

## Twelve Fundamental Avenues of Revelation<sup>1</sup>

by James B. Jordan

Theologians often speak of “special” and “general” revelation, or of “natural” and “supernatural” revelation, or of “word” and “deed” revelation. While there are many worthwhile insights in these discussions, particularly in the discussions in Cornelius Van Til's *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, I have not found any that satisfied my quest for a full picture of revelation grounded in the doctrine of God and creation – by which I mean that I have my own concerns and agendas as a theologian and what I have read from others has not supplied what I have needed, or at least has not supplied it in the form in which I needed it.

By no means do I intend the present essay to say all that should be said about the subject of God's self-revelation to and through the creation. My purposes, as stated, are (a) to provide for myself and others a useful general conceptual grid, and (b) to provide a framework that is useful in discussing the unfolding of God's plan and glory in human and cosmic history.

That said, let me begin by pointing out that almost without exception, discussions of this topic seek to divide revelation into two kinds, such as “general” and “special,” or “verbal” and “non-verbal.” As a Trinitarian schooled at the feet of such men as John M. Frame and Vern S. Poythress (who should be credited for much that is worthwhile in this essay, but who should not be held accountable for such infelicities as are doubtless present), I am disinclined to follow. God has revealed Himself in three ways, in three Persons, and we should expect there to be three irreducible avenues of revelation from Him.

The tendency to reduce everything in theology to pairs, or dyads, such as two kinds of revelation, or two testaments, or “body and soul,” etc., is, I submit, a holdover from Greek philosophical ways of thinking. For the Greek philosophers, the universe is not created by a living God, but is self-creating, an emergent manifestation of “being.” Accordingly, the universe consists of two things: “being” and “non-being,” or “form” and “matter” as it is also put. Since the universe *is* god, or somehow embraces god, then the “good high stuff” is divine while the “bad low stuff” is non-divine or even anti-divine. In Christian thought, this dyad played strongly into the division between “nature” and “grace” as these developed in the history of theology.

If, however, we start strictly from the genius of Biblical revelation, the very Word of God, we come up with a different scheme. The only true duality is that of the creature and the Creator. It is this duality that the various Greek and Greek-modified schemes point to, though without sufficient clarity. God Himself, however, exists in three Persons, each with unique properties. The creation adds a fourth “person” to this community, so that the creation exists in four directions or aspects, as revealed symbolically in the four faces of the cherubim. That is, creation displays the three Persons/aspects/properties of God as well as her own unique non-divine aspect/property. History is structured in such a way that the three Persons of God are revealed in order, and such that any fourth period of creation history is also the first of a new cycle of three.

For the Christian, unlike the Greek, God unfolds Himself to us in history, progressively, from glory to glory; from Father to Son to Spirit in a repeating spiral, each of which takes His Daughter-Bride to a new level of maturity. For the Christian, unlike the Greek, God is a person, and so He communicates by language. Hearing rather than sight is the primary mode of revelation, as one person speaks with another.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised from original publication in *Open Book* 30-34 (December, 1996 - August, 1997)

## **Trinitarian Revelation**

God reveals Himself as Person, Word, and Energy (Power, Movement). In another sense, each of these is a Person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but the particular property of each is different. Thus the Father is the Ultimate Person and the Archetype of personhood. The Son, as a divine Person, is the Image of the Father, and the Spirit is the Image of Father and Son.

The Son's property is language, for He is the Word. He is “spoken” by the Father as well as “begotten” by Him.

The Son also speaks back to the Father, and this requires not just “thought” but “breath” (motion, energy) so that the Holy Spirit enables the Son to speak back to the Father. The Spirit is the Energy that enables the Word to leave the mind of God and to go forth. Thus, the Spirit energizes the Word in the first place, from the Father, acting almost as a mother to the Son; and the Spirit energizes the Word back to the Father, acting almost as a bride to the Son.

There is, however, no true feminine in God, for God is creator over against the creation. The creation is the feminine. Accordingly, it is the Spirit who comes into the creation at the beginning and continually moves alongside the creation, alongside creation's apex, humanity, to enable humanity, and through us the creation, to converse back with God.

This triune communication of intra-Trinitarian revelation is the ground of revelation to the creation. Thus, we have revelation through three modes: persons, language, and movement. It is an error to speak of only two kinds of revelation, such as word and deed, for there is also revelation through persons. It is an error to speak of only two aspects of the church, word and sacrament, for the community of persons is a third. It is wrong to speak of only two “means of grace,” word and sacrament, for persons are means of grace to one another (John 7:38-39; cf. 3:8).<sup>2</sup>

The replication of this triune revelation is seen at the level of human persons, in that we are priests, kings, and prophets. We must correct Calvin and the Reformed/evangelical theological tradition at this point, because the modes of revelation that the Bible sets forth for these three are not quite those we find in the standard literature. The priest primarily reveals personhood, so that his dress and position are most important. The king primarily reveals language, for he speaks laws and rulings and gives direction to society. The prophet is primarily the man of action, for he goes places and performs dramatic actions, blown by the Spirit. Of course, all three aspects are found in all three persons, as we shall discuss in due course.

For now, in summary:

Father - Personal revelation

Son - Language revelation

Spirit - Action revelation

## **Three Modes in Four Spheres**

When theologians speak of “special” and “general” revelation, they usually mean something like on the one hand the particular revelation of God directly through the Word together with the special history recounted in the Bible, and on the other hand the general revelation of God through

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<sup>2</sup> John Frame, in class lectures on the doctrine of the Word of God, has shown that each of these forms of revelation is also a form of the Word of God, which is self-expressive [person-revealing], meaningful [linguistic in itself], and powerful [energetic]. Thus, the Son [Word] reveals the essence of the Father and the essence of the Spirit, while the Father and the Spirit also reveal themselves directly.

the created world, which cannot help but reveal its Maker and Sustainer. Yet any theologian will have to distinguish between “general” revelation through human life and history on the one hand, and through the lower creation on the other. From what we have seen thus far, this vague distinction between “special” and “general” does not flow from the nature of God and the creation. In addition to a triad of *what* is being revealed, we also need a triad of *spheres* through which it is being revealed, and that gives us nine avenues of revelation. When we add God Himself to the three created spheres of revelation in which He discloses Himself, we come up with twelve avenues of revelation. For reasons that will be explained in due course, one of these must be divided, for a full total of fifteen avenues.

