

Revelation in George Tyrrell, Neo-Scholasticism, and *Dei verbum*

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Abstract

The article argues that, despite *Dei verbum*'s affirmation of the notion of experience, the understanding of it in the conciliar document is different from Tyrrell's, and that *Dei verbum* holds together the Neo-Scholastic understanding of revelation as "locutio," on the one hand, with Biblical-historical theories of revelation that stress experience, on the other. To this end, the article explores various understandings of revelation that include those of Tyrrell and his critics (i.e., Grandmaison, Gardeil, Schillebeeckx), Neo-Scholastics (i.e., Garrigou-Lagrange et al.), and *Dei verbum* (as interpreted by Congar).

Introduction

The defeat of the Neo-Scholastic minority at Vatican II, along with the disappearance of the Anti-Modernist Oath, have been interpreted to imply, at the very least, that modernism today would not be condemned as it was under Pius X.¹ While for many it might seem obvious that Modernism was not at all vindicated at Vatican II, the cordial association of Modernism with the doctrine of Vatican II remains among both traditionalists and progressives alike.

¹ Gerard Loughlin, for example, argues that Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange was actually *correct* in asserting that the *nouvelle théologie* was a return to Modernism, but was wrong in fearing this. G. LOUGHLIN, "Nouvelle Théologie: A Return to Modernism?" in G. FLYNN – P. MURRAY (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*. Oxford, 2011, 36-50.

The Catholic Modernist George Tyrrell (1861-1909) is for some an unsung hero of twentieth-century theological renewal. One of the major works that set out to make such a case was David Wells's *The Prophetic Theology of George Tyrrell*, in which Wells argued that Tyrrell's theology merits the appellation "prophetic."² One example which allegedly demonstrates Tyrrell's vindication, is the incorporation of his revelation theology into the Council document *Dei verbum*.³ According to Wells, the parallels between Tyrrell and Vatican II on tradition are "remarkable,"⁴ and these parallels can be explained by the fact that Vatican II moved beyond a propositional model of revelation and endorsed a more experiential one, whereby revelation "is not really given until it has been personally received."⁵ With little nuance, Wells draws similarities between Tyrrell's and the Council's conceptions of religious experience and its relationship to revelation. Wells, in fact, claims that "Tyrrell's final position was less heterodox than the account of it in *Pascendi* would suggest and that, in fact, *his ideas were almost duplicated by the Council*."⁶

Despite some of the subsequent book-reviews that vehemently criticized Well's argumentation to the point of dismissal,⁷ the thesis of Wells seems to have floated along unscathed in more contemporary treatments of Tyrrell's relationship to Vatican II.⁸ James Kelly, for example, associates Vatican II and Tyrrell when he states that both Tyrrell and Vatican II's theological renewal focused on experience as the core of revelation, and

² D. WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology of George Tyrrell*. American Academy of Religions Studies in Religion 22, Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 1981.

³ SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Revelatione, *Dei verbum*, AAS 58 [1966], 817-835.

⁴ D. WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 67.

⁵ D. WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 58.

⁶ D. WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 65 (my emphasis).

⁷ See the review of Wells's book by D.G. SCHULTENOVER in: *Church History* 52 (1983), 391-392.

⁸ For example, Michael Kirwan, though expressing caution against identifying Tyrrell as a prophet of Vatican II, repeatedly cites Wells's work without any criticism of it. See M. KIRWAN, "George Tyrrell and the theology of Vatican II", in O. RAFFERTY (ed.), *George Tyrrell and Catholic Modernism*. Dublin, 2010, 131-152.

proceeds to exposit Tyrrell's theory of revelation without any criticism or qualification of it.⁹ In a more agnostic key, Alessandro Maggiolini concludes that religious experience was indeed vindicated in *Dei verbum*, but leaves it open as to whether Tyrrell's understanding of it was vindicated.¹⁰

In what follows, I will argue that the Catholic Church's teaching on revelation, as expressed in *Dei verbum*, is fundamentally *different* from any Tyrrellian conception of revelation. To this end, I will first exposit Tyrrell's theology of revelation and present Wells's interpretation of it. After criticizing Wells's argument, I will pursue what I believe to be a more historically sensitive way forward in examining Tyrrell's relationship to Vatican II. This way includes (i) an examination of certain Catholic reactions to Tyrrell's theology of revelation, (ii) an examination of (Neo)Scholastic Catholic conceptions of revelation prior to the Council, and (iii) an assessment of the relationship between word and experience in the *Dei verbum* itself.

To contextualize *Dei verbum*'s teaching on experience (and in order to relate it to Tyrrell's thought) I will examine various reactions to Tyrrell by both his Neo-Scholastic contemporaries (Ambroise Gardeil O.P. and Léonce de Grandmaison S.J.) and by those theologians more contemporary with the Council (Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. and Karl Rahner S.J.).¹¹ An examination of the latter two serves to show that a variety of Catholic theologians—even those most clearly associated with the “majority” at Vatican II and who, like Tyrrell, were disenchanted with their inherited Neo-Scholastic theological tradition—were critical of Tyrrell's revelation theology; the examination of Grandmaison and Gardeil serves to illustrate

⁹ J. KELLY, “Revelation as Experience. George Tyrrell (1861-1909)”, in: *Doctrine and Life* 61/3 (2011), 39-54.

¹⁰ A. MAGGIOLINI, “Magisterial Teaching on Experience in the Twentieth Century: From the Modernist Crisis to the Second Vatican Council”, in: *Communio (EN)* 23 (Summer 1996), 225-43.

¹¹ In the case of Karl Rahner, he is not explicitly reacting to Tyrrell in the first volume of the *Theological Investigations* considered in this article. From the topic and its context, however, it is clear that he has the problems of theological Modernism in mind. Cf. Rahner's comments on Modernism in K. RAHNER, “Observations on the Concept of Revelation”, in: *Revelation and Tradition*, K. RAHNER – J. RATZINGER (eds.), New York, Herder & Herder, 1966, 10-11.

the Neo-Scholastic concerns voiced in Tyrrell's own day, and prepares the reader for what follows, namely, a brief exposition of an understanding of revelation typical of Neo-Scholastic manuals in the decades leading up to the Council. My examination of the manualist tradition on revelation serves not only to highlight the difference between Neo-Scholastic and Tyrrellian conceptions of revelation, but also prepares the reader for the last step.

The last step will examine *Dei verbum* and show that key elements of the Neo-Scholastic understanding of revelation—and reactions to Tyrrell—were not repudiated in *Dei verbum*. On the contrary, I will show that for drafters such as Yves Congar, the Neo-Scholastic definition of revelation as *locutio Dei* is compatible with the personal, biblical, and historical conception of revelation for which *Dei verbum* is so often lauded, and towards which Tyrrell was working. In other words, this article sets out to show that, while much of Tyrrell's instincts with respect to the primacy of experience stands firm in *Dei verbum*, there is overwhelming contextual-theological evidence that suggests that the drafters and their intentions were far-removed from appropriating the exclusively experiential revelation of the kind propounded by Tyrrell and criticized throughout the 20th century.

I. Tyrrell's Theology of Revelation and Experience

Having been trained in Suarezian Neo-Scholasticism as a Jesuit, Tyrrell gradually became disillusioned not only with Suarezianism, but also with the Thomism he had favoured over against the former. Ordained in 1891, he gradually came to share with others the common sentiment of the (general) Neo-Scholastic system's fruitlessness and stagnancy.¹² His rejection

¹² For a more sympathetic treatment of the recent history of Suarezian philosophical doctrine, see J. PEREIRA, "Thomism and the Magisterium: From *Aeterni Patris* to *Veritatis splendor*", in: *Logos* 5/3 (2002) 147-183 and, more recently D. SCHWARTZ (ed.), *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. For the move away from Suarezian Thomism, see A. VIDLER, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: its Origins and Outcome*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1934, 145-150; D.G. SCHULTENOVER, *George Tyrrell: In Search of Catholicism*. Shepherdstown, Patmos Press, 1981, 29-31; N. SAGOVSKY, 'On God's Side': *A Life of George Tyrrell*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, 28; 32; 46.

of Neo-Scholasticism was clearly manifest in “A Perverted Devotion”, published in 1899. His anti-Scholastic trajectory developed and issued in a series of articles, some of which were later collected and re-published in 1907 as *Through Scylla and Charybdis: Or Old Theology and the New*, a year after his dismissal from the Jesuits in 1906. The book marks the last major publication of Tyrrell’s before *Lamentabili* and Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi* condemned “Modernism” in 1907. The writings in this work of Tyrrell’s contain not only past articles, but also the most mature thought of Tyrrell on revelation as expressed in, at the time, two yet-to-be published essays, “Revelation” and “Theologism.” *Through Scylla and Charybdis* also contains some of the most controversial ideas with which so many Catholic theologians would later engage.¹³

Tyrrell criticised the Neo-Scholastic propositional model of revelation as naïve and ahistorical. At the root of this ahistorical and propositional conception of revelation is what Tyrrell stigmatized as the “mother of all heresies.” He dubbed it *theologism*.¹⁴ *Theologism* is essentially the mistake of imbuing theological propositions with properly revelatory content. It is committing the dangerous error of “giving supernatural authority to scientific terms and propositions.”¹⁵ It is a system which applies “logical deduction to the inspired and largely symbolic utterances of prophecy” and “imposes its conclusions in the name both of revelation and of reason, as binding.”¹⁶ Tyrrell notes that what alone has supernatural authority

¹³ It is for this reason that this article deliberately focuses on the later writings of Tyrrell, especially as they are expressed in the essays of *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, which is not a monograph, but a series of articles and essays.

