.²⁵ The new element in his argument is that revelation – of which the resurrection is the example – takes place on a metalevel and Grube does not make clear why its historicity is still relevant.

The Importance of a Historical Resurrection

The main reason for Grube to relativize the question and leave its answer principally undecided is that if the historicity of the resurrection or even of the appearances could be proved, that would only substantiate a fact and underdetermine the revelatory event. Facts cannot legitimize the new eschatological perspective.

My suggestion is to turn this argument around. Although the historical proof of the appearances cannot as such legitimize the new eschatological perspective, the fact that so many of the disciples – notwithstanding all the counter-evidence regarding its probability – accepted the resurrection of Christ as a new paradigm, is the most plausible legitimation of its historicity.

According to Tom Wright, the question whether the resurrection was historical must be affirmed, although it has frequently been argued that the

²⁴ Grube, *Offenbarung*, 140-141.

²⁵ Grube, *Offenbarung*, 141.

resurrection is not accessible to historical investigation. He discusses the different meanings of the word ‘historical’ and the objections against the historical study of the resurrection, at length. He concludes that ‘the proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead possesses unrivalled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity’.²⁶ Although mathematical-style proof is impossible, the historical resurrection of Christ provides the best explanation of the rise of early Christianity.

In other words, the fact that the disciples’ experiences of encounters with the risen Christ led to a completely new perspective is the best argument for the historicity of the resurrection, because there is no other plausible way to explain the birth of Christianity save by the real and historical resurrection of Christ.

Grube restricts revelation to the opening of the eyes after which the disciples saw everything in a new perspective, a new paradigm. In my view, however, his relativizing of the historicity of the resurrection undermines the argument that the paradigm shift legitimizes Christianity, because the paradigm shift can be only legitimized by a real anomaly. It is true that facts are multi-interpretable, but it is not true that a new perspective on reality can be triggered without facts. In other words, Grube is right in claiming that more than the historical resurrection is necessary, but wrong in suggesting that less than the historical resurrection is sufficient.

The only plausible explanation of the experience of the appearances – and of the birth of Christianity in which they resulted – is the historical resurrection of Christ as an act of God, who vindicated the crucified Christ, as his Son, the truly righteous one. The letter of Paul to the Romans can be read as an explanation of Habakkuk 2:4 – ‘the *Tsaddik* will live by his faith(fulness)’ – as fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the revelation of his righteousness par excellence (Rom. 3:21).

From the perspective of the Christian faith – call it a paradigm shift from second temple Judaism if you want – it is self-evident that the resurrection of Christ is much more than a historical fact, because it opens a new perspective on history. All who are united to Christ by faith participate in Him and in the new life of the age to come, although they still live in this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). The early Christian church did not only learn to see Jesus from a new perspective as the Christ, but they saw him as the one who had risen – in history and on this earth – from the empty grave.

²⁶ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London 2012, 718.

In principle, I agree with Grube that it is not necessary to prove or to be able to prove the historicity of the resurrection. This does not mean, however, that God's revelation through this act can be disconnected from its historical origin. Grube again suggests only two options: either the historicity of the resurrection can be proved as a foundational basis of the Christian faith, or its historicity is irrelevant. But the historical reality of something that perhaps cannot be proved on the basis of historical research, still, may be very relevant for other reasons. In this case, because what God has done in the life, death and resurrection of Christ is a necessary historical basis of Christianity. Again, Grube's view suffers from its dichotomic character.

As an act of God, it can indeed not be proved since no historical fact can be proved to be a divine intervention by historical means. Facts, even the real resurrection of a body, are always open to alternative explanations. The confessional understanding of the resurrection of Christ as a divine act, however, does presuppose its historical reality. The experience of the disciples of the appearances of the risen Christ does not suffice if we leave the option open that it was merely a psychological effect. Attempts to prove the historicity of the resurrection need not and should not function as a foundation of the Christian faith, but there is no reason, given the historicity of the resurrection to reject them wholesale.²⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that revelation cannot be restricted to an epistemological metalevel without conveying some propositional content. The early confessions of the church consist of confessional propositions, which Christians claim to be true. Revelation is more than propositional, but not less than propositional or on a completely different level from it. I have also argued that knowledge based on revelation can and indeed does sometimes conflict with other forms of knowledge. Grube denies the possibility of a conflict between knowledge from natural sciences and revealed knowledge by placing the latter on a metalevel. The real conflict lies between revelation and certain forms of naturalism or materialism.²⁸

²⁷ Grube refers to W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, Gütersloh 1964, 85103 and R. Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, Oxford 2003.

²⁸ Grube, *Offenbarung*, 133.

I agree with that analysis, not because revelation is exclusively situated on a metalevel, but because these forms of naturalism and materialism are part of alternative worldviews or ideologies that combat with Christianity, by interpreting the facts from a different framework. My main objection against Grube's position is his conclusion from the fact that the resurrection cannot be proved to the claim that its historicity is irrelevant: 'If the historicity of the resurrection, or rather of the appearances, could be proved, it would only substantiate a mere fact. (...) It cannot make it plausible why the first Christian churches have taken a new leading perspective on the interpretation of reality, nor can it show that this change of perspective was legitimate.'²⁹

Over against docetism the first Christians not only confessed that Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate, but also that he rose from the dead under Pontius Pilate.³⁰ The main reason that the name of this cruel prelate is mentioned in the Apostle's Creed is to affirm the historical basis of the Christian faith.

Faith itself is impossible without illumination – and that is how I would call the metalevel on which revelation steers all our other knowledge – but this illumination presupposes the prior and historical revelation of God in Christ. Illumination does not add new propositional information to revealed truth, but it presupposes the revelation of God's deeds in salvation history. These deeds can be formulated in confessional propositional statements. It is not arbitrary whether Christ rose again in the minds of the disappointed disciples – who had to cope psychologically with the loss of their Master – or in historical reality. Easter turns the entire course of history only because it is a historical event, although it is much more than that.

29 Grube, *Offenbarung*, 141-142, Compare to '(...) my point is that making the reasonableness of the Christian belief system dependent upon the success of demonstrating the historicity, likelihood, probability or whatever of the belief in resurrection is unnecessary restrictive', in: Grube, 'Resurrection of Jesus', 151.

30 Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*, 11, in: B.D. Ehrman (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache* (Loeb Classical Library 24), Cambridge 2003, 252-253. For the importance of resurrection over against Docetism, see also Ignatius, *To the Trallians*, 9, in: Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 264-265.

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