Seeking Vision: Revelation In

Contemporary Theology

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Abstract

This thesis explores revelation in the contemporary vistas of twentieth and
twenty first century theology through the trope of seeking vision. Revelation is
deemed to be unfolding within the dynamic interplay of both particular views and
wider global, ecological and technological influences. The influence of postmodernity
is also considered, inviting observation of the minority view, and the ‘other’ as
pertinent vantage points.

This thesis uses metaphors of sight and blindness, light and glory as indicative
of horizons and limits for revelation. The views of theologians and scholars like
Avery Dulles, Mary C. Grey, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Vladimir Lossky, John M.
Hull, Jean Luc Marion and Wesley Wildman, are explored to convey diversity in the
ways revelation can be described.

The thesis concludes by inviting the reader to pay attention and to continue to
seek vision as God is revealed now, and into the future.
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Introduction.

The opening words in the title of this thesis, *seeking vision* announce that its method will be exploratory and quest-like. For to be *seeking* is, by inference to recognise there is something that is worth finding and is, indeed drawing your attention. This thesis will not, however, be asserting a particular case or singular view so as to postulate a neat conclusion. Rather, in its effort to explore and *see* the landscape of current views as vistas of theology, it invites one to continue to look and see. Consequently the arena of the subject *revelation in contemporary theology* is broadened and kept open. In exploring this sense of seeking vision and by using the framing concept of seeing, the scope of the thesis will involve looking briefly through the lens of theories and ideas put forward in twentieth and twenty-first century theology. This thesis acknowledges that these theories and ideas as contemporary views are both in flux and contextual. The way of seeking vision as a guiding, fluid metaphor, includes both seeing and not seeing. The thesis will explore both the notion and experience of blindness and of seeing with clarity. Seeking vision as a guiding metaphor will be highlighted by other visual concepts that correlate with receiving revelation, such as illumination, recognition and insight.

The notion of *seeking* is particularly relevant within contemporary theology, as we are aware of both limits and horizons to our seeing and understanding God within a plurality of perspectives. Tony Kelly encapsulates this in his assertion that in these times “theology can be quite content… to join with other forms of thought that are less concerned to trumpet forth the certitude of their attainments and more
inclined to accept the humbler role of exploring the meanings with which the universe is illumined.\textsuperscript{1}

It is important to recognise that whenever we speak of revelation in theological parlance, we are speaking in a reflective voice. For in speaking about the experience of revelation we seek to express what we have experienced and beheld in a second order language. This second order language attempts to reflect and shape something that in essence cannot be contained, because it is only seen partially from within the perspective of our limited human viewpoints. We cannot hold revelation for it breaks out from our containers and carefully constructed forms into the partially glimpsed reality of mystery and anticipation. For revelation is necessarily about God who breaks forth from any human moulding as the source of all creative visioning. Yet, paradoxically at the same time we do need to express the encounter with God in our limited language and from our varied perspectives. This task of theology to engage with and seek vision for revelation is particularly relevant as theology engages with new voices and perspectives that affect the vision of God that may be revealed.

This emphasis on vision calls us to recognise that we are in an era in which the visual is predominant. As Thomas Staubli and Sylvia Schroer remind us, by drawing attention to the American scene (which I think is the enculturation pattern for many nations), “the average American spends eighteen years of her or his life in front of the television set. Video [and DVD] stores are replacing libraries.”\textsuperscript{2} The viewed world is colonising and, in a dramatic sense, replacing the world of aural experience. “Television and video at home, advertising billboards in the streets – our lives are

\textsuperscript{1} Tony Kelly, \textit{An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections}, (New Town, NSW: E. J. Dwyer, 1993), 40.