“Special” revelation is usually considered the redemptive revelation God provides to man after our fall into alienation, while “general” revelation is said not to contain redemptive content. This bifurcation is open to serious question, since the order of redemption follows the order of creation. The present essay will not, however, address this distinction. We are at this point concerned only with avenues of revelation, and we shall set aside the question of redemptive versus non-redemptive content.

The best way for us to proceed is to set this out in a scheme, and then discuss it. In that way, the proof of the pudding will be in its eating, so to speak. (See next page.) I believe that these twelve categories, being a (3-fold) revelation of the Trinity in the (4-aspect) creation, can summarize all the various avenues of revelation, exposing to view several that are extremely important and generally overlooked.

Immediately we must make an extremely important point, which is this: In the *opera ad extra* of God (*i.e.*, God's works outside of Himself, in the creation) each Person of God is involved, yet so that one Person is more prominent than the other two. To use the popular phraseology: All of God does all that God does. Thus, theophany is not a revelation of the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit, but in theophany the Personhood, and therefore the Fatherhood, of God is preeminent, while word and glory (energy) are also present. We shall explore these revelational relationships as we proceed.

## 1. Revelation Through Persons.

God comes into creation Himself. He comes through various other things, but He also comes directly, in the Divine Person, Word, and Power (Energy). That is, we can distinguish (if not always separate) between God's Person, Word, and Power *over* the creation and God's Person, Word, and Power *through* the creation. Here we are concerned with the former.

**A1. Theophanous Revelation.** A theophany is an appearance of God. The various times God appeared in the time before the incarnation of the Son anticipate His final and full theophany in Jesus Christ. John 1:18 says that no one has seen God (the Father) at any time, so that with a few exceptions all visible appearances of God in history are appearances of the Son. The Spirit occasionally becomes visible, as when He gave forth light on the first day of creation, and when He appeared as a Dove at Jesus' baptism. Note that the Spirit never appears in a humaniform shape.

Theophanies are always accompanied by words and actions of power (miracles), so that the linguistic and energetic aspects of God's self-revelation are also present, but the aspect of theophany as such is personal. Thus, it is preeminently associated with the Father, even though it is the Father's Image (the Son) that is the particular Person present in the theophany. In a theophany, the Father is revealed *by* the appearance of His Divine Image (the Son) *via* the energy of the Spirit.

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GOD	A. Father Person	B. Son Language	C. Spirit Act
<i>From outside the creation:</i>			
1. Divine	Theophany	Speech Scripture	Covenant history
CREATION	Particle Matter	Field Space	Wave Time
<i>Through the creation:</i>			
2. Human (Father)	People	Language	Deeds
3. Covenantal (Son)	Church Rulers	Preaching Direction	Sacrament Interaction
4. Cosmic (Spirit)	Angels Things	Relations	Activity

A1 Theophanous Revelation

A2 Personal Revelation

A3 Personal Covenantal Revelation:

A3a Through Church

A3b Through Rulers

A4 Object Revelation

B1 Word Revelation

B2 Linguistic Revelation

B3 Linguistic Covenantal Revelation:

B3a Through Preaching

B3b Through Judgments

B4 Relational Revelation

C1 Special Historical Revelation

C2 General Historical Revelation

C3 Dynamic Covenantal Revelation:

C3a Sacraments

C3b Acts of Power

C4 Dynamic Cosmic Revelation

Theophanic revelation is historically progressive, or eschatological, in character. First of all, in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit appeared inside the creation, sent by the Father.<sup>3</sup> After the creation of

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<sup>3</sup> The act of creation is simultaneously the act of sending the energizing Spirit into the creation. The Spirit has traveled with the creation ever since. He has never departed. God has chosen to travel with the cosmos and with humanity in the temporal flow of the unfolding and maturation of the creation. By being with sinful humanity, God allows Himself to suffer and be grieved by human rebellion. The many passages of the Bible that speak this way are not figures of speech

man, the Spirit worked and works with humanity to bring us to maturity, from Daughter to Bride to fruitful Mother. He used angels for this purpose under the Old Creation.

The Bible speaks of angels as winds and fire (Hebrews 1:7), associating them with the Spirit in the way that humanity is associated with the Son. In the Old Creation, the theophanic appearances of the Son were as the Angel of Yahweh, often as enthroned in the Pillar of Cloud (wind) and Fire. In this way, the Spirit progressively brought the Son into the world, revealing the Son. At the incarnation, the Spirit (the *Power* of the Most High) overshadowed the virgin Mary and brought the Son into the world as man. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit came upon Him in full measure to guide Him.

In Jesus, humanity comes to maturity and no longer needs angelic tutors (Acts 7:53; Galatians 4:23–5:6; Hebrews 1:14 & 2:2; Revelation 1-22).<sup>4</sup> In the New Creation, human beings are tutors in Christ. The servant priesthood of ecclesiastical ministers is provided to bring the entire Bride to maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13). These overseers are to be elders, older men whose maturity then sets an example for all. In the same way, the older women are to guide the younger.

As the Spirit revealed Jesus, so Jesus reveals the Father. The Son is revealed throughout the Old Creation, at Mount Sinai dictating the law and through the prophets dictating their prophecies. The Father is little revealed in the Old Creation. What is new in the New Creation is the revelation of the Father through Jesus. Jesus, the now-incarnate Yahweh of the Old Creation, continually points up to the Father. Yet, even in the New Creation the Father remains somewhat hidden behind the Son, so that Philip could yearn to see the Father (John 14:8). Jesus said that He reveals the Father, and in Revelation we do begin to see the Father on His throne (Revelation 4:2-3). Yet, until the removal of the firmament-sky at the end of history, we shall not see the Father revealed in the cosmos.

