

## GOD'S SELF-COMMUNICATION IN HISTORY

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### ABSTRACT

*God's communication in history finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The refusal of God's self-communication diminishes the right use of freedom and in the final analysis, the person becomes what he should not become. This is what actually happened to Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit – and we have all inherited that defect – that potency to sin. This situation can be compared to that of hereditary defect in which a defect is passed on from one person to the other. In this case, we can analogously say that all the descendants of Adam have inherited the possibility that we could abuse freedom – by choosing wrong things and this abuse of freedom was redeemed by Jesus Christ.*

**Keywords:** God's communication; Jesus Christ; Christians;

### INTRODUCTION

It is clear that over the years it has been difficult to unify into one single and clear direction the interpretations of transcendental experiences in different histories and religions. This is the case because different religions may differently interpret the religious and transcendental events that have taken place in history.

However, of special note is the fact that these histories have a direction – they have a movement – they point to some definite point – they move towards a particular centre and Christians and theologians generally identify these histories as moving towards Jesus Christ as the Absolute self-communication of God. This basically means that the different histories and the different events that preceded Jesus, eventually lead to the revelation and coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the definitive and absolute self-revelation and self-communication of God in Jesus Christ.

### 1. GOD'S COMMUNICATION IN HISTORY

God's communication in history finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ. That is why; we can say that the Old Testament history is a preparation of the coming of Jesus. For example, the wonderful and appreciable work of Moses and the prophetic tradition in general is a big preparation of the fulfilment of God's self-communication in Jesus.

The Old Testament history and communication prepared the ground for God's final communication in Jesus. If we understand Jesus Christ in this way, then we will be able to comprehend that he is the basis and foundation of biblical history and biblical communication. This communication is dialogic in the sense that God, dialogues with the human person so that he or she can be saved. God in Jesus has brought to fulfilment this objective. That is why biblical and secular history are both a communication of God's love

for the human person fulfilled in the person of Jesus – for God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son so that all who believe in him may be saved.

The history of revelation has taken place in all the peoples because it is history of the guilt, of the fall, and rejection of God and this has happened among all peoples. People of all ages, people of all nations and people of all places have all come to fall, to rise up, have accepted God but have at times also rejected God. The cycle of falling and rising up, going up and down in the spiritual life, accepting and denying God – are all universal manifestations that have taken place in biblical history but also in secular history.

That is why the dichotomy between secular and biblical history is at times rejected because basically God has revealed himself not only in biblical history but also in secular history. There are people that were clearly called from a pagan background and straightaway brought into Christian history. This shows that God does not only work in Christian history but also intervenes in secular history.

It is in this context and case that we can say that the Old Testament is a preparation of the Christ event. The Old Testament is the immediate and proximate prehistory of Jesus. It is in the Old Testament that God started giving his communication to the human person and this communication reached its peak and height in Jesus Christ – the fullness of God's communication to the human being.

It is in this context that we can say that the history of salvation and the history of revelation have been a progressive history in which each generation has somehow participated. Both histories, namely the history of salvation and the history of revelation have progressively led us to the God-man event. Jesus is the absolute self-communication of God. In Jesus, God communicates himself to the human person. In Jesus the history of revelation and the history of salvation reach their climax. In addition, in the God-man, human beings reach their final goal – that is, being given the offer of salvation.

It is in this context that we can say that the history of salvation takes place within the history of the human person. That is why, it is unthinkable to develop a theology that is divorced from not only the transcendental but also the anthropological. That is why some theologians talk about theological anthropology or existential theology. The idea is that the history of the human person is the context in which God has revealed himself – the historical is not divorced from the theological – they are both contexts in which God has revealed himself – in both the history of the human person and in the history of salvation.

Incarnation is the locus and event in which God has become human. In Jesus, the self-communication of God to the human person has reached an irreversible and irrevocable point in history. It is through the acceptance of death on the cross, that Jesus has fully accepted God's self-communication.

We can therefore say that Jesus is the fullness of God's self-communication to the person. He is the fullness of man's acceptance of God's self-communication. It is through Jesus that God has fully revealed himself and has fully revealed his plans for the human person. It is also through Jesus Christ that God's communication to the human person has been fully accepted through Jesus' death on the cross. All this has taken place in history – in salvation history, in the history of revelation but also in the history of the human person.

However, even with this assistance, human beings can refuse not only the idea of God but can also refuse God. When human beings refuse God and the very idea of God;

through their lives and existence – their lives become an expression of the God-denial. Nevertheless, the denial of God, regardless of whatever form it takes, is self-contradictory.<sup>1</sup>

One may think that they are asserting themselves by saying “no” to God but they actually find themselves affirming an absolute categorical position that leads them to miss everything. The truth of the matter is that humans ought to give themselves to God unconditionally otherwise by denying God definitively – they end up putting themselves in a contradictory situation of actually denying who they really are – that they are human beings created in the image of God and called to live with God.