marked by constant visual over-stimulation.” As this contextual paradigm shift to the visual is now in the foreground and affects how we make meaning, I believe it is pertinent to the task of seeking vision for revelation. Thus attempting to see and experience God and to explore revelation within this visual milieu will also mean addressing the corresponding gazes by which we envisage God. These gazes include the views of different theologians and thinkers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This shift to the visual highlights the contextual appeal to the image as revelatory. There is a current resurgence of writing on theological aesthetics, which assert art as a potent medium for revelation. We have been alerted in the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries to another theological paradigm shift in how we see the world via the global lens. The social theorist Marshall McLuhan, asserted that the world is becoming “a global village.” This global impetus recognises an increased connectedness in terms of access to information due to increased technological means, particularly via the World Wide Web. These global connections interact with our individual contexts and ways of viewing reality and God within those contexts. They can be filters and lenses through which we gaze. Thus as theologians, we are alerted to both the global contexts and the individual contexts in which we live and name revelations of God. Contemporary shifts are particularly observed in the rise and increase of visual technologies and the corresponding effect on how we view and define an authentic revelation within this new expanding arena.

Consequently, we encounter both the complexity of, and the difficulties in, exploring the notion of revelation in a narrow sense that ignores the broader contemporary observable landscapes. These observable landscapes include tradition

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3 Staubli and Schroer, 103.
in its dynamic sense as active and unfolding (including the influence of new technology), our theoretical frameworks and constructs, the contextuality that embraces individual differences and contemporary factors such as interdisciplinary insights like the emergence of eco-theology. In this thesis I will explore briefly some of these factors and name them as dynamic and open to new possibilities. For by exploring different views and ways of seeing revelation in dialogue with a plurality of vantage points, the insights gained are expansive and fluid rather than closed and confined. The lenses through which we perceive are necessarily influenced by what we bring to our looking and seeking of vision. Clearly within the moving contexts of both pre- and postmodernity, there are many varied perspectives.

The emergence of postmodernity, which appears as an amalgam of theories and theorists in this last century who seek to critique modernity, presents scant references to revelation as a major theological theme. Rather there is the assertion of the fragmentation of knowledge with a resultant hermeneutic of suspicion towards any universal tendencies in how we view things. Within the emerging patterns and views that post-modern theorists assert, there are both advocates of revelation and also those like Karl Jaspers\(^5\) who oppose continuing the discussion on revelation as a given. Jaspers calls for a dismissal of the overarching questioning that pertains to any God hypothesis at all.

Contrary to the dismissal of the question of the primacy and existence of God \textit{per se}, or at least any semblance of God language encountered within the scope of the gazes of postmodernity, there is still openness to revelation as an idea. New theological vantage points are emerging in postmodern discourses that are invitations to explore the less visible cracks or spaces in order to obtain new vision. Thus we

become open to the possibility of finding the divine in the guise of what is deemed authentic and true, in ways and places not previously seen. Wesley Wildman asserts in a discussion referring to postmodernity’s propensity to deconstructionism, that it is by the deconstruction of past structural ways of knowing that “you learn to see the truth peeking through the cracks for if you focus on the cracks they get bigger… By not articulating a theory, or defending a constructive impulse you create a space and increase awareness.”

I believe that there is merit in this creating of space and in the invitation to find new ways of seeing and knowing in theology. This will enable the seeking of authentic vision and the enhancement of revelation’s scope into the future.

In choosing the emphasis on seeking, whilst acknowledging a loose analogy can be made with Anselm’s famous dictum on theology as “fides quaerens intellectum,” faith seeking understanding, seeking is also a term that is appropriate and continuous within theology’s tradition of seeking and addressing questions. Whilst seeking also allows us to explore options, recognising the plural realities of the contemporary milieu, Kelly pertinently argues in An Expanding Theology “…in this new context faith… continues to seek new understanding.” In our effort to explore and seek the new, we can engage creatively with vistas of theology in order to be seeking vision for revelation and be faithful to theology’s contemporary invitation.

The new vistas of theology to be considered include the elevation of context, and the renewal of the experience of the knower and scholar, coupled with the call to be attentive to “the other,” which David Tracy asserts as a key focus of

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6 From conversation with Professor Wesley Wildman in Boston, on 11th June, 2002.
8 Kelly, An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections, 3.
9 This turn to the other is discussed in David Tracy, “Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity” Theology Today 51, 1 (April 1994): 108.
postmodernity.\textsuperscript{10} This attention to the other is both challenging and pertinent to seeking vision for revelation within contemporary theology, because it is often only by shifting our focus or gaze to see or engage with the other that we can see further dimensions to the view at hand. The engagement with the other, whilst explored in different ways by contemporary theologians, widens the revelatory horizon, drawing us to engage with the more than we previously knew. Thus we are enabled to find new insights into the mystery we name as God in our human experience.