This historical revelation can be summarized as follows:

1. The Father sends the Spirit into cosmos coordinate with the act of creation (Genesis 1:1-2).
2. The Spirit reveals the Son, who comes into cosmos as Angel, and the Spirit causes us to fear Him (Romans 8:15; Proverbs 1:7).
3. The Son comes into the cosmos, incarnate, and men fear (Mark 4:41; 9:32; 10:32; 16:8).
4. The Son sends the Spirit into our hearts, crying “Abba, Father!”, revealing the Father (Romans 8:15; Galatians 5:6).
5. At the end, we are brought to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Since God is not a creature, visibility is not an attribute of God. In Himself, He is invisible. He chooses to make Himself visible. For now we “see” Jesus, but at the end, the Father will also choose to make Himself visible to our resurrected and transfigured sight.

**A4. Object Revelation.** There are three fundamental forms of Personal revelation in the cosmos, in addition to the Person of God Himself. The first, historically, consists of the angels and the created objects of the cosmos. Each of these objects, considered in and of itself, is a revelation

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that are needed because God is actually outside the world and beyond emotional reach. Rather, they reveal that God has chosen to be with us in this world, and to put Himself within emotional reach. God Himself is not without emotion; He is rather the fullness of emotion, and of mind, will, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The appearance of the Son as the Angel of Yahweh in the time before the incarnation is, thus, appropriate for the age. In fact, the Angel of Yahweh is a replacement for the fallen Lucifer, who was originally created as humanity's chief tutor. Thus, before the Son came as the new Adam, He had to come as the new Lucifer (light-bearer).

of the Creator. Objects in the world reveal God's person by their “thereness and thatness,” not by their words or actions (though such are inseparable from them).

This cosmic furniture was brought about through the labors of the Spirit during the week of creation, and serves His purposes, as guided by Him and by the angels. To wit: All these things exist to train humanity for maturity. As I demonstrated in *Through New Eyes*, these various things in the universe teach mankind about God and about humanity. Men are like birds, animals, fishes, trees, thorns, grasses, air, water, stars, stones, etc. All of these, and all the rest of creation, symbolize human beings and human life.

During the first phase of human existence, which we call the Old Creation and also “childhood” (Galatians 4-5), these objects were used through the Spirit to teach us. We were “under” them in that sense. In the second phase of human existence, which we call the New Creation and also “maturity,” these objects are used through the Son by us in the exercise of dominion and in our work of transforming the world from glory to glory. Thus, in a real sense, the world comes to us first as a revelation of God, as something we have no control over. This is the truth that is warped in all childish religions, such as an “animism,” which view created things as possessing divine fearfulness. Only as we have matured in Christ, and as we have grown from childhood into the abilities of adult maturity, does the world become something “under” us, that we use and manipulate. Then the world ceases to be such a strong avenue of revelation, and God's self-revelation shifts “upward” to other avenues; that is, revelation becomes more concentrated in persons and less in objects.

God's personal self-revelation through worldly objects, coming to us as children and producing awe, embraces such things as the following:

- a. Angels (spirits), or demons (fallen angels).
- b. Stars, rocks, plants, lower animals, earth, air, water, etc.
- c. Higher animals, which are considered semi-personal, and not static objects

(Exodus 21:28; Numbers 22:22).

Additionally, human beings can use the furniture of the world as symbols of God and of His image, man. This is possible because these things already are symbols of God, avenues of revelation. When man takes the things of the world and makes them into symbols, he acts creatively, with maturity, instead of merely receptively, as a child.

For this reason, the various articles of furniture, tools, curtains, etc. of the Tabernacle and Temple are each symbolic of human beings. They are all “fabricated persons,” whose construction, whose placement in relation to other objects, and whose use portray aspects of human personhood, which is itself an copy of the Divine person. God Himself dictated the form of these objects, but they were made by Spirit-led men (Exodus 31:1), so they stand in the middle between God's original creation and man's symbolic creations.

A few other comments are necessary at this point. The cosmos consists of substance (matter), space, and time; and things in the universe can be considered in terms of their peculiar *particle* aspects, their relationships with other particles in the *field* of existence, and their movement through the *wave* of time, as they alter and change in themselves and in their relationships. These aspects of the cosmos, considered as a whole, reveal the three Persons of the Trinity; to wit:

1. The distinctive quality of any given substantial object, its particularity, reveals the unique particularity of each Person of God, and thus primarily of the Father.
2. The relationships of objects in the spatial field of the cosmos reveal the linguistic connections between the Persons of God, and thus primarily of the Son-Word. (We shall take up the relationship of language to spatial fields below.)

3. The movements and changes of objects in the wave of time reveal the movement and transforming energy of the Persons of God, as they relate to one another actively, and thus particularly reveal the Spirit.

Reflect for a moment on how we as particular human beings relate to space and time. The relationship of things in space is seen with the eye and determined by and understood by language. A sense of proper timing, and a sense of the times in which one lives, is not something that can be taught so much as it is something that is caught. The mode of spatial, relational understanding is that of the Word primarily, while the mode of temporal understanding is that of the Spirit primarily. We shall return to these matters as we proceed.

**A3. Personal Covenantal Revelation.** A second class of particles consists of human beings who have status as leaders among other human beings: parents, husbands, masters, overseers, elders, older siblings (especially firstborn sons), rulers, governors, etc. Such rulers have a covenantal relationship with those they rule. That rule will be exercised through words and deeds, but here we are considering the rulers as such, as symbols or revealers of God's lordship.

As angels yield their oversight of the world to humanity, so the Spirit yields to the Son. The Spirit is no longer bringing the (preincarnate and then infant) Son into the world; rather, the (now mature) Son sends the Spirit at Pentecost. This is not an absolute change in history, but a relative one, for in one sense the Spirit is always bringing the Son and the Son is always sending the Spirit, in all times.

The first Spirit-made ruler was Noah, after the flood, and this is a picture of the New Creation when humanity ascends in Christ to full rule over the cosmos (in principle, at least).<sup>5</sup>

Rulers are representatives of the Son, brought by and moved by the Spirit, whose job it is to bring all humanity to maturity through sacrifice. As Jesus died for His Bride, so the husband must be ready to die for his wife, the parent for his or her child, and the ruler for his people (by defending them in combat, as David was willing to fight Goliath when Saul would not).

