

Gerald O'Collins. *Revelation: Towards a Christian Interpretation of God's Self-Revelation in Jesus Christ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ix + 229 pp. \$40.00. Hardbound. ISBN: 9780198784203.

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Gerald O'Collins has engaged in theological reflection on the topic of revelation since the time of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Cambridge. In his works on fundamental theology – *Fundamental Theology* (1981), *Retrieving Fundamental Theology* (1994), and *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (2013) – O'Collins has offered in-depth explorations of the meaning and dynamics of divine revelation. His works have influenced many students and teachers of theology. In this book he returns to the topic, engaging the thought of contemporary theologians and philosophers (e.g., Richard Swinburne and Jean-Luc Marion) as well as clarifying and correcting some of his own previous positions.

Rather than offering an account of the history of Christian reflection on revelation, this work is an essay in constructive theology in which O'Collins “examines themes for a Christian theology of revelation” (viii). The book is divided into twelve chapters: revelation as self-revelation and communication of truth; the love that reveals and conceals; revelation informs and transforms; the sacramental character of divine self-revelation; means and mediators of revelation; believers receive revelation and are themselves revealed; evidence of revelation and human freedom; revelation then, now and to come; handing on revelation; revelation and inspiration; the canon and the truth of Scripture; divine revelation reaching the “others.”

The careful, balanced approach to theological themes and issues that is characteristic of O'Collins's previous work is also evident here. On the question of revelation as personal or propositional, he emphasizes that these views are not mutually exclusive. While the personal nature of divine self-revelation is primary, the propositional content of revelation “maintains its proper, albeit secondary place” (13). As he puts it, “the faith that responds to the self-revealing God announces what it now knows of God” (12). O'Collins also upholds the traditional position that envisions revelation as a free disclosure and unmerited gift of God, who could have remained silent. And like other prominent theologians, he employs the language of “self-communication” as a way of integrating talk about revelation and salvation.

In his discussion of the sacramental character of revelation, as articulated in *Dei Verbum*, O'Collins emphasizes that God discloses God's Self through both word and deed, though he concludes that the word remains subordinate to the event. Engaging the work of ecological theologians critically, he affirms the significance of cosmic revelation, though he argues that in the Judeo-Christian tradition the cosmic form of revelation is surpassed by a set of historical events and persons. Addressing the evidence for revelation, O'Collins maintains that the theology of revelation should be related more directly to Christian spirituality through an examination of the lives and works of people who have chronicled their personal journeys from unbelief to belief. On the issue of past and present revelation, O'Collins preferences terminology he has proposed in the past: “foundational” and “dependent” revela-

tion. The witness of the Spirit brings it about that foundational revelation (recorded in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures) “is not only more fully understood but also is actualized as God’s living revelation to the church and through her to the world” (114).

Influenced by his former colleague Jacques Dupuis, O’Collins discusses the relationship between Judeo-Christian revelation and other religions in several places throughout the book, especially in his final chapter. He corrects his own previous use of the terms “definitive” and “absolute” for God’s self-revelation in Christ. He concludes that describing God’s self-revelation in Christ as “definitive” obscures the belief that there is a final revelation yet to come. The language of “absolute” (even Rahner’s description of Jesus as the “absolute savior”) is inappropriate because only God is absolute; absoluteness should not be predicated of any finite reality, even the human existence of the Son of God made human. Citing *Dei Verbum*, O’Collins employs the language of “full, complete and perfect” (109) to describe revelation in Christ. In his discussion of universal revelation he highlights the biblical witness of the covenant with Noah, the Old Testament stories of Jonah and Job, and Paul’s reflection in the first chapter of Romans on the knowledge of God available to everyone. Though there is no revelation outside of Christ and the Spirit, Christ and the Spirit are present everywhere and to everyone. In a characteristically balanced formulation, O’Collins asserts, “Other’ religions can, to a greater or lesser extent, prove revelatory and, therefore means of salvation. This effect depends always on the work of Christ and his Spirit” (204).

In a work that is as comprehensive in scope as this one, readers will find some formulations and positions with which to quibble. For example, O’Collins draws on Paul Tillich to argue that human experience is not a source of revelation; it is a medium through which the sources of revelation speak to us. This position stands in contrast to the late twentieth-century recovery of experience as a *locus theologicus*, especially in contextual theologies. Overall, however, O’Collins presents a well-researched and balanced theology of revelation that reflects his profound engagement with the tradition and contemporary scholarship. This work recapitulates much of the earlier thought of this eminent theologian, while also engaging new questions and contexts. Students of theology, especially at the graduate level, will certainly benefit from a careful reading of this book.