

Revelation and Its Theological Presuppositions for Apostolic Reflection

History

For Christians, history is much more than the place or context in which God communicates to humankind. “History is itself the *creative act of God* [bold italics mine] through which God is manifested and continues to be manifested to us.” See Richard McBrien, Catholicism, Vol. 1, 228.

It is our response to and cooperation with these creative acts of God, which constitute this history and our relationship to God. “*We come to a knowledge of God as we reflect on the principal events of our history.*” Ibid.

There are two especially significant events in this history of God’s saving deeds: Exodus and the Resurrection of Christ.

[Of course, our reflection on our Vincentian heritage, especially those events of primary significance to the establishment of the various works and branches of the Vincentian Family, should be the mainstay of our reflection and enter into our conversations as part of the mentoring experience].

Whereas we may believe that we have an immediate comprehension of the significance of historical events because of instantaneous news and analysis, this is much less true with respect to our awareness of God of history.

I suspect this is made all the more difficult for us because of a strong dualism, today, which wants to separate the sacred from the profane. This, as we will see, was not in the purview of St. Vincent’s thinking.

“Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rules of this age who are passing away. Rather we speak God’s wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew, for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him,’ this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Mediated and Sacramental Disclosure of God

Because God is totally other we cannot experience God directly. An excellent example of this is Moses' encounter with the Lord in the tent.

“Then Moses said, ‘Do let me see your glory!’ He answered, ‘I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, ‘Lord’; I who show favors to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will. But my face you cannot see, for no man [one] sees me and still lives. ‘Here,’ continued the Lord, ‘is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock. When my glory passes, I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen.’” Exodus 33:18-23

Cf John 1:18 *“No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.”*

Because it is only in the context of our lives on earth that we can possibly know God, God's self-communication and its accompanying history are always mediated. Hence, there is an incarnational and sacramental character to this revelation.

“The Christian message is about one mystery, the mystery of God, who is revealed sacramentally: in the order of nature, through historical events, through charismatic figures (prophets), through Jesus Christ, who is the great mystery, through the Apostles, through the early Church, and indeed through all these events, objects, and persons which constitute and profoundly shape human experience and human history.” Ibid, 233-34.

[From a Vincentian perspective this insight into ongoing revelation is important as a basis for this reflection on experiences].

There is a mystery to God's revelation (self-communication) that often requires the assistance of another to better understand its implications and insight into the signs of the times, especially as these relate to one's own life and ministry. See Psalm 115.

This revelation should not be construed as merely the communication of certain truths. In other words there is not new information per se. Rather in Jesus' disclosure we come to new meanings and insights about our reality and of ourselves.

God's communication to us is not merely to a select few. In fact God chooses the weak and those who count for nothing to confound the supposed learned. Foundational to this belief is the Church's teaching that God's grace is communicated to all persons regardless of whether they believe in Jesus Christ. These seeds of grace are given to all in the hopes that all persons will become oriented to God. Examples of this in Scripture include the rain falling on the just and the unjust. Also see the accounts of the Centurion, the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan woman, Bartimaeus, etc.

[St. Vincent's encounter with the elderly man from Gannes wishing to make a general confession illustrates well this point. Vincent's insistence that we see the poor differently from how most persons tend to view the poor stems in part from this conviction and his sense of reverse mission. In other words, the poor evangelize us].

St. Vincent's Practice

Vincent paid particularly close attention to those persons who gave events meaning. See André Dodin, C.M., Vincent de Paul and Charity: A Contemporary Portrait of His Life and Apostolic Spirit, (New York: New City Press, 1993), 53.

According to Dodin, Vincent approached life from the point of view of values. He writes: "We believe a person, not because he [she] is well informed, but because we consider him [her] good and we love him [her]." Dodin, p. 53. Obviously this belief in another is important in the relationship between the mentor and the mentee.

Vincent's life was first and foremost experience, and it is this experience which led him to his beliefs. This would happen through prayer, reflection, apostolic reflection and mentoring.

A sound basis for mentoring can be found in these words of Vincent: “We have to sanctify our occupations, by seeking God in them and by doing them to find God in them rather than to get them done.”

Vincent, you might say, was interpersonal. This interpersonal relationship is evident in what Dodin has to say about Christ and Vincent. “The Christ whom Vincent contemplated and adored is not a representation of an eternal truth, but a living human being united with humankind in history, on a mission from his Father to save humanity.” See Dodin, p. 56.

Part of Vincent’s genius, then, was his capacity to adapt and remain flexible. It gives further credence to the importance of mentoring in my estimation. Dodin writes: “Life must expand constantly through action. Life and action receive their depth and truth only through faith. Life lived in faith must grow and adapt, in order to remain faithful to the goal of eternal life.” Dodin, p. 58.

- See Matthew 7:7. Seek and you will find.
- These are some particularly significant events in St. Vincent’s life.
- Encounter with the elderly man from Gannes
- Homily at Folleville on January 25, 1617
- His refusal to see his father while in the seminary in Toulouse, and subsequent regrets
- His reflection upon his irascible temperament and the need for greater meekness as a virtue to follow
- The need for greater organization following the outpouring of relief to a family in need in Châtillon
- Growing awareness of the need for the reform of the clergy and the proper training of seminarians to better care for the people, especially the poor
- His initial hesitancy about accepting St. Lazare