¹⁴ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla and Charybdis: Or the Old Theology and the New*. London, Longmans & Co., 1907, 350n. “Theologism” is the derogation of theology in the same way that “Sophism” is of Sophia. The essay in *Through Scylla*, “‘Theologism’—A Reply”, (pp. 308-354) was the English version of Tyrrell’s response, “Théologisme,” to a portion of the “Chronique de Théologie”, in: *Revue pratique d’apologétique* 4 (February 1, 1907) 542-550, by J. LEBRETON S.J. (1873-1956). Lebreton would respond to Tyrrell’s “Théologisme” with his own “Catholicisme.” For the exchange, see the *Revue pratique d’apologétique* 4 (July 15, 1907) 499-548.

¹⁵ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 324.

¹⁶ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 351.

and compels assent is God's revelation, not man's fallible attempt at systematizing it. Tyrrell sums it up pithily: "Theology is human. Revelation is divine."¹⁷ In short, the diagnosis of Neo-Scholasticism is a decadence caused by conflating revelation and theology. Tyrrell's prescription is an uncompromising separation of the two.

Revelation may have many characteristics, but "statement" or "proposition," according to Tyrrell, is not one of them.¹⁸ Revelation is the presence of God impressed upon the human person. The impressed, given, forced, inspired, and prophetic can neither be taught, nor possessed through an *auditus fidei*. Much less can it be arrived at discursively by the mind, or calculated and articulated scientifically. Therefore, revelation can neither be a teaching proposed to the mind from without, nor given in propositions. Rather, it is experiential. It is an element of a complex religious "experience made up of feelings and impulses and imaginings; which reverberates in every corner of the soul and leaves its impress everywhere; in the mind no less than in the heart and will."¹⁹ It is "an interior word of God in me addressed to my own Conscience;" it is "personal and incommunicable;" a "direct experience given to the soul by God" which "cannot be caused by external instruction."²⁰ It is "private and personal;"²¹

¹⁷ G. TYRRELL, *Medievalism: A Reply to Cardinal Mercier*. London, 1994, 129.

¹⁸ G. TYRRELL, "Revelation as Experience" by T.M. LOOME, "'Revelation as Experience': An Unpublished Lecture of George Tyrrell", in: *Heythrop Journal* 12/2 (1971), 117-149, p. 141. This essay was a reply to Hakluyt EGERTON (a penname for Arthur Boutwood), *Father Tyrrell's Modernism: An Expository Criticism of "Through Scylla and Charybdis" in an Open Letter to Mr. Athelstan Riley*. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909.

¹⁹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 282. Also, on the same page, revelation is, for Tyrrell, more of a "presentation;" theology is a "representation." The word "knowledge" can be used to describe both, but only in an analogical (i.e., different) way.

²⁰ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 316. There seems to be a tension here between Tyrrell's use of the term, "word" on the one hand, and his constant insistence that such an experience is "incommunicable" on the other. "Communication" obviously implies a content communicated. I think his qualification of "word" as "interior" connotes a real encounter with God, but an encounter whose content cannot be conceptualized without doing violence to the encounter itself. "Interior word" then, elicits a sort of pseudo-communication of God's presence.

²¹ G. TYRRELL, "Revelation as Experience" (cf. nt. 17), 131.

a “showing on the part of God, a seeing on the part of the receiver.”²² “Whether the Divine Spirit causes the revealed truth to spring up in our own minds, or throws a supernatural and revealing light from within on a truth presented to us from without. In both cases the revelation is from within, is personal, and incommunicable.”²³ In the words of Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009), revelation, for Tyrrell, was an “act of God with whom the believer came into mystical contact.”²⁴

Contra propositionalism, Tyrrell never fails to emphasize that “we experience a thing, not an idea”²⁵ and that “Divine truth is revealed, not as statement, but as a thing.”²⁶ We can summarize Tyrrell’s conception of religious experience by using a description of his own experience of revelation as,

the image of a sort of indwelling Christ-God—my conscience, my judge, my other and better self... This being, I know, is a construction of my understanding and imagination inspired by and explanatory of the Power within me that makes for righteousness and of whose real nature I have no idea...²⁷

Tyrrell’s own description makes clear that human access to the transcendent is only possible through “dim spiritual experience and its imaginative symbols.”²⁸

Theology, on the other hand, is the after-reflection on that experience—the subsequent intellectual explanation. For Tyrrell, it is the essay

²² G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 289.

²³ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 314-15.

²⁴ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology*, 2 volumes, II. New York, Sheed & Ward, 1968, 10. The original Dutch was published as *Openbaring en Theologie*, Theologische Peilingen, 1, Bilthoven, Nelissen, 1964. Cf. J.F. MEEHAN, *Dogmatic Relativism in the Theology of George Tyrrell (1861-1909)*, Excerpt from Dissertation, Rome, 1953, 22: “For Tyrrell revelation is the communication of a Spirit within man and that communication is not made in words; it is an experience felt and therefore outside the range of adequate description.”

²⁵ G. TYRRELL, “Revelation as Experience” (cf. nt. 17), 144.

²⁶ G. TYRRELL, “Revelation as Experience” (cf. nt. 17), 140.

²⁷ Letter to L.D. (1908) in M. PETRE (ed.), *George Tyrrell’s Letters*, London, 1920, 35.

²⁸ G. TYRRELL, *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, London, 1910, 196.

to translate the teachings of the Church into a systematic coherent whole. The goal here was to create a scientific unity.²⁹ Tyrrell, throughout the last decade of his life, progressively and relentlessly widened the gap between revelation and theology. As Gabriel Daly declares, “The notion of a revealed theology (and this included dogma) became the enemy which had to be fought to the death.”³⁰

Tyrrell’s separation of experience from its subsequent articulation came as a reaction to what he considered to be Roman Scholasticism’s erection of a false mediation that exalted ecclesiastical authority. Divine statements were communicated via God’s vice-regents on earth.³¹ Tyrrell’s reaction to this was a “Divine Immanence, with all its democratic consequences.”³² Divesting theological propositions of any revelatory quality and instead, insisting on their purely symbolic character, would both account for the limits of human language, and attenuate ecclesiastical authority by restricting revelation to that which is immanent in the conscience of the faithful—via experience.³³

Tyrrell describes a revelation which consists in “felt promptings and guidings of the finite by the infinite will, and *not in man’s spontaneous or reflex interpretations of those promptings.*” Tyrrell continues, however: “The spontaneous and inspired expressions of those experiences may loosely be called revelation. They are an element... of the total experience; but they are the human element.”³⁴ Here, we see how Tyrrell struggles to retain the normativity of apostolic utterances.

The consequences of this experiential conception of revelation are far-reaching with regard to Tyrrell’s understanding of doctrine. It leads

²⁹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 86.

³⁰ G. DALY, *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, 143.

³¹ G. DALY, *Transcendence and Immanence* (cf. nt. 29), 149; G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 360.

³² G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 374.

³³ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 371.

³⁴ G. TYRRELL, “Revelation as Experience” (cf. nt. 17), 136; 138.

Tyrrell to distinguish between primary and secondary dogmas.³⁵ Primary dogmas are those expressions and formulas which spontaneously proceed from a revelatory experience. They are faith's immediate, existential, and spontaneous expressions. Avery Dulles calls them "primitive formulas that are accepted and sanctioned by the heart."³⁶ Secondary dogmas, on the other hand, derive from primary dogmas. Secondary dogmas are the reflective, deliberate, and cognitive formulations of the more primary dogmas.