By seeking to pay attention to the other and expounding and expanding on metaphors associated with sight, I offer what can be described as a kaleidoscopic method of research. This kaleidoscopic method is a posture of gazing at patterns. It recognises that how you articulate the vision and enunciate it as revelatory, will depend on the way you are able to gaze and see what is before you. This method will be unfolding and often fragmentary, like the shifting panorama of the kaleidoscope. The viewing angle and the small window one sees through are reminiscent of the limitations of the way one can see or behold a revelation. So, too, the intent and ability of the viewer to look and see will always be in conjunction with many variables of light and shade, which recall our particular contexts and lived experience, both in external and internal referents. As to where and how revelation is discerned, the view may not be all in the eye of the beholder, but rather in the varied colours and facets that the fragments display. What may appear as a loosely formed pattern inevitably will be frequently changing and transient, resisting any attempt at permanence.

The kaleidoscope metaphor also is helpful in that a kaleidoscope, when used as a means of seeing, is dependent upon both external and internal referents. The

external but ambiguous referent is the look, or gaze that can see or perceive a pattern emerging in the loose fragments that are seen through the kaleidoscope’s lens of glass. What is seen appears as internal mirror-like shards that connect to form moving patterns as the frames are adjusted. The patterns, which come to light, are also dependent on the angle, scope and limitations of the observer and perceiver. These patterns and the referents are illuminated by the source that enables, which I shall name as the light that is God.

This light that is God is present, enabling us to see. It is, indeed, the a priori presence and ground for theology. Yet the perceiver can look to the light and see only within a secular gaze, as a mirror that reflects a reduced sphere of knowing, or alternately with ‘the eyes of faith’ can be enabled to see a “plane of glory that cuts across and indeed shapes all visibles,”11 infusing the present vista. In this way the activity of gazing is integrally linked with the activity of meaning–making. The gaze that is revelatory and facilitates the perception of the divine presence enables what, paradoxically, seemed invisible, to now become visible.

The experience of revelation as a sense of gazing at that which is made manifest and lit up with God’s presence is akin to the assertion of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins “that the world is charged with the grandeur of God.”12 Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his argument that the visible form points to, and inhabits the mystery of God expounds this allusion to the infused glory of God being visible in all of creation.13 So in this gaze the mystery of God is revealed, both in the form in which it is revealed and in the act of seeing the form. Encompassed in this notion is

also the possibility of the mystery of God who sees or gazes at primordial creation depicted in the first Creation narrative of Genesis and who pronounces its inherent character as “very good.” This gaze that sees and pronounces all creation as very good correlates with the gaze that sees and knows humanity as *Imago Dei.* Here male and female are seen as created to express the rich variety of the image, characteristics and patterning of God.

This gaze is one of a common likeness akin to a familial knowing, paradoxically without diminishing the sense of *Otherness* for God and humanity. In this vision of humanity as made and patterned in God’s image we are seen as intrinsically related to God. Thus in the “Matthean gospel imperative” we are called to declare and reveal, rather than hide and conceal, our diversely manifested light, in order to declare and reflect God’s light in our living of good works.

The *scope* of revelation discerned in the horizons, both human and the projected beyond, invites the question: is there any arena outside the light who is God, and whether from a human perspective, there is the possibility of a comprehensive gaze? This is why patterns or fragments depict a more adequate means of describing the moving nature of revelation. This is because necessarily we can only see from within our shifting and consequently limited perspectives, even in the times when our view or gaze seems remarkably clear. Revelation, as a criterion in theology, can appeal to mystery and the unseen. The exploration of the character of God depicted in both Scripture and experience asserts that there is a wider gaze that sees us and knows us; the gaze of the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

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14 Gen. 1: 11b.
15 This theological doctrine of *Imago Dei* is expounded from the Genesis narrative in Gen.1: 26-27 that asserts the creational identity of humanity as made in God’s image, with God being described in a plural sense. It