It might seem that rulers should preeminently picture the Father rather than the Son. From one perspective, that is doubtless the case; and since all three Persons are involved in all of these avenues of revelation, it is certainly a legitimate perspective. My reason for not associating rulers with the Father directly is five-fold. First, I submit that it is preferable to associate the Father with human persons as such (see below), not with human persons as rulers. Second, rule is exercised primarily by speaking words and directing other people by means of words. Thus, rule is linguistic, which associates it more closely with the Son. Third, rule always involves fear of some kind, and fear is associated with the Son rather than with the Father: At the last judgment it will be Jesus, not the Father, who passes judgment. Fourth, as we have seen, true rule is also associated with sacrifice and death. Finally, the Bible associates sonship with rule and authority, as in Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, etc. The father is not so much ruler as elder-advisor to the mature son, who actually rules.

In addition to specific rulers, the Church is also, as a body, the ruler of this world. All authority has been given to Jesus Christ, and the Church is in union with Him. As the book of Revelation shows, through her prayers and faithfulness the Church actually determines the course of history. Thus, as a special body of people, the Church must be placed here as a particular avenue of revelation from God, for the Church (to the extent she fulfills her calling) reveals God to the world.

The many different kinds of superior-inferior relationships in humanity provide many avenues and aspects to this category of "authority revelation."

Now, the avenues of Personal Covenantal Revelation, which I originally thought to term Authority Revelation, must be grouped under two main heads. Rulers are over other people, while the Church is in a sense "under" other people, "ruling" through prayer and service and sacrifice. The

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<sup>5</sup> On Noah's ascension, see *Biblical Horizons* 96-98.

history of the Kingdom begins with the work of the Church, and climaxes in the production of mature Godly rulers in every sphere of life. The goal of the Church is the discipleship of nations into theocracies, where Jesus is recognized as king.

In terms of Personal Covenantal Revelation, the Church reveals the glory of Christ's lordship by serving and suffering and teaching, all the things that initiate history over and over again. The Church manifests the glory of the cross. The other spheres of life reveal the glory of Christ's lordship primarily by ruling and passing judgments, the things that maintain history and bring it to places of relative consummation. These other spheres manifest the glory of the ascension.

In all the forms of Covenantal Revelation, as we shall see, there is a mutual relationship between above and below, server and served, lord and servant, etc., which point to the relationship between God and man. Such covenantal relationships are at the opposite pole from casual relationships. Such strong relationships form larger "particles" of their own, such as families, nations, churches, etc. Each of these is an avenue of revelation about man and God.

**A2. Personal Revelation.** Preeminently, of course, human beings are the images and likenesses of God the Father. This is true of all people, of people as people. The goal of history is for all people, or at least all the elect, to grow into the fullness of God-likeness.

The concept of "image" is static. Human beings simply *are* the images of God, whether in heaven, earth, or hell. So, apparently are angels, though in a different way. The image of God is not something *in* man, or an aspect of man, that may be lost or diminished or increased; rather, man simply *is* the image of God. The concept of "likeness" is dynamic. Human beings grow in the likeness of God, or else depart from it (Genesis 3:22). Angels apparently do not grow in this sense.

The many different kinds of human beings – races, cultures, individuals, the two sexes, etc. – provide many aspects to this avenue of "personal revelation."

This brings me to a comment on what I consider to be an error in Reformation theology, which is that the sacraments are considered "visible words." That is, they make Christ visible. In fact, visibility has nothing to do with the sacraments. Baptism is tangible, while the Supper is edible; neither is to be gazed at. Moreover, they are primarily not "words," for the Word in worship is the Scripture and its proclamation. They are, rather, works of the Spirit: miracles. The closest thing to a "visible word" would be the human person, especially the human face.

Several implications flow from this first group of considerations. First (A4), nature and natural objects reveal God to the eye of faith. The study of nature is the study of the design of the Spirit, and from it we learn how God designs things, and how we as His images can design things, thinking His thoughts after Him.

Second (A3), rule and authority reveal God to the eye of faith. The study of government, in church, state, family, business, etc., is the study of the Son, and from it we learn how God governs things and how we as His images can govern things. We learn positive and negative things, because we live in a world held captive under sin. Yet, the Christian must learn to see the face of Christ in all rulers, even in evil ones to the extent that they actually rule and govern.

Finally (A2), the study of persons and of human life and of how human beings are constituted, is a study of God. The human body-soul-spirit complex is the image of God the Father, the Person, and a faith-full examination of the human person is a revelation of the nature of God. For instance, what does it mean that the human person, unlike any animal, has the ability to fall prostrate before a ruler, to kneel in submission, to stand to receive orders, to sit forward to pay attention, to sit back to judge and evaluate, to recline to eat, to dance and leap in ecstatic worship, to engage in sexual relations face-to-face, etc.? All of this is revelatory.

Thus, in summary, we have found four/ve avenues of revelation in the area of Personhood. First, we have found that God reveals Himself as a Person through theophanies. Second, we have

found that God reveals Himself as a Personal object (“particle”) in each and every one of the lower parts of creation. Third/fourth, we have found that God reveals Himself as a Ruler in the human rulers of this world, and as a Servant in the Church. And finally, we have found that God reveals Himself as a full Person in the personality and total constitution of each and every human being.

We have thus far considered revelation apart from language and activity, and to these we now turn.

## 2. Revelation Through Language.

By revealing Himself as Word, God reveals Himself as Language. We are not speaking here of the Bible in particular, but of language as such. Language, its various forms and aspects, is a revelation of God. This is one of the most important avenues of revelation that is generally overlooked in discussions of “special” and “general” revelation.

**B1. Word Revelation.** God states that He is Word, and this is associated with the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. God is Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and thus also Aleph and Tav, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>6</sup> A number of the psalms, four chapters of Lamentations, and some other Bible passages are structured as a list of 22 items each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. God is not only Alpha and Omega but Alpha *through* Omega; not only Word, but Alphabet!