Doctrinal—and more particularly, Apostolic—utterances identifying Christ as the Messiah, the Logos, or the second Adam, are primary dogmas. They are prophetic and "not to be interpreted according to literal or surface value. They are cryptic and enigmatic."³⁷ Primary dogmas are called prophetic by Tyrrell because they attempt to communicate an inner vision or experience which alone is revelation.³⁸ They ought to be heeded with reverence as vestiges of "the imaginative impressions made by Christ on the mentality of an age that had known, seen, and touched him."³⁹

Secondary dogmas are theological formulations of those more primary dogmas, such as Jesus being *consubstantialis Patri*. These subsequent reflections (secondary dogmas) upon revelatory experience and their spontaneous expressions (primary dogmas) have as their function to protect apostolic revelation (the experience of the apostles) and the collective religious experience of Christians.

³⁵ This distinction between primary and secondary or derivative dogmas is made in his letter to Baron von Hügel on 10 February 1907. See M. PETRE, *George Tyrrell's Letters*, 56-61. See also J.I. BELLA, "Father Tyrrell's Dogmas", in: *Church History* 8 (December 1939), 321. While scholars approach Petre's edited works with caution due to potential modifications of Tyrrell's texts by Petre, the distinction drawn between primary and secondary dogmas is corroborated, as will be shown below, by his presentation of doctrine in *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, even if the distinction "primary" and "secondary" is not explicit. See, for example, *Through Scylla and Charybdis* (cf. nt. 13), 239-240; 278-279.

³⁶ A. DULLES, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for: A Theology of the Christian Faith*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, 103.

³⁷ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 329.

³⁸ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 289.

³⁹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 291.

Neither primary nor secondary dogmas are propositions of revealed truth. Tyrrell identifies revelation with the experience alone and hence, the words—both prophetic (primary) and theological (secondary)—are in no way chosen or guaranteed by God so as to make the utterances themselves revelatory. According to Schillebeeckx’s commentary, when the word-less, non-conceptual experience is spontaneously expressed, its expression is no longer guaranteed by divine testimony.⁴⁰ Much less, then, can the theological reflection upon this spontaneous expression be revelatory. All dogma, whether primary or secondary, has only—what Tyrrell calls—a protective infallibility, not scientific.⁴¹ For example, “The sun moves around the earth” is prophetic, not scientific. Dogmas—both primary and secondary— have the same symbolic nature. According to René Latourelle, the relationship between dogmas and primary revealed truth, for Tyrrell, “is not one of formula to objective and intellectual data defined, but one of interpretation of prophetic or apostolic experience.”⁴²

Substantiating this interpretation of Tyrrell’s conception of dogma—namely, as symbolic as opposed to representative—is his use of the word “prophetic.” Although it is clear that he uses the word “prophetic” more often than not to describe the primary dogmas, he also uses “prophetic” to describe doctrinal decisions arrived at by ecumenical councils, which are obviously deemed to be secondary dogmas.⁴³ Hence, for Tyrrell the hermeneutical key for conciliar dogmatic conclusions (secondary dogma) is the same as that of primary dogma: namely, a prophetic interpretation, rather than a “scientific” or “theological” one.

⁴⁰ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology*, II (cf. nt. 23), 10.

⁴¹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla*, (cf. nt. 13), 354. By “protective infallibility,” Tyrrell seems to be saying that a dogma is “without error” or at least does not mislead only when we understand it to have a protective function (of a religious experience), not a scientific or representative function (of a revealed reality). The use of the word “protective” in Tyrrell’s opus is ubiquitous. The most relevant can be found in *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 201; 241; 293-294; 330-334; 343-346.

⁴² R. LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation*. Cork, Mercier Press, 1968, 278.

⁴³ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 331.

Tyrrell also states that it would be scandalous if the Church were to give dogma a “proper” significance rather than a “protective” one. The many “obsolete” Jewish and Hellenic categories of thought that permeate dogma (both primary and secondary) have been retained, alleges Tyrrell, for their illustrative and protective value, not for their proper value, “be it philosophical, theological, or scientific.”⁴⁴ The Church’s secondary dogmas then, are not a developed body of theological truth, but more or less “accidental congeries of defensive propositions.”⁴⁵

Tyrrell then, exhorts the Church not to bind the believer’s faith to the “proper” theological, scientific, philosophical, or representative significance of her dogmatic utterances but merely to the “protective” prophetic significance. This conception of “protective significance,” for Tyrrell, is his attempt at walking the *via media* between doctrinal relativism and scepticism, on the one hand, and his personally dubbed *theologism* or dogmatism, on the other.⁴⁶ He allegedly avoids doctrinal relativism because he acknowledges certain doctrines to be either true or false, depending on their capacity to “protect” the Christian’s revelatory experience, the measure of which is the Apostolic primary dogmas. Tyrrell, however, avoids *theologism* because he refuses to give anything but a symbolic value (rather than a scientific infallibility) to *all* dogmas, whether primary or secondary.

Because dogmas are human expressions, symbols, and interpretations of supernatural experiences, and because they have only a protective function—rather than a clarifying or formulating function—the only way by which to judge the veracity of secondary dogmas, for Tyrrell, is by their religious fruits.⁴⁷ They must evoke religious feelings and be “an effect-

⁴⁴ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 331-332.

⁴⁵ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 332.

⁴⁶ For Tyrrell’s influences see A. VIDLER, *The Modernist Movement* (cf. nt. 11), 158-165.

⁴⁷ E.g., G. TYRRELL, *Lex Orandi or Prayer and Creed*. London, Longmans, Green, & Co., 1907, 169: “Hence it is, that certain concrete historical facts enter into our creed as matters of faith. Precisely as historical facts they concern the historian and must be criticized by his methods. But as matters of faith they must be determined by the

al guide to the spiritual life.”⁴⁸ If they fail in this regard, then they have ceased to retain their protective function of the Spirit of Christ which is encountered in revelatory experience. Tyrrell writes, “If you can live on the undeveloped germ, you may dispense with the developments, especially if they but puzzle and hinder you.”⁴⁹

In this way, Tyrrell refuses any final or absolute truth to theological propositions or formulas, even those formulas ecclesiastically sanctioned by an Ecumenical Council. Rather, they are protective, provisional, and—like primary dogmas—symbolic. Secondary dogmas are religiously adequate to the extent that they aid in the spiritual life; viewed scientifically, however, both primary and secondary dogmas are inadequate. Hence, “the visible Church (unlike the invisible) is but a means, a way, a creature, to be used where it helps, and left where it hinders.”⁵⁰

II. David Wells’s Argument From Experience

In the fifth chapter of *The Prophetic Theology of George Tyrrell*, David Wells attempts to vindicate the legitimacy of Tyrrell’s theology of revelation by highlighting its compatibility with the thinking manifested in *Dei verbum*. While one can detect three strands of argument that Wells employs in these fourteen pages (which can be identified as Biblical, magisterial, and experiential), the success of the former two ultimately depends on the success of his experiential argument. All other comparisons can be reduced to the comparison or analysis of experience and its relationship to revelation in both the theologies of Tyrrell and the Council. For this reason, I examine and critique Wells’s argument from experience.

criterion of faith, *i.e.* by their proved religious values as universally effectual of spiritual progress; as implications of the spirit of Christian charity and sanctity; as selected by the exigencies of the development of the inner life of the soul.”

⁴⁸ J. BELLA, “Father Tyrrell’s Dogmas” (cf. nt. 34), 324; A. VIDLER, *The Modernist Movement* (cf. nt. 11), 156.

⁴⁹ G. TYRRELL, *A Much Abused Letter*. London, 1906, 86.

⁵⁰ G. TYRRELL, *A Much Abused Letter* (cf. nt. 48), 86.

Instead of engaging directly with the question of revelation given experientially, Wells argues backwards, examining certain *roles and relationships* between Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium and, from these, deduces what the nature of revelation must be if these *roles and relationships* emerge in the Church. What allows him to do this are—what I consider to be—two highly dichotomous models assembled for the sake of his argument.

The first model describes the transmission of revelation when it is conceived experientially. When revelation is experiential, according to Wells, God unites men and women to himself; (1.1) tradition is the “residue” of this unitive encounter; (1.2) revelation and tradition are almost identical; (1.3) the magisterium has little part to play; and (1.4) the transmission is done by God. Wells’s second model conceives of revelation propositionally, such that (2.1) tradition is a body of truth handed on from one generation to the next; here, (2.2) revelation and tradition are sharply distinguished; (2.3) the magisterium has a large or exclusive part to play; and (2.4) the transmission is done by man.⁵¹

After presenting these models, Wells argues that elements of the first model are evident in *Dei verbum*. These elements include the Council’s “corrections” of the propositional model, reflected in the desire to reunite scripture and tradition so as to avoid a two-source theory, on the one hand,⁵² and the effort to limit the control of tradition by the Magisterium, on the other.⁵³ From this, Wells concludes that the first model, the experiential one, triumphed at Vatican II and with it, revelation as experience so conceived: “The parallel between Tyrrell’s thought and that of Vatican II on this question of tradition is remarkable. It can be explained, it would

⁵¹ WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 65.