All this then shows the seriousness of the decision that human beings make in their acceptance or rejection of God. The choice that human beings make in freedom, whether for or against God, decides their final and definitive fate and destiny. In this case, when humans finally and definitively reject God – they become destitute – and this is well-presented by tradition and scripture, which uses images and stories to show the destitution and problems that accrue from the rejection of God.

That is why, when we read eschatological literature, one does not have to look for anything more than the presentation of the intrinsic contradiction that exists when “freedom decides finally and definitively *against* the structures of the reality of the world established by God.”<sup>2</sup> We thus note here that the decision for God or against God is important and crucial. It is the context in which humans as created subjects establish their own final and definitive self and destiny. Human freedom does not imply a limitation for the sovereignty of God because God Himself created human autonomy and human freedom and it is God who established the creator-creature radical difference. “For this difference is not something that happens to Him, but rather he alone makes it possible. He establishes it, he allows it, he grants it the freedom of its own self-actualization of this differentiation.”<sup>3</sup>

The freedom of humans is actualized in history and in the world of persons where man and woman are free subjects. They act freely in a situation that they find constructed by others – philosophically referred to as the – givenness of the situation.

The freedom of humans is co-determined among other things by the free history of other persons. This means that the objectification of human freedom has the stamp of the objectification of freedom by other persons in the world.<sup>4</sup> In fact, a person “finds himself already with the other of the world, hence that the other as such is his proper object, that his being-present-to self is thus a being-with-the-other, and that he wants to understand himself in all his potentialities from this basis [...]”<sup>5</sup>

This means that some objectification of the personal guilt and sin of other people may have an influence on others thereby making the process of - free decision making - difficult and painful. An experience in which a person is co-determined by the guilt of others is original, universal, but also permanent.<sup>6</sup>

However even amidst the pessimism that human freedom is co-determined, there is enough optimism that humans are responsible before God for their choices and actions. While both realities are true and cannot be disguised – but we can still maintain that each person is unique and responsible for his or her actions and decisions. Therefore, in Catholic

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karl RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith, An introduction to the idea of Christianity*, translated by William V. DYCH, London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1978, 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 102.

<sup>3</sup> RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 105.

<sup>4</sup> RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> Karl RAHNER, *Spirit in the world*, New York, Continuum publishing company, 1957, 77.

<sup>6</sup> RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 107-109.

Theology when we speak about the sin of Adam as being our sin, we do so only analogously and not univocally – that is to say – we inherited from Adam and Eve the potency to sin and this leaves us with space of freedom whether to actualize that potency or not.

The refusal of God's self-communication diminishes the right use of freedom and in the final analysis, the person becomes what he should not become. This is what actually happened to Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit – and we have all inherited that defect – that potency to sin. This situation can be compared to that of hereditary defect in which a defect is passed on from one person to the other. In this case, we can analogously say that all the descendants of Adam have inherited the possibility that we could abuse freedom – by choosing wrong things and this abuse of freedom was redeemed by Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSIONS

The story of the original sin is a clear example of aetiological inference from human's present experience of sin and freedom to the origins and primeval beginning of the human history. While the story of Adam and Eve is representational<sup>7</sup> but it gives us important lessons about the human race – we ought to live in unity – because whatever happens to one person can affect the entire human race – what happens in one part of the world can have an influence in the other part of the world - that we are different but we are all human beings – our ways of looking at things may differ but we have a common destiny, one Lord, one God and this unity is well manifested in our common descent – Adam and Eve. The human species is regarded and treated as a concrete unity, not only in the natural order but also in the order of salvation – namely – the salvation of all people in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

It is in this context that we can hereby indicate that human beings are free subjects. They are responsible for their actions. Nevertheless, human freedom was abused by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they chose to do what they were forbidden. Jesus chose to obey. The choice of disobedience in the Garden of Eden was redeemed by Jesus' choice for obedience – to die on behalf of humanity on the cross. Through Jesus we have received the grace of God to make good choices – to choose well – and this is called the redemption of freedom or the freedom of freedom. Although our freedom has been freed but due to our sinfulness and the historical circumstances in which we live, we at times make mistakes and choose wrongly. We have to continue to purify our intentions and our choices. That is why, we can submit that the project for the 'freedom of freedom' is a lifetime task!

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian faith*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Karl RAHNER, *Membership of the Church*, in Karl RAHNER, "Theological investigations, Volume 2, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963, 78-79.

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