REVELATION, A UNIFIED FIELD

Einstein died disappointed that he'd failed to get "it" (the "uni"verse) all together--a feat the religions each neatly manage, though (disconcertingly to the human mind) to a total of "its" rather than "it." As experience, revelation solves all puzzles; as a congeries of mutually irreconcilable experiences, it is itself the ultimate puzzle: how can the One appear, distributively, only as the many while appearing to each as the One?

In the ¶ above I've converged **science** (by analogizing from unified-field theory), **religion** (the experience of "revelation"), & **philosophy** (the always-&-everywhere conundrum of the one & the many); & thus have presented my conviction that "revelation" must now--more than ever before--be defined or at least described tridisciplinarily: visually, let's put "revelation" in a triangle whose angles we label "religion" (the apex), philosophy," & "science." (Of the books I'm aware of that approach this triangulation, my favorite is Richard J. Coleman's COMPETING TRUTHS: Theology and Science as Sibling Rivals [Trinity Press International/01].)

OCCASION: The current internet "revelation"—discussion among the members of the UCC Confessing Christ "meeting."

1 While for Christian thinkers revelation is (as for humanity in general) a puzzle (viz., how arrive at a reality-picture/story/theory that leaves nothing out, i.e. is "without remainder"), for Christians-in-the-round, the Christian as human being, revelation is not a puzzle but a **person**, Jesus Christ in high Christology (God come among us as one of us, to effect our becoming one [in the relational sense] with God, "participating" [2P.1.4] in his eternal life). The last sentence of that NT letter spells out the life-process by which this revealing / being-revealed-to occurs: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (a doxology & amen follow); in my daily reading this morning I found that Jörg Zink has in this verse properly intensified the Gk./Lat. thus: "ihn immer tiefer versteht" (him always understand more deeply--reminding me of Schweitzer's conclusion of THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS: As we continue to walk with him, he will reveal to us who he is).

2 As an active noun, "revelation" is something done to & for but not by us; it is a being-given-to, a gift. As a passive noun it is that gift received-in-relation (but not a possession apart from the relation). Beauty can/should be experienced as response to a divine invitation-into-relation--as I indicated in this conversation with a stranger a few days ago: do you go to church?/no/did you ever?/no/do you worship?/yes/who or what?/beauty /where?/in nature/do you ever worship through beauty?/what?/a window may be beautiful, but it's more for looking through than for looking at; beauty is God's invitation to worship God; will you think about that?/(with a surprised look) yes. (Jesus says "I am the door"; he could as well have said "I am the window." Metaphors drawn from daily experience exercise continuing tugs on the soul.)

3 Human beings have a drive to unify feeling/thinking, so "revelations" as feelingful experiences are insufficent to satisfy the soul: romanticism cannot comprehend (in either sense) reality. Quaker "openings," Pentecostal seizures of being "slain in the spirit," mystical ecstasies--all these, while they may be authentic, are partial. The mind struggles to see clearly, coherently (without internal contradictions), & comprehensively (leaving nothing out). These three criteria are necessary to "revelation" in the high sense, the sense demanded by the three contexts (religion[theology], philosophy, science).

4 That's *two* unifications: (1) A comprehensive ("unified field") vision of reality (without remainder, nothing left out), & (2) Personal integration of emotion & cognition. Regardless of quality* of the former (by objective criteria) or of the latter (by moral criteria), either unification produces the subjective experience of **peace & joy**, a soul-harmony to maintain which the person will try to white-sound all dissonance & cacophonies. Let's call what's being defended foundational ("the way

* *Qualifiers*: (1) Jesus' pragmatic "fruits" test for quality; (2) "Peace & joy" as evidentiary, not (narcissistic) summum-bonum goal of life.

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things are"). (Postmodernism's "antifoundationalism" reacts against competing foundation-claims, but this position adversarially functions as itself a foundation.) Revelation-claims are specific instances of foundations affirmed as disclosures from beyond the self, not discoveries of the self. Coleman 234: "History and evolution cast up events that are disclosive because they both intrude and protrude with a surplus of meaning. They are revelatory because they raise such profound questions that reference to God seems necessary."

5 But to the secular mind, what seems necessary is that there be no reference to God. Stephen Jay Gould (who died yesterday at 60) was as foundationalistic on randomness as explaining everything as are religious fundamentalists in their insistence that nothing's random, everything's directive (so no chance, no fate, all "providence"). Gould's Harvard colleague Richard Lewontin put their view plainly: "materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door" (NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, 1.9.97). Materialism, this fellow-biologist admits/affirms, is "a prior commitment" to "accept scientific claims" in the "struggle between science and the supernatural," & that commitment arranges the evidence confirmatively--the same mentation as that of us revelationists: sense is univocal, the universe has only one semantic center (which for the Bible is God & for these two Darwinists is "natural selection").

Darwin himself, however, did not at first interpret his "natural selection" theory as exclusive of God, whom he honored (as "Creator") in the last ¶ of the 1st edition of THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES (a copy of which I held in my hands in the London home of Darwin expert Eric Evans, an atheist [who owned a 1st edition of Darwin's whole oeurve]). On the last segment of the PBS/TV series "Evolution" I heard this ¶ read, "Creator" & all. But in an earlier segment, Gould read the ¶ & left God out (God has been out in every edition since the 1st [which sold out--all 1,250 copies--the 1st day]). (Atheists say "Why in?" & guess it was his wife's nagging: theists say "Why out?" & guess that it was his best friend's nagging.)

By 1941 it had become clear to me that we revelationists would have to surrender our traditional lock-out of randomness: we would have to construe "providence" as inclusive of the random without compromising monotheism. In this revising we were helped by (1) Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy & (2) Arthur Comptom's lock-in of randomness with freedom (whom I remember personally as a Sunday school teacher, & the world should remember as the administrator [as physics dean, U. of Chicago] of the Manhattan Project, which opened the atomic age).

It is now past time for science to surrender its lock-out of the *non*random, the directive, the purposive, the patternful/designful elements in reality. Orthodox Darwinism is fast breaking down; even Gould allowed for a factor X outside of natural selection, though he insisted that factor x not compomise his materialism with randomness implicit (as the directive element is implicit in theism). But to return to Darwin's 1st position, allowing for God, will be bloody hard for materialists--as Thomas Nagel admits in THE LAST WORD: "Darwin enabled modern secular culture to heave a great collective sigh of relief, by apparently providing a way to eliminate purpose, meaning, and design as fundamental features of the world."

6 In assembling a jigsaw puzzle, you look for (1) eye-catching pieces that jump out at you & (2) pieces with at least one straight-edge, preferably two. Please play with this metaphor. Let's say the eyecatchers are distinctive-disclosive ("revelational") events, & the straightedged get you started on the **boundaries** (esp. the corner-pieces, having two straight-edges). Why bother? Because you want to see how it comes out & have the pleasure of partipating in the process. No boundaries, no revelation, no hope, because no story. Switch to sculpture: the boundaries are in Michelangelo's vision & faith: "Love takes me captive; beauty binds my soul; / Pity and mercy with their gengle eyes / Wake in my heart a hope that cannot cheat." History is a continuous clashing of hopes, &--we Christians claim--the event, the eschaton, will prove that the Hope we were/are given in the Christian Story was/is the only hope that could not cheat. And we shall have the pleasure & joy of seeing that all the pieces fit, & that in the center (as in Jan Van Eyck's Ghent cathedral altarpiece) is the Lamb that was slain & did not stay dead ("lamb" 26x in Rev.).