⁵² This theory conceived of revelation as springing from “two sources,” Scripture and tradition. This element of Neo-Scholastic fundamental theology was abandoned by the Council, and replaced by a “one source” emphasis on the God who reveals himself through Jesus Christ.

⁵³ WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 65-66. He appeals to the well-known passage, *D.V.* no. 10, where the Council teaches that the magisterium is not above, but serves the word of God.

seem, only by a mutual acceptance of the view that religious experience is revelational.”⁵⁴

This “tacit agreement by the Council fathers,” according to Wells, is evidence enough to support the conclusions that “Tyrrell’s final position was less heterodox than the account of it in *Pascendi* would suggest and that, in fact, *his ideas were almost duplicated by the Council.*”⁵⁵

Unfortunately for Wells, this method of argumentation renders the parallels he draws between Tyrrell and *Dei verbum* only as accurate as the models he himself assembles. It is my contention that his models are much too simplistic. One only has to note elements of the second (the propositional) model which are present in *Dei verbum* in order to show that some aspects of each model do not necessarily follow from the constructed framework, and that a fluidity exists between the two. For example, the notion of a body of truth being handed on from one generation to the next (2.1) is present in *Dei verbum* no. 8. In no. 10, *Dei verbum* also presents the magisterium as having—not an exclusive or large role, but nevertheless—an essential and unique role in the transmission of revelation: namely that of authentic interpreter with authority (and hence, closely related to 2.3).

It seems that one can tread a more fruitful path forward than Wells’s approach. The precise relationship between *Dei verbum* and Tyrrell’s revelation theology has to do with the relationship between experience and concepts. Instead of constructing models and then identifying which is most coherent with *Dei verbum*, I believe a more methodical approach would be more illuminating; one, which was more historically sensitive to the diverse ways in which Catholic theology, in the years leading up to the Council (i) received Tyrrell’s thought on revelation and (ii) conceived of revelation. This way, we maximize the benefit that an examination of *Dei verbum* would otherwise give. For this reason, we turn to some Catholic reactions to Tyrrell.

What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of Tyrrellian reception in the twentieth century. These reactions are selected for

⁵⁴ WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 67.

⁵⁵ WELLS, *The Prophetic Theology* (cf. nt. 2), 65 (my emphasis).

their power to highlight the issues at stake in Catholic theologies of revelation before the Council, and with respect to Modernism.

III. Reactions to Tyrrell

In this section, I examine different responses to Tyrrell's understanding of revelation. The first two by Léonce de Grandmaison S.J. and Ambroise Gardeil O.P. are what would be considered today to be two "Neo-Scholastic" responses to Tyrrell. It should be said from the outset, however, that these reactions are from two figures who, contrary to many associated with twentieth-century Neo-Scholasticism, were deeply influential for that generation of theologians who are typically credited with the renewal of Catholic theology: Gardeil for Congar; Grandmaison (and Lebreton) for De Lubac.⁵⁶

A consideration of Schillebeeckx and Rahner on revelation and experience follows. These two figures are examined due to their closer proximity to the Council and, consequently, their temporal distance from the Modernist crisis.

1. *Grandmaison and Gardeil*

As readers of Tyrrell, both Grandmaison and Gardeil exhibit a striking combination of criticism and sympathy—even if this sympathy is hidden under an uncompromising rhetoric. They recognize the accusation leveled by Tyrrell against Scholasticism: it allegedly confuses and conflates two incommensurable discourses: the prophetic with the theological; expressive poetry with representative science.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Lebreton, to whom Tyrrell responded with his "Théologisme," was colleagues with the older, Grandmaison. For an expression of Henri de Lubac's reverence for them, see H. DE LUBAC, *Theology in History*. San Francisco 1996, 318-319, esp. the notes. For Yves Congar on Gardeil, see J. PUYO, *Jean Puyo interroge le Pere Congar: Une vie pour la vérité*. Paris, Le Centurion, 1975, 34-35; 70.

⁵⁷ L. DE GRANDMAISON, "Le développement du Dogme Chrétien", in: *Revue pratique d'apologétique* VI (1908), 5-33, 81-104, 401-436, 881-905, at 94-95; Cf. A. GAR-

In a series of essays dedicated to dogmatic development, Grandmaison engages with Tyrrell's thought, primarily from *Through Scylla and Charybdis*.⁵⁸ He accurately pinpoints the crux of the matter: for Tyrrell, doctrine is meaningless without internal revelation. It is for this reason that doctrine or instruction is only an *occasion*, and not a *cause*, of revelation and faith.⁵⁹ For Grandmaison, however, the formulas are not mere occasions but *causes* of faith.⁶⁰

The reason for this is that dogmatic formulae are ultimately the result of a divine communication. In other words, for Grandmaison, revelation entails dogmatic propositions.⁶¹

Grandmaison's response to Tyrrell amounts to defending the *possibility* of God communicating to creatures in this intelligible way. If it can be shown that this kind of communication on the part of God is possible, then the onus is on Tyrrell and others to depart from the traditional understanding of dogma.

In order to show that God can indeed communicate intelligibly to creatures (that is, conceptually), Grandmaison appeals—perhaps to the surprise of many today—to the *personal* nature of God.⁶² By this appeal,

DEIL, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, Paris, Cerf, 1932, 78-80. The first edition of this work was published in 1910.

⁵⁸ L. DE GRANDMAISON, "Le développement" VI (cf. nt. 51), 90-98. Grandmaison attacks Tyrrell vehemently in L. DE GRANDMAISON, "Jean-Adam Moehler. L'école catholique de Tubingue et les origines du modernisme", in: *Recherches de science religieuse* 10 (1919), 387-408, at 404-405.

⁵⁹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 306: "Revelation...can be occasioned, but it cannot be caused, by instruction." Cf. Romans 10:17.

⁶⁰ L. DE GRANDMAISON, "Le développement", in: *Revue pratique d'apologétique* V (1907) 521-542, 524. Cf. VI (cf. nt. 51), 96.

⁶¹ L. DE GRANDMAISON, "Le développement" VI (cf. nt. 51), 406: "Toutefois, c'est comme vérité, comme ensemble de jugements certains et définis communiqués par Dieu, que nous avons à envisager ici la révélation."

⁶² In this sense, Grandmaison puts paid to some contemporary descriptions and assessments of pre-conciliar revelation theory as "propositional" and, hence, inherently antagonistic towards "personalist" models of revelation. For Grandmaison, the two dimensions—propositional and personal—are not only reconcilable, but intrinsically connected; the propositional (*i.e.*, God "speaking") dimension presupposes an interpersonal relationship in which the communication happens.

Grandmaison emphasizes that God is indeed a Person—volitional and intellectual—whose creation is the basis for the analogical relationship between Creator and created. Given what natural theology or metaphysics can teach us about God, Grandmaison shows how it is possible and indeed the case that God communicates in a way that is commensurate with humans: namely, by speech. Grandmaison asks rhetorically, “Celui qui fait parler les hommes ne pourrait parler aux hommes?—En révélant, Dieu *parle*.”⁶³ For Grandmaison, an appeal to the inter-personal relationship between Creator and creature enhances the case for, and does not diminish, an understanding of revelation as speech.

In what ways does God speak then? According to Grandmaison, God speaks in two ways. The first way is what amounts to Tyrrell’s prophetic revelation. “C’est proprement le contact mystique, le goût de Dieu, la ‘saveur ineffable’.”⁶⁴

There is also, however, “la révélation proprement dite.” Grandmaison then goes on to explain the two stages of this revelation: presentation (of, say, images to the mind of the prophet) and judgment. Again, much of what Grandmaison describes in this presentation stage is similar to Tyrrell’s experiential revelation insofar as it concerns the psychological dimension of the prophet. The major difference is that this stage of “presentation” for Grandmaison, has not yet reached the heart of revelation. “But the essence of revelation is not this communication of images, this direct or indirect evocation, in the mind [esprit] of the prophet, of notions more or less defined. It [revelation] is above all communication of *truths*, and the truth—which feeds the soul and enriches it—consisting in distinct judgments, in affirmations.”⁶⁵ That this judgment includes lively impressions and a “psychological tension that expresses itself through sensible effects” is a natural consequence of embodied human persons (and not angels) being the subject of revelation.