It is important to see that God comes to us, as Word, first as Speech and then as Scripture. Hearing involves submission, while reading involves much less. I cannot close my ears, but I can close my eyes. I cannot go back and listen again to something I hear (before the modern tape recorder), but I can go back and re-read and meditate on what I read. The first hearing of something comes as a new thing, as an authority that I must either accept, reject, or set aside for future reflection.

For this reason, there is a great stress in the Bible on *hearing* the Word of God. We are to listen to it in Church, submitting to the words of the reader, and hearkening to its amplification in the sermon. If all we do is study the Bible, without hearing it, we have dominion over it. The goal, of course, is for it to have dominion over us.

Once we have heard something, we can “write it down” in our memory and meditate on it. Memory, however, is notoriously selective, and that is nowhere more true than in moral matters and in matters relating to God. Sin means that we shy away from God and readily forget what He says. “Oral tradition” is no trustworthy safeguard of memory, despite what many early 20th century scholars maintained. Thus, writing has been with humanity from the beginning. It has always been necessary to write down things that have to be remembered, especially contracts and covenants. Long before he died, we can be sure that Adam was writing things down in some fashion. It is no surprise, then, that the God who speaks is also a God who writes down what He has already said. He spoke the Ten Words, and then wrote them down Himself. He dictated laws to Moses and sermons to Isaiah, who then proclaimed them. They were written down, to be a memorial for all time. Note in this regard especially Jeremiah 36:2, where Jeremiah was told to write down all the messages God had been giving him to proclaim over the years. Speech comes first, and then the creation of a memorial through writing.

Once again, then, we see an eschatological dimension to linguistic communication. First God speaks, exercising direct authority over us in our childhood. Then God causes things to be written down, giving us more authority over His words so that we reflect on them, compare them,

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<sup>6</sup> The oracle kept in the pouch of the High Priest's ephod was called Urim (beginning with Aleph) and Thummim (beginning with Tav).

and expand upon them by making applications. In fact, the four fundamental periods of Biblical history reveal this sequence twice:

1. The Law period (Genesis-Joshua) is primarily a time of dictation.
2. The Kingdom period (Judges, Ruth, Samuel, the five wisdom books) is a time of revelation by inspiration.
3. The Prophetic period (the rest of the “Old Testament”) is primarily a time of dictation, when God dictated to the prophets.
4. The Gospel period (the “New Testament”) is, except for Revelation, a time of revelation by inspiration.

Books of vision, like Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Revelation, lie in between dictation and inspiration, for God shows things to the prophets, and the prophets write up the matter under inspiration.

I should add that whether dictated, inspired, or revealed through vision, the Word of God is equally inerrant and infallible. I might also add this:

- Dictation - Son (words from God)
- Inspiration - Father (out of the personal reflections of the writer)
- Visionary Revelation - Spirit (visible mode)

**B2. Linguistic Revelation.** Linguistic revelation is different from revelation through things because while God is not visible and is not material (not a creature), God *is* language. He *is* Word. We must, of course, maintain the distinction between Creator and creature in the area of language, but the analogy between the two is “closer” and more pregnant than the analogy in the area of visible objects. We see this in that God in Himself is a linguistic being, while in Himself He is not visible. Thus, God demands that His worship must be through language, and in no way through images and icons.

Since language is an attribute of God, the study of language is a study of a revelation of God, and perhaps more particularly, a study of human beings, the images of God. Human languages are a revelation of human existence; linguistics is correlative to anthropology. The study of language is the study of the medium between one person and another, including between God and human beings. Throughout his writings and lectures, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy provides valuable insights into the revelatory character of language as such, calling for a complete reevaluation of grammar and linguistics on a Christian base.<sup>7</sup>

Because language is an attribute of God, linguistic aptitude is a characteristic of God's people, while linguistic ineptitude is a characteristic of rebels. In a society under the influence of the Bible, languages improve in precision and populations become better speakers and readers. When Christianity declines in a society, as it has in Western civilization, the result is a decline in literacy and in linguistic precision. When the Spirit comes tongues are loosed, as at Pentecost. In hell all is silent: No one desires to communicate with anyone else, for each is turned in upon himself. For a fine picture of this, see C. S. Lewis's novel *The Great Divorce*.

The original language that God taught Adam was almost certainly Hebrew. Some language was spoken before Babel, and it was either Hebrew or something else. Why would it be some other language? Moreover, the names in the early chapters of Genesis are Hebrew words, and the words spoken by God have some double entendres and puns in Hebrew. All of this strongly implies that Hebrew was the language of that primordial revelation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See especially his *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, VT: Argo Books, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller discussion, see *Open Book* 27, June 1996.

In such a line of thought, Hebrew was the primordial language, perfectly fitted to man's first stage of life; and it will always be the language to which we corporately must return as we repeatedly re-start our lives in the covenant. At Babel, however, Hebrew expands to become the germ of many languages, with different configurations, which then multiply further. This is the glorification, the maturation, of language in history. The verb system in Hebrew, for instance, is built up largely of voices, with tenses only implied; certain other languages are built up largely of tenses, with only a few voices. This diversification, affirmed and sealed at Pentecost, is not to be undone; rather, each language has its own *perspective* on God, humanity, and the cosmos. In the world to come, we will be learning all these languages, and enjoying all these millions of perspectives on God.

Someday someone will have to study Hebrew with a view to how it is fitted to be the primordial language, and the language of God's Word in its first three installments (with a little Aramaic in the third).<sup>9</sup> What does it mean that the primordial language is so largely built up of voices (modes, stems)?

Now, each language implies all the others, and so all truth can be expressed in each language, though some languages are more felicitous for one purpose than another. It is hard to translate some things from Dutch to English, but if you use enough words, you can do it. Once we know them all, however, we can use the right language for the right purpose.

What language do we speak in heaven? All languages, not some other language. Learning languages in heaven will be learning new appreciations for the Word. It will be a never-ending delight.

The vast number of languages and dialects, with their “body language” and tonal sing-song, provide a tremendous variety of avenues of “linguistic revelation.” The dances and musics of various peoples are related to their body language and the tones of their speech.

**B3. Linguistic Covenantal Revelation.** There is a middle kind of linguistic communication that stands between general language and the Word of God as spoken into the creation from God Himself, and that is the proclamation of the Word: preaching; and with that, the kind of language that initiates and maintains covenants in history among men and between men and God.