⁶³ L. DE GRANDMAISON, “Le développement” VI (cf. nt. 51), 408.

⁶⁴ L. DE GRANDMAISON, “Le développement” VI (cf. nt. 51), 409.

⁶⁵ L. DE GRANDMAISON, “Le développement” VI (cf. nt. 51), 410.

What is significant to note about Grandmaison's conception of revelation here—and hence, his response to Tyrrell—is how he does *not* deny the psychological and experiential dimension of revelation, but in fact, retains it while also moving to the essence of revelation which, for Grandmaison, is God speaking. It is also important to note how someone who is unapologetic about the propositional nature of revelation is also very conscious of what the terminus of those propositions is: namely the nourishing of the spiritual life. In Grandmaison, we have a case-in-point of how a pre-conciliar theory of revelation—which many would label “propositionalist”—does not necessitate a reductionist understanding of faith as merely an assent to impersonal propositions that have no bearing on our salvation.

Only two years after Grandmaison's articles appeared in the *Revue pratique d'apologétique*, Ambroise Gardeil published what was considered by Chenu to be the “breviary” of the Saulchoir.⁶⁶ The work, *Le donné révélé et la théologie* sought, in response to Modernist tendencies, to substantiate the homogeneity between the data of revelation that is given by the prophets and Christ in Scripture, on the one hand, with the Church's subsequent dogmatic pronouncements, on the other.

Whilst engaging with *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, Gardeil considers Tyrrell to be the most representative and coherent of all figures who hold to what Gardeil refers to as a “mystical notion of revelation.”⁶⁷ One of Gardeil's chief criticisms is that understandings of revelation such as Tyrrell's crucially neglect the social and public character of revelation that makes revelation formally what it is: namely, instruction for the Church. And to support his claim, Gardeil draws the reader's attention to the parallels between Tyrrell's individualist understanding of revelation, on the one hand, and the object of St. Paul's critique in 1 Cor 14:1-9,18-19, on the other. There, St. Paul teaches that prophesying is greater than speaking in tongues because prophecy edifies the Church, whereas those who speak in

⁶⁶ M.-D. CHENU, *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*. Kain-la-Tombe, Cerf 1937, 40.

⁶⁷ A. GARDEIL, *Le donné révélé* (cf. nt. 51), 48: “La notion mystique de la révélation.” See also 78-82.

tongues edify only themselves. Prophecy, for St. Paul, brings “revelation, or knowledge,” or a “word of instruction.” Without the communication of an object valid for all, expressed with sufficient clarity revelation ceases to serve the purpose of facilitating an encounter between God and those who search for him.⁶⁸ For the prophetic experience to become a social norm, it must be communicable to others and, hence, become a fixed intellectual affirmation.

It is important to note that in Gardeil’s criticism of modernism, he does not deny the “interior grace” that is constitutive of the revelatory process. Here he concedes Tyrrell’s point. Gardeil simply insists that, despite it being an “interior grace,” revelation is also “social and not individual.”⁶⁹ And because only human affirmations are capable of the absolute and of communicating fixed values, prophetic utterances must take the form of human affirmation (that is, intellectual judgments), and not remain on the level of emotions, feelings, images, and impressions.

Gardeil further admits that certain theological manuals, because of their elementary (i.e., pedagogical) nature, have focused too much on maintaining the irreformable character of dogmatic formulations at the expense of treating the psychological processes that led to those formulations.⁷⁰ Gardeil acknowledges that there is indeed a psychological (and quite natural) process that facilitates a movement from a mental judgment, spurred by images etc., to an exterior formula. According to Gardeil, the same Light that impresses itself upon the interior directs the selection of the most fitting exterior verbal expression for the edification of the people. Hence, not only the interior experience, but the external expression is shot through with divine movement.⁷¹

Both Gardeil and Grandmaison acknowledge certain points of Tyrrell’s: the interior grace that is revelation, the feelings that are concomitant with it, and the lack of attention given to the subjective dimension of

⁶⁸ A. GARDEIL, *Le donné révélé* (cf. nt. 51), 49-53.

⁶⁹ A. GARDEIL, *Le donné révélé* (cf. nt. 51), 74.

⁷⁰ A. GARDEIL, *Le donné révélé* (cf. nt. 51), 71.

⁷¹ A. GARDEIL, *Le donné révélé* (cf. nt. 51), 72.

prophecy. While acknowledging these concerns in Tyrrell, both Gardeil and Grandmaison maintain over against him that revelation does not end with experience and that, with its terminus being public, revelation is intrinsically communicable, and hence, contains an essentially intellectual component.

Having surveyed some then-contemporary Scholastic reactions to Tyrrell, we now turn to assessments of Tyrrell's theology of revelation closer to the conciliar period.

2. Schillebeeckx and Rahner

The vindication of the cognitive and conceptual elements of revelation can also be found in the philosophical-theology of Edward Schillebeeckx O.P., whose *Revelation and Theology* (originally *Openbaring en theologie* published in 1964) explicitly refers to the Modernists and, in particular, Tyrrell.⁷² Here we find the similarities and differences between Tyrrell's and Schillebeeckx's thought on experience and its subsequent expression.

Schillebeeckx faithfully exposes Tyrrell's synthesis, noting the Modernist demand that more attention should be given to the "inward, subjective, non-conceptual aspect of the act of faith—that is, to religious experience," as the core of revelation.⁷³ He commends the Modernists, such as Tyrrell, for abiding by the "fundamental patristic and scholastic affirmation, thus formulated by Aquinas: 'Faith comes in principle by infusion.'" But, unlike the Modernists, Schillebeeckx is also able to stand by Aquinas's complementary statement: "But in respect of its [faith's] content it comes by listening and hearing."⁷⁴

⁷² For a consideration of a seminal shift in Schillebeeckx's theologizing, namely, his decision to start from human action instead of the theoretical and abstract, see P. KENNEDY, *Schillebeeckx*. London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1993, 3, 42-45. For biography, E. BORGMAN, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in his History*. London, Continuum, 2003.

⁷³ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 10.

⁷⁴ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 12. AQUINAS's quotation can be found in *In IV. Sent.*, d. 4, q. 2, sol. 3, ad 1.

What allows Schillebeeckx to abide by the second half of Aquinas's axiom is his developed understanding of the relationship between experience and concepts. Unlike Tyrrell, for whom the non-conceptual experience could never be conceptualized, Schillebeeckx insisted on a conceptual linguistic framework always accompanying any experience. Schillebeeckx, moreover, affirms the possibility and even the necessity of concepts. For Tyrrell, concepts are functional symbols which serve to evoke an experience within the believer. For Schillebeeckx, however, concepts are truly revelatory in that they *point* to the reality experienced. For Tyrrell, the conceptual explication of religious experience is radically changeable. Schillebeeckx diagnoses Tyrrell's interpretation of doctrine as the unorthodox attempt to separate faith's experiential aspect from its conceptual aspect.

Schillebeeckx, like Tyrrell, wanted to dispense with representational Scholasticism which held that the content of concepts is an exact reflection of reality without any reference to a human act which confers meaning.⁷⁵ For Schillebeeckx, while that which is conceived neither *grasps* reality nor is *possessed* by it, it nevertheless has the value of a definite reference to reality.⁷⁶

Ultimately, Schillebeeckx accepts that our journey toward salvation through dogma has to be satisfied with imperfect concepts that cannot convey the whole mystery.⁷⁷ And yet, each experience takes place within an unavoidable conceptual and linguistic framework. It is for this reason that Schillebeeckx finds it impossible to separate experience from the conceptual framework of faith.⁷⁸ Tyrrell, on the other hand, simply could not content himself with imperfect concepts. Consequently, for Tyrrell, dogmatic propositions, by virtue of their limited and imperfect concepts, are absolutely interchangeable and relative.

⁷⁵ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 6.

⁷⁶ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 21.

⁷⁷ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 25.

⁷⁸ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Revelation and Theology* II (cf. nt. 23), 20.

Although not reacting explicitly to Tyrrell's understanding of revelation, Karl Rahner S.J., member of the commission drafting *Dei verbum*, also presents a notion of religious experience that both differs from Tyrrell and would be in keeping with the trends leading up to, and embraced by, the Second Vatican Council.

Rahner's theology of revelation and dogma differs from Tyrrell's because he refuses to separate the experience from the subsequent reflection upon it, which in turn, alters the relationship between revelation, theology, and dogma. Key to Rahner's dialogical approach to revelation is the essential role which reflection—and the propositions articulating that reflection—play in the entire dynamic of revelatory experience. For Rahner and Tyrrell alike, knowledge acquired by experience is infinitely richer, simpler, and denser than any body of propositions could be. Moreover, even Tyrrell would agree with Rahner that knowledge never lacks a “certain measure of reflexive articulateness.”⁷⁹ Rahner and Tyrrell differ, however, in the limits they place on, and the status they give to, this reflexive articulation. For Tyrrell, the spontaneous expression, such as Thomas's “My Lord and my God,” is inspired, but *not revelational*. Rahner's dialogical revelation conceives of reflection on experience differently. For Rahner, the subsequent description of experience alters, so to speak, the reality described: “Every explication which has been successfully established in propositional form illuminates the original experience, allows it to grow to its proper stature, and becomes an intrinsic factor in the abiding life of this experience itself.”⁸⁰

Tyrrell claims that the prophetic propositions are unequal to the experience. Rahner, on the other hand, shrewdly distinguishes between a correct and imperfect proposition. He contends that the prophet “declares it correctly, that is without error (though imperfectly), with divine

⁷⁹ K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, 23 volumes, I. London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965, 64.

⁸⁰ K. RAHNER, *Investigations I* (cf. nt. 73), 66.

guidance and attestation.”⁸¹ Rahner further asserts that the saving reality can only be

gained through the faith that comes from hearing and speaks in human concepts and human propositions. Any attempts to transcend this divine message—in some ‘religious experience’...—so as to grasp this reality immediately and without reference to the message, is delusive and impossible, and must inevitably lead to a modernistic realization of Christianity.⁸²

The relevant characteristic of Rahner’s theology concerning experience is that articulation and reflection are *part* of the religious experience. As Delia Candelario writes, “Tyrrell tends to separate the verbal expression from the interior revelatory experience; Rahner, by contrast, stresses their unity.”⁸³ The consequence of this is a much more nuanced and comprehensive conception of religious experience that is not limited to “feelings and impulses” and the impressions that they leave.

What is significant about all of these theological reactions to Tyrrell (or Modernism more generally, with Rahner)—from the Scholastically-inclined Frenchmen to the German and Belgian—is their insistence that concepts are a necessary, and even constitutive, component of divine revelation, even if divine revelation cannot be reduced to concepts.

IV. The “Manualist” Conception of Revelation

As the alleged overcoming of “Neo-Scholasticism” is crucial to the narrative that vindicates Tyrrell, it would serve our purposes here to examine more closely in what exactly the Neo-Scholastic understanding of revelation consisted, relative to Modernist theories, such as Tyrrell’s.

⁸¹ Rahner in D. CANDELARIO, “George Tyrrell and Karl Rahner: A Dialogue on Revelation”, in: *Heythrop Journal* 50/1 (2009), 44-57 at 48. K. RAHNER, *Concise Theological Dictionary*. London, Burns & Oates, 1968, 419.

⁸² K. RAHNER, *Investigations* I (cf. nt. 73), 49. Also see D. CANDELARIO “George Tyrrell and Karl Rahner” (cf. nt. 75), 49-50.

⁸³ D. CANDELARIO, “George Tyrrell and Karl Rahner” (cf. nt. 75), 49.

The first point to consider before addressing the manualist definition of revelation are the general theological principles undergirding the manuals which are expressed in the Vatican Council's *Dei filius*, especially the second and third chapters on revelation and faith, respectively.⁸⁴ In these chapters, the council teaches that God revealed "himself and the eternal laws of his will" in a "supernatural way" [*supernaturali via*]. The reason for this revelation is humanity's elevated calling to a supernatural end [*ad finem supernaturalem*] that surpasses the "understanding of the human mind" [*humanae mentis intelligentiam omnino superant*]. Here we see the inherently intellectual character of revelation and its correlative, faith. Faith, furthermore, is a submission of both the "intellect and will" to God the revealer, whose revelation is contained in "the written books and unwritten traditions" delivered by Christ and the Spirit to the apostles. Significantly, this revelation is accompanied by "divine acts" [*facta scilicet divina*]. These divine acts—miracles and prophecies—are the "most certain signs of revelation." The Council references Mark 16:20, according to which the apostles preached, and God confirmed it with signs. Similarly, in 2 Peter 1:19, the apostles' eyewitness to his majesty made "the prophetic word more sure." Revelation clearly has intellectual content much of which can be written and preached (and otherwise transmitted by "traditions"). Divine acts, in *Dei filius* serve to confirm, substantiate, or testify to, the reality of this revelation as something divine and demanding adherence. As we shall see further down, perhaps the greatest achievement of *Dei verbum* is the way in which it treats divine acts not simply as a testimony of revelation, but as a medium through which God communicates himself.

The hallmark of Neo-Scholastic theology's understanding of revelation is its concise definition of revelation—practically ubiquitous in the most popular theological manuals of the twentieth century: revelation

⁸⁴ SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM VATICANUM I, Constitutio Dogmatica, *Dei filius*, ASS 5 [1869-70], 481-493. What follows is a summary of what is contained in two pages of *Dei filius* as found in N. P. TANNER (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 volumes, London, 1990, 806-807 [hereafter *Tanner*].

is, generally, the manifestation of something hidden⁸⁵ and, in the case of Christianity more precisely, revelation is the speech or word of God to humankind [*locutio Dei ad hominem*]. Putting the general and strict definitions side by side, revelation is a manifestation of God by way of *locutio*.⁸⁶

The most prominent scriptural basis for this Scholastic definition of revelation is Hebrews 1:1-2: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...” This scripture passage is echoed not only in the manuals, but also in Vatican I’s *Dei filius* and Vatican II’s *Dei verbum*.⁸⁷

For the Neo-Scholastics, speech can be attributed to God in two different, but related ways: by way of metaphorical analogy and proper analogy. If one refers to human speech as that which involves uttering sounds and making gestures, then speech is attributed to God only *metaphorically* (just as God is rock, *metaphorically* speaking). If, however, speech is understood as a manifestation of thought from one person to another, then this is attributed to God *properly* (just like God is good and

⁸⁵ For example, R. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *De Revelatione per Ecclesiam Catholicam Proposita*, 2 volumes, I, Rome, Ferrari, 1945, 130. In addition, we will be making constant reference to the following manuals or Neo-Scholastic treatises, from now on, simply by the author’s name: I. IUNG, “Revelation”, in: *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, XIII, Paris, 1937, cols. 2579-2618; A. TANQUEREY, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae Fundamental*, 3 volumes, I. A. VACANT – E. MANGENOT – E. AMANN (eds.), Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1959; R.S. TROMP, *De Revelatione Christiana*. Rome, Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1945; H. DIECKMANN, *De Revelatione Christiana. Tractatus philosophico-historici quos scripsit*. Freiburg, Herder, 1930. J.M. HERVÉ, *Manuale Theologiae Dogmaticae. Vol. 1. De Revelatione Christiana-De Ecclesia Christi-De fontibus Revelationis*. Paris, Berche et Pagis, 1957. Hereafter, each manual will be referenced only by author’s name (e.g., HERVÉ, 10).

⁸⁶ HERVÉ, 39: “*manifestationem Veritatis, homini a Deo factam per locutionem formalem.*” Cf. HERVÉ, 40n; GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, 135; DIECKMANN, 137; TROMP, 63.

For the presence of “locutio dei attestans” in the schema “de deposito fidei” see, B.J. CAHILL, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology (1960-1962): The Development and Responses to the Fourth Chapter of the Preparatory Schema De deposito Fidei*. Rome, Tesi Gregoriana, 51, 1999, 35-40.

⁸⁷ GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, 136; HERVÉ, 40; TANQUEREY, 127; IUNG, col. 2582. *Dei filius*, Ch.2 in *Tanner*, II, 806; *D.V.* no. 4. *Tanner*, II (cf. nt. 78), 972.

wise, *properly* speaking).⁸⁸ According to the Neo-Scholastics, while both are legitimate attributions for theological reflection, the proper attribution is what garners most theological weight. Revelation is formal divine speech [*locutio formalis*] manifesting supernatural mysteries (and natural truths of religion).⁸⁹

It is important here to note that the theological understanding of *locutio* is *not* equivalent to “articulated speech.” Angels, for example, also engage in *locutio*, but do not use words. *Locutio*, rather, is an act by which one’s mind is made manifest to another. By theological faith, Christians share in the knowledge and wisdom of God that has been revealed.⁹⁰ The ultimate end of *locutio* is seeing God face to face.⁹¹ In the meantime, however, humans see dimly (Cf. 1 Cor 13:12).