The Bible maintains an authority over all languages, for when the Bible is translated into a language, that language is “Hebraized” to some extent, and is reformed to become a more fit vehicle for the Word of God. This does not mean every language is to be Hebraized as a whole, but rather that every language receives a special “priestly” form for use in its relationship with God, which form is a Hebraized version of that language. Worship and our engagement directly with God continue to be the first aspect of human life, setting the course for all else, and thus it is appropriate that the first language be used (in translated form) at that point in human life and culture. The involvement of certain human beings in this work of translation – those who have the abiding form of the gift of tongues – places this work in the middle between the original Word of God and ordinary human language.

Similarly, the preaching of the Word in the context of official worship, where the community is officially gathered under her leaders and in the context of the Lord's Supper, has a certain power and authority not present at other times. And, flowing from this occasion, and then flowing back into it, are the times when the Bible is taught and studied and applied more generally by anyone able to teach and apply it, as when one person encourages another by quoting and applying specific passages or teachings of the Bible.

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<sup>9</sup> This project has begun. The reader is directed to [www.edenics.org](http://www.edenics.org).

The Spirit-led proclamation of the Word of God mediates the Word into human life and thus is a special linguistic event, different from ordinary language. Preaching, thus, is a distinct avenue of Divine revelation.

Preaching is Biblical study and teaching that takes place in worship, in a setting of covenant renewal. We must make a distinction between language that is merely descriptive or conversational, and language that initiates future states of affairs, or maintains those states of affairs. Preaching and evangelism are one form of such language. Evangelism initiates people into God's family covenant, and preaching maintains it, renewing the covenant. Similarly, law codes and national constitutions and covenants consist of language that *creates* societies, and the decisions and proclamations of judges and rulers maintain such societies.

As above, we must distinguish between two kinds of Linguistic Covenantal Revelation. The covenantal language in the Church is fundamentally protological; that is, it creates a new world. (Thus, it is "Hebraized.") Preaching continually calls us out of "Egypt" and into God's Kingdom. We start over again in the Church, week by week, as worship on the first day of the week ushers us forward.

By way of contrast, the covenantal language in other spheres of life is fundamentally eschatological. A marriage comes about after a time of courtship. A nation is formed out of a crisis in history, as at the Exodus from Egypt, or as with the Constitution of the United States. Law codes are formed based on prior experience, though they also determine the future (since the law is also a teacher). The words of judges conclude cases at law.

Of course, all covenantal spheres of life employ both protological and eschatological language, both teaching and testing, both rules and judgments, etc. I hope it is clear enough, however, that there is a fundamental temporal difference between the most powerful forms of covenantal language: the language that creates a new world, and the language that develops into history and eventually closes an old one. The Church is primarily oriented to the former, while the other spheres of life are primarily oriented to the latter.

Thus, for 430 years the Hebrews possessed the constitutive, prophetic words given through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – words of *genesis*, beginnings. They had these kinds of covenant words, but not the covenant words of the Law that constituted Israel as a nation. That came later. Even then, God constituted Israel as a nation with priests but not with kings. The kings came later still, when God decided the people were ready to be given David. At two levels, then, Church preceded nation, Church-covenant words preceded national-covenant words. In both cases, the nation-constituting covenant words came *after* periods of crisis (the sojourn in Egypt and the period from Eli to Saul), as did the covenant-initiating words to Abram after the Babel crisis. To see a purely initiatory covenant we have to go back to Adam.

So, Linguistic Covenantal Revelation is a particular kind of language. This is the kind of language that gives direction to people. We can call it directive, but I prefer to call it covenantal. The Bible itself is this kind of language, as it comes from God. Man as the image of God also utters this kind of language.

This kind of language is revelatory in a particular way, different from ordinary language. It reveals man as the image of God, as the ruler of creation, as having authority over other persons in various ways, etc. It is the particular kind of language used by rulers as they rule, and the particular kind of language used by the Church as she acts as the hidden servant-government of the world.

Such constitutive or covenantal language has many aspects or dimensions, all of which are avenues of revelation about God, such as:

- Constituting covenantal documents.
- Law codes.
- Legislation.

Decrees.  
 Songs for use in directing life (like the Psalms).  
 Pointed questions designed to elicit reflection.  
 Prayer.

**B4. Relational Revelation.** There is a kind of communication that takes place between the various semi-persons (higher animals) and objects in the lower creation. Our general scheme requires us to regard this as another avenue of revelation, which I am calling Relational Revelation. To start with, consider the way animals communicate with each other, the way your cat and dog tell you things, and the way angels and God communicate with the lower aspects of creation.

In a sense, the linguistic ability of human beings counts for and represents the whole creation, for humanity is the leader and acme of revelation. Plants convert earth, air, water, and fire (light) into food, which animals and human beings eat, and humans also eat animals. In this way, humanity eats into itself the cosmos and transforms the cosmos into full personhood, and through human speech the cosmos speaks.

Yet we know that some kinds of speaking occur in the higher animals, and this will have to be considered as another dimension of linguistic revelation. Indeed, there may be a great deal more going on in this area than we are presently aware of.

Let us stop thinking about language for a moment, and consider instead that all the objects in the cosmos exist in relationships with one another. This is true of human beings as well, and of all things as they relate to God. This is the spatial or field aspect of created existence, and it is a manifestation of the Son, who is Word.

Now let us return to language. Language sets things in relationship with one another. For instance, certain words are used to create the relationship of marriage, or to create a new nation, or to baptize a person into the Church. Laws and judgments set persons into relationships with one another: taxpayer and bureaucrat, guilty and innocent, etc. *All language expresses relationships.* Performative language, as we have just indicated, creates relationships. Declarative sentences express relationships (“That house is white.” “John went to the store.”). Commands express relationships between persons (“Bring me my slippers!”). Interrogations call relationships into question (“Where is my book?” “Adam, where are you?”). General patter either lubricates human relationships ceremoniously, or wrecks it through gossip.

Thus, language is relational, spatial. Sentences can be diagramed, laid out in relationships in space, visible to the eye.