Along with this, it should be said that this understanding of *locutio* presupposes the personal nature of God. As we referred to Grandmaison above who made this same point, so too, a theologian like Sebastian Tromp echoes it: Revelation is a “manifestation of God *as a person to a person*.”⁹²

Practically all the Neo-Scholastics, in their presentation of the nature of *locutio Dei*, follow St. Thomas Aquinas in the latter’s distinction between internal and external speaking by God in *De Veritate* q. 18, a. 3. What is significant in this passage is that it introduces the importance of “signs” [*signa*] as the key media between God and the prophet, for in seeking to communicate something in speech, one does not present the thing itself, but some sign that represents it. Likewise, God communicates by various *signs*.⁹³ These signs consist, no doubt, of words, but also of images, and deeds. Hence, there is not only an *imaginative* (i.e., dreams,

⁸⁸ IUNG, col. 2583. Cf. HERVÉ, 40

⁸⁹ HERVÉ, 40: “locutio divina manifestans mysteria supernaturalia et veritates naturales religionis.” Cf. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, 135.

⁹⁰ HERVÉ, 40; DIECKMANN, 138; TROMP, 63. Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation* (cf. nt. 41), 207-208.

⁹¹ GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, 132-133; TANQUEREY, 128.

⁹² TROMP, 63: “est manifestatio Dei ut personae ad personam per propriam communicationem suae mentis.”

⁹³ Here, the relevant passages from AQUINAS are *STh* 2–2, q. 171–174.

visions, ecstasy) and *intellective* (i.e., illumination by the Holy Spirit) revelation, but there is also a *sensitive* revelation, that is exterior to the subject.⁹⁴ According to Aquinas, the sensible ways of prophesying involve both the verbal (such as voice conveyed to human hearing) and the visible: “a corporeal thing offered externally to the sight” such as the cloud that led the Jews in the desert. What is crucial here to note is that, according to the Neo-Scholastic scheme of things, “signs” of God *do not preclude visible things or historical events that are experienced*, even if Aquinas insists that voices are most expressive and hence, most excellent.⁹⁵

In sum, for the Neo-Scholastics, concepts are constitutive of revelation,⁹⁶ but more crucially for our purposes, it must be emphasized that the notion of *locutio*, can entail the theological notion of “event” or “deed” because these external signs are capable of issuing in the apprehension of an intelligible truth by the prophet.

That being said, while events are admitted to be revelatory, their meaning is not self-evident, and hence, require words to clarify them. Events become revelatory because their *meaning* is apprehended. At bottom of the Scholastic understanding of revelation is an anthropology that insists on the noble stature of human beings as endowed with an intellect, and in this way, having the potential to participate more deeply in the likeness of the personal (that is, intelligent) God who created them. An understanding of revelation according to which God engages only the feelings or senses would be, in this respect, impoverishing because it would not do justice to what humans are. For the Neo-Scholastics, God speaking to *intelligent creatures*, a speech or word that is considered formally as that

⁹⁴ GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, 144 and 156; HERVÉ, 42; TROMP, 63-64; IUNG, cols. 2586-2587; TANQUEREY, 126-127; DIECKMANN, 142-143; 147. In Tanquerey’s classification, the imaginative and intellective fall under the category of internal modes of prophecy, whereas the sensible [sensitive] falls under the category of the external.

⁹⁵ AQUINAS, *STh* 2–2, q. 174, a. 3, c.

⁹⁶ When the Scholastics admit the revelatory significance of events, it is only because therein are hidden mysteries that need words to declare them. In the preparatory stage of the Council, this concern to maintain the intellectual dimension of revelation had Tyrrell as one of its main targets. See B. J. CAHILL, *The Renewal of Revelation* (cf. nt. 80), 38-39.

which communicates something from one mind (God) to another (creatures) is the essence of revelation.

V. Experience and Speech in *Dei verbum*

A cursory reading of *Dei verbum* reveals that the document retains in its wording the intellectual and verbal elements of revelation: forms of words such as *verbum*, *locutio*, *alloquor*, *doctrina*, *praedicatio*, *audire*, *nuncium*, *praeconium* etc. are abundant. While *verbum* is more prevalent than *loquor*,⁹⁷ the verbal and, more essentially, *intelligent communication* between God and humanity is retained.⁹⁸

That *Dei verbum* struck a fresh chord at the Council in multiple ways, relative to the initial schema *De fontibus*, however, is beyond doubt. It is crucial to note, for example, that experiential language was deliberately included in the document, despite the concerns raised by the Council Fathers about its Modernist connotations,⁹⁹ But on the two occasions that the word *experire* appears in the document, neither case seems to substantiate a Tyrrellian understanding of revelation, if by Tyrrellian we mean that which is *distinctive* of Tyrrell's doctrine: revelation is experience and subsequent doctrine is incommensurate with it and hence, can be disposed of according to the extent to which it aids the spiritual life.

In *Dei verbum* no. 8, for example, experience appears in the context of unpacking the deposit of faith by an increased understanding of the "words and the realities"¹⁰⁰ that constitute the *depositum fidei*. To admit a

⁹⁷ For example, *Dei verbum*, 9. While one can understand why *locutio* might be used in reference to Scripture and *verbum* to tradition, there remains a sense in which the words can be basically synonymous. Hence we have in TANQUEREY, 127: "Revelatio est *Dei locutio* seu verbum." Also, IUNG, col. 2582: "Entre Dieu et l'homme la communication s'établit par la 'parole'. C'est le terme généralement employé par les théologiens quand ils étudient le concept de révélation et le mode par lequel une vérité est transmise à l'homme."

⁹⁸ In this regard, Latourelle's commentary is informative: "In defining revelation, the Council thus retains the analogy of word...God has *spoken* to humanity..." (R. LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation* [cf. nt. 41], 459).

⁹⁹ A. MAGGIOLINI, "Magisterial Teaching" (cf. nt. 9), 242.

¹⁰⁰ *Dei verbum*, in *Tanner II* (cf. nt. 78), 974

growth in the *understanding* of the deposit implies a theory of development that is precisely the kind that Tyrrell thinks impossible.¹⁰¹ Revelation, as experience and, hence, something incommensurable with, and separate from, subsequent doctrinal articulations, cannot develop for Tyrrell.

The second occasion in which experiential language appears is *Dei verbum* no. 14, which states that the Jews came to “learn by experience how God acts towards human beings” through God’s words and deeds.¹⁰² This, perhaps more than *Dei verbum* no. 8, is the passage most indicative of the major shift from *De fontibus* in terms of “experience” as it relates to revelation, for here, as reiterated elsewhere in the document, God reveals not only by words, but also by deeds, which are *experienced* and come prior to conceptual articulation. But even if the Jews are experiencing God’s deeds, they are still experiencing *in order to come to a deeper and clearer understanding [intelligere]* about God.¹⁰³

What remains the case, however, is that *Dei verbum* eschews any concise definition of revelation such as could be found in the theological manuals of the day (*i.e.*, *locutio Dei*) and instead, insists that God communicates not only truths but his very self (*Dei verbum*, no. 2) by way of the pairing “words and deeds.” Such an addition of deeds or “works of salvation” to God’s speech was not uncontested.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, God’s words, according to *Dei verbum*, “proclaim and clarify.” The deeds, in turn, “manifest and confirm the words.” In other words, the deeds retain a role of *testimony* that was common in the manualist tradition. (This is why most manuals would treat of Christ’s deeds, especially his miracles, *after* the exposition on revelation itself. These deeds would testify to the divine legateship of the speaker, who was Christ.) By the time of *Dei verbum*, theologians—especially Biblical scholars—be-

¹⁰¹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 4-12.

¹⁰² *Dei verbum*, in *Tanner II* (cf. nt. 78), 977.

¹⁰³ *Dei verbum*, 14: “ut Israel, quae divinae essent cum hominibus viae experiretur, easque, ipso Deo per os Prophetarum loquente, penitius et clarius in dies intelligeret atque latius in gentes exhiberet.”

¹⁰⁴ Tromp objected to this, claiming that it was novel relative to the theological tradition. See B.J. CAHILL, *The Renewal of Revelation* (cf. nt. 80), 209.

gan to recognize that the most important historical deeds of God (namely, Christ's miracles such as his healing and his resurrection) are seen to contain revelatory content; they are communicative. And hence, their role in revelation is not simply to confirm and legitimate the authority of Christ's words, which alone are revealing; these events, rather, actually *communicate* something, albeit, something that is not yet *précised*, and hence, in need of clarification.

Herein lies one of the great achievements of *Dei verbum*: events—or the works of God, especially in Christ—are in themselves revelatory or communicative (even if words serve to clarify their meaning). The fact that the Neo-Scholastic treatment of Christ's deeds heavily emphasized their character as *testimony* (rather than as a revelatory medium) meant that the concept, "locutio," used to define revelation in many manuals was consequently—but not necessarily—associated with a verbal, conceptual understanding of revelation. This understanding of revelation, in fact, did not do justice to the rich meaning of the word "locutio," and from the standpoint of *Dei verbum*, was not wrong, but incomplete.

That *Dei verbum* opted for "words and deeds" instead of remaining satisfied with "locutio" is a far cry from repudiating it.¹⁰⁵ What can explain this change is that *Dei verbum* is less concerned with nominal precision due to its more pastoral intention, and therefore, less technical approach. It is clear that the Scholastic penchant for isolating essences meant that *locutio*—*a concept that was broad enough to include external signs*, but de facto was not dwelt upon in that way—was enough to be an accurate definition of revelation as a manifestation of God to his (intelligent) creatures. In this sense, then, the Neo-Scholastic definition of rev-

¹⁰⁵ There is no evidence that *Dei verbum* completely abandoned all conceptions of propositional revelation. The silence of the document on one theme does not necessarily imply its rejection, but rather, can presuppose it. Numerous commentaries affirm this. R. VODERHOLZER, "Dogma and History: Henri de Lubac and the Retrieval of Historicity as a Key to Theological Renewal", in: *Communio (EN)* 28 (Winter 2001), 648-668, at 649; É. DE MOULINS-BEAUFORT, "Henri de Lubac: Reader of Dei Verbum", in: *Communio (EN)* 28 (Winter 2001), 669-694, at 674-675; G. TAVARD, "Commentary on *De Revelatione*", in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 3 (1966), 1-35, at 8.

elation as “locutio Dei” was not wrong but simply misleading because it neglected—in presenting with little prominence—the notion of historical event as one of the major signs by which God reveals not only truths, but his very self.

Congar’s Biblical and Scholastic Synthesis

Thus far, we have, in treating Gardeil and Grandmaison, noted the major criticisms of Tyrrell’s understanding of revelation by those contemporary with him. In briefly considering Rahner’s and Schillebeeckx’s reactions to modernism, we also could substantiate that even the theologians who are associated with what historians call the Conciliar “majority” found Tyrrell’s divorce of experience from subsequent expression to be problematic. Having then examined in what exactly the Neo-Scholastic understanding of revelation consists, we looked at *Dei verbum* as a whole, and observed that *Dei verbum*’s insistence on God’s revealing through both word and deed does not *prima facie* do harm to the Neo-Scholastic definition of revelation as *locutio Dei*.

To substantiate this claim that is based on an intra-textual analysis of *Dei verbum*, we now turn to one of Yves Congar’s conciliar contributions because it shows that, in the midst of the transition between *De fontibus* and *Dei verbum*, Congar himself sought to synthesize what he saw as two very different, but not incompatible tendencies: the Scholastic understanding of revelation as divine locution, and the Biblical understanding of revelation as saving event, or salvation history.¹⁰⁶ In relating this compatibility with a correct interpretation of *Dei verbum*, it behooves one to attend to the words of Congar, who himself was instrumental in the composition of it.

In his reflections on the Schema “De Revelatione” (the first schema after *De fontibus* was rejected), Congar sought to give an evaluative analysis of the current state of the schema to the French episcopate. There, Congar notes that then-contemporary theology is highly critical of an “intel-

¹⁰⁶ See also R. LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation* (cf. nt. 41), 212.

lectualiste-abstraite” conception of revelation characteristic of the schools. In wanting to move beyond this, however, Congar explicitly states: “C’est celle, non seulement d’une parole proprement dite—*locutio formalis*: idée qui n’est nullement à rejeter!”¹⁰⁷ Congar points out that the Biblical notion of Word is at once both dynamic *and* noetic. Some, writes Congar, wish to see revelation as holy history (*l’Histoire sainte*) and are wary of an intellectualist *locutio formalis* [or “parole proprement dite”].

To this, Congar responds defensively. While noting the concern not to reduce revelation to a series of propositions, Congar claims: “La notion thomiste de Révélation nous paraît toujours valable et apte à accueillir, tant le dévoilement que Dieu fait de son Dessein et de soi-même par ses actes, que la valeur dynamique de l’idée biblique de ‘Parole’.”

Congar continues,

La Révélation consiste en ceci que Dieu assume certaines réalités de notre monde—paroles, événements, comportements—et en fait le signe de ce qu’il veut nous communiquer. De ces signes, Dieu prend l’initiative et la responsabilité.¹⁰⁸

Congar is showing how the Scholastic use of “signs” is consonant with a dynamic, historical, and Biblical view of revelation. For the Scholastic understanding of sign, as we saw above, entails historical and external wonders or deeds. The efficacy of these signs, notes Congar, is guaranteed by God.

Nevertheless, while a sign that is an event or deed is capable of communicating something that God intends, it does so because words explain it. For this reason Congar writes,

Ainsi des gestes et des événements ou des séquences d’événements, aussi bien que des paroles proprement dites, reçoivent une valeur révélatrice du vouloir, de la pensée et de l’être de Dieu. La notion de ‘signe’ s’applique à tout cela. Cependant, si les faits suscités par Dieu ont en eux-

¹⁰⁷ Y. CONGAR, “Le Schema “De Revelatione””, in: *Études et Documents* 14 (11 Juillet 1963), 1-8, at 1.

¹⁰⁸ Y. CONGAR, “Le Schema” (cf. nt. 101), 2.

mêmes une valeur révélatrice, ils ne sont révélaux pour nous que si une parole précise leur sens.¹⁰⁹

Here again, it is evident that the deeds of God are revelatory insofar as their *meaning* is apprehended by the faithful. And while it might be the case that the meaning of certain deeds such as Christ's healings can begin to be apprehended with fewer words, other deeds, such as Christ's crucifixion, left by themselves, certainly would confound the human who encounters it.¹¹⁰

VI. Conclusion

Congar's analysis of the schema *De revelatione* in 1963 shows that, at least for him, it was the case that the Neo-Scholastic definition of revelation as *locutio formalis Dei* was consonant with the Biblical account of revelation that sought to show the revelatory significance of historical events.

What is key, here, is that for all the differences between *Dei verbum* and the manualist tradition that preceded it, the Constitution on Divine Revelation did not understand itself to be repudiating the essentially intellectual character of revelation as an intelligent communication from one person (God) to another (humanity). *Dei verbum's* inner unity of word and deed, then, can and should be interpreted as an enrichment—not a repudiation—of the Scholastic understanding of revelation.

The synthesis between *locutio* and the biblical notion of historical revelation found in Congar is relevant for contemporary theology because it makes it more difficult to see *Dei verbum* on this point as simply a compromise document. One can show that, in *Dei verbum*, the old and the new are not resting side-by-side, but are understood to be compatible, and indeed, integrated.

The trajectory of this integration between divine speech, on the one hand, and deeds, events, and other media which are *experienced* by

¹⁰⁹ Y. CONGAR, "Le Schema" (cf. nt. 101), 2.

¹¹⁰ R. LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation* (cf. nt. 41), 461.

individuals, already can be seen in the reactions of Grandmaison, Gardeil, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx to Tyrrell's reductionism. Tyrrell's theology of revelation was not endorsed by *Dei verbum* because (1) the understanding of revelation as God *speaking* was never abandoned and (2) *Dei verbum* understands words—articulated concepts—to be constitutive of divine revelation. At no point are they deemed to be reducible to second-order expressions that can be jettisoned according to the spiritual fruits that they may or may not bear. Hence, calling the parallel between Tyrrell and Vatican II's thought on revelation "remarkable"—as Wells does—is overdone. Perhaps he was a pioneer, but "prophet" seems a misnomer.

What is invaluable in Tyrrell is his insight into the experiential genesis of doctrinal formulae. While *Dei verbum* does not reduce or relativize dogma in the way that Tyrrell does, it affirms that historical revelation has experience as its foundation; not personal religious experience, but the experience of the apostles who, in the words of Tyrrell, "had known, seen, and touched him [Christ]."¹¹¹ Without this experiential dimension, one is left with the account of *Dei filius* which only offers us the locus of revelation today: written and unwritten traditions. Although of course not wrong, it is incomplete. Tyrrell fearlessly ventured forward in his reflections on religious experience at a time when historical criticism was in full swing. The achievement of *Dei verbum* lies in its highlighting the revelatory deeds of God which are experienced by God's people.

¹¹¹ G. TYRRELL, *Through Scylla* (cf. nt. 13), 291.