Now, what I must write next may baffle some readers, but please bear with me. There is evidence to suggest that something like language exists as a field in the universe as a whole, and moves between objects of the same kind. We can start with the Bible. Colossians 1:17 says that all things are connected together in and through the Second Person of God, the Word. Similarly, Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son upholds all things by His powerful *word*.

Moving from such hints in the Bible, let me call attention to the work of A. Rupert Sheldrake.<sup>10</sup> Sheldrake presents experimental evidence to show that communities of the same kinds of creatures are linked throughout space by fields of “morphic resonance.” For instance, if a group of mice is trained over a period of time to perform certain acts in New York, another group of mice trained in Sydney six months later will learn the same acts in a shorter period of time. Clearly, there

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<sup>10</sup> *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1981); *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* (New York: Vintage, 1989); *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* (New York: Berkeley-Riverhead, 1995); et cetera.

is no biological explanation for this, and Shel Drake argues that the explanation lies in a kind of communication among all mice.

Shel Drake's work explains the seemingly impossible links between certain animals and the world itself: the way fish find their way back to spawning grounds, or the way an abandoned cat will travel a thousand miles to come home.

The evidence presented to back up this theory is not limited to animals, but also extends to non-living things and plants as well. One experiment involved crystals. A new kind of crystal was precipitated out of a solution, a process involving a certain amount of time. Later on, the same crystal precipitated faster and more easily.

Shel Drake's interpretation of this phenomena smacks far too much of pantheism, but his evidence is what is of interest to us. This is not the place to go farther with this. I only want to show that there may be good reason to believe that something like language operates in every aspect of the cosmos to create relationships. This linkage of communication is itself a revelation of God.

One final point along these lines. We saw above that angels were particularly involved in revealing God's truth to us when we were children in the Old Creation. Angels used animals, stars, plants, etc. for this purpose. It may be that angels maintain the lines of communication between the parts of creation.

### 3. Revelation Through Event.

Thirdly, God reveals Himself through actions, His own and those of His creatures.

**C1. Special Historical Revelation.** By this we mean the actions of God Himself in the sphere of cosmos and history, particularly as focused in the special covenantal history of the Old Creation (from creation through the apostolic age).

We can distinguish several kinds of special actions by God. The first is the act of direct creation, bringing into being something that did not previously exist. One example, obviously, is the creation of the cosmos itself. Another is Jesus' changing water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, for the grape molecules, as well as such sediment as might have been found at the bottom of the jars, were created out of nothing. Another is the turning of the Nile river and all the waters of Egypt into blood. Both of these creative miracles were the first God performed as part of a larger series during the two exceptionally important periods of covenant-making. It is likely that the provision of manna from the sky during the wilderness wanderings is another example of creation out of nothing.

A second kind of direct action by God consists of acts of transformation, whereby God transforms something that already exists by using powers that do not exist within the cosmos itself. The various resurrections performed by God in the Bible fit into this category, as doubtless do some of the healings.

A third kind of direct action by God consists of works of extraordinary providence that are timed to coincide with prophetic predictions. I have in mind bringing millions of frogs over the Egyptians all at once, or bringing vast swarms of lice and flies. Some of the healings might fit here also.

Yet another kind of direct action involves symbolic demonstrations of Divine power, such as walking on water (which recalls the hovering of God over the creation in Genesis 1:2).

We could probably come up with other categories as well, but these suffice for our purposes.

In the main, God's special miraculous acts are part of the Old Creation history, and these miracles are particularly grouped around times of covenant making: the original creation, the Flood, the Exodus from Egypt, the formation of the Remnant Covenant under Elijah and Elisha, and the

coming of the New Covenant. Miraculous events done by God have occurred also in the history of the Church from time to time.

Also here we must consider God's special guidance "behind the scenes." God generally guides all of human history "behind the scenes," but the history recorded in the Bible involved special guidance as God brought His original covenant with Adam to maturity in Christ. This special history involved the fulfillment of previously-revealed prophecies, and that is what distinguishes it from the more general providential guidance of God in history.

**C2. General Historical Revelation.** Since man is the image of God, human life at all levels reveals God. The biographies of individuals reveal God, as do the histories of families, churches, businesses, schools, nations, civilizations, and human history as a whole. Because man is sinful, much of what is found in such histories reveals God by way of contrast, but it still is inescapably revelatory.

In contrast to Special Historical Revelation, General Historical Revelation is directed by human beings rather than by God. Human beings are the actors in history, and so history tells us "more" about the images of God than about God Himself.

Thus, human history is not just "one thing after another," as the saying goes. Rather, it reveals the nature of man and the nature of God.

As miracles pointedly reveal God by forcing our attention, so crisis times in history are "more" revelatory than ordinary times. In crisis, people act according to their basic natures, for good or ill. The various works of Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy and of René Girard are particularly valuable in exposing some of the revelatory aspects of social upheavals, revolutions, and crises.

Yet, the ordinary day-to-day actions of human beings also teach us about God. Human beings like to dress well, because God is robed in glory. Human beings eat, incorporating other things into themselves; and God "eats" us into His fellowship (see Revelation 3:16, as well as the whole sacrificial system). Human beings study and investigate the world. Human beings rework and transform the world. All the things that human beings do reflect the things that God does.

**C3. Dynamic Covenantal Revelation.** As there are certain special persons and groups of persons (i.e., rulers and the Church), and special covenantal words spoken by such persons, so there are special covenantal deeds done by them. All such special deeds are revelatory.

First of all, the general ruler-ruled relationships. The particular deed that the state does is to bear the sword. The magistrate may go to war and he may put people to death. Such events are crises in society or in the lives of individuals. The ruler may also command taxes, maintain roads, and do other things that are less of a crisis nature, but all of which display his position as covenant head of a certain society in a certain aspect. All of these things are things that God also does, and so the covenantal deeds of the ruler reveal things about God.

The particular deed that the husband and wife do is sex. In sex, the husband takes the wife to himself. He is fundamentally active and she is fundamentally passive: He penetrates her. This interaction is pleasurable and non-threatening in a good marriage. It reveals how the Persons of God fully enjoy being one with each other, and also how the creation is passive under the penetrating and life-giving actions of God.

When covenants and contracts are engaged, they are normally sealed with a meal. The covenant meal is revelatory, since both parties eat the same food at the same time in the same place. Thus, the two parties become one by taking the same food into themselves, which food is transformed into each of them. This is a form of union and communion that is the opposite of sex

in certain ways, but like sex it is pleasurable and reveals how the Persons of God enjoy being one with each other and with Their friends.<sup>11</sup>

Let us now turn to Dynamic Covenantal Revelation in the Church. Here we are concerned with the revelatory character of the sacraments, which like the other actions we have studied spring from the Energy of the Spirit. The sacraments are primarily the dynamic work of the Spirit. As the Spirit is sent by the Son, certain words are spoken first, and then the action is performed. “Do this,” said Jesus, not “Contemplate this.”

The word “sacrament” is not found in the Bible, and there is always discussion as to what makes something a “sacrament.” We shall bypass that discussion. There are four special “miraculous” works of the Spirit that the Church performs as special covenant rites. They are Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Unction, and Ordination.

Baptism makes us new persons, and so in this work of the Spirit, the Fatherly aspect of our existence comes to the fore. Unction for the sick is a kind of extension of baptism to those who need it.

Ordination sets aside certain persons as special representatives of the Son, to oversee the congregation, the preaching, and the rites. This work of the Spirit has a special relationship to the ruling/serving aspect of our existence, that of the Son.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is the act of the whole congregation, and so in this rite, action comes to the fore. What we do in the Supper is a memorial presented to God the Father, and what we eat is in a miracle the Theanthropos, but the energy of the Spirit is paramount in the rite. In the order of worship, we first confess sins and are restored as persons. Then we hear the Word and pledge renewed allegiance to Him. Finally, we receive the power of the Spirit. The Spirit first binds us together as one loaf in union with Christ, as we all eat the same Bread. Then the Spirit imparts to all of us collectively the death of Christ through His blood, so that we are enabled to live sacrificially as martyrs, dying more and more to sin and rising more and more to righteousness.

Since the “sacraments” are generally understood to be avenues of revelation, I need go no farther at this point.

As we move toward a consideration of Dynamic Cosmic Revelation, there is a further aspect of revelation through action that should be discussed here, and that is this: God is particularly revealed to us in times of crisis and distress. When things are going well, we forget God. When distress comes, we cry out to Him. We see His hand in the distress. All human beings do this, because all human beings know (a) that they are guilty, and (b) that God is behind everything that happens.

Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy has pointed out, in class lectures on “Comparative Religion,” that if we look at the heathen and their gods, we can see the kinds of things that overwhelm men and that are accordingly considered divine. Let us briefly discuss a few of these.

War and oppression overwhelm human beings. They are “gods” in a very general sense, for they are radically “over” man. Thus, the heathen identified war as a god. The Greeks called him Ares; the Romans called him Mars. Gods of oppressive and capricious government can be seen in Zeus and Jupiter. Such personifications are long gone, but the psychology remains. In the foxholes, men believe that they will not die until their number comes up, until a bullet with their name on it is fired. War pressures men into superstition or faith, or some combination thereof. War thus reveals God as a fearful threat who operates through other men. The fearfulness of war as a revelation of God is, I suggest, particularly related to the Son, the Judge, the “Man of War.”

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<sup>11</sup> Sex is private and involves only one other person; meals are public and involve many people. In sexual union, one new thing is potentially created (a child), while in culinary union, one old thing is shared (food).

Love overwhelms human beings. We discussed sex above, as a special kind of covenantal action. Love impels people to marry. A man or woman in love can think of little else. Jealousy and unrequited love are intensely powerful emotions. Thus, every heathen society has a god and/or a goddess of love: Aphrodite, Cupid, Venus, Eros, etc. The power of love reveals to us that intensity with which the members of the Trinity love each other, and the intensity with which the Son loves His bride.

Enthusiasm overwhelms human beings. When a person is very excited, he is “beside himself.” Thus, there are gods of dance and movement and enthusiasm, like Mercury. Enthusiasm makes people dance. Enthusiasm as a revelation of God is particularly to be associated with the Spirit.

Mobs overwhelm human beings. I suspect that “mob psychology” is related to the kinds of “morphic resonance” that Sheldrake discusses. In any event, a person will be “swept along” with a mob, and in the process may do things he or she would never ordinarily do. Positively, the music and liturgy in worship can form a bond among people and make them better than they usually are. Being influenced by a group is, I suggest, a revelation of the unity of the triune God.

**C4. Dynamic Cosmic Revelation.** The “thereness and thatness” of the world and its contents reveals God to us, and that fact is widely recognized by those who write on “general revelation” or “natural revelation.” What is not generally recognized or discussed is that we are usually blind to such revelation because it does not come to us in a crisis, in such a way as to force our attention.

It is actually when nature becomes catastrophic that God is pointedly revealed. God is seen in the storm, in the whirlwind, in the volcano, in the earthquake. Such events as these cause man to realize his weakness and smallness before the God behind these events. Thus, the gods of the untaught always include gods of storm and fury, the powers that overwhelm man. As a revelation of the true God, catastrophe reveals God's power.

Of course, we should perceive God in the ordinary activities and events in the cosmos. We should perceive Him and learn about Him from the processes of change and development and transformation in the day-to-day cosmos. But as sinners we find it easy to tune all that out. A meteoric strike from outer space is harder to ignore. A flood is harder to ignore.

Another aspect of the creation that overwhelms human being, and thus is godlike, is wine; and so every people has a god of wine, such as Bacchus or Dionysus. For the Christian, the overwhelming nature of wine reveals the sabbath of God, His eternal peaceful rest, which He shares with us.

The more ordinary activities in the creation are also revelatory. Angels used created things to train human beings, by means of their angelically-stimulated activities. Animals multiplied in the world first, and discovered which plants are good to eat, formed trails to watering places, and generally prepared the way for humanity. Some animals serve man, while others punish him for his sin. The same is true of plants, with their thorns, and of the sun, with its burning rays, etc. Thus, the actions of created objects reveal much about God, about man, and about the relationship of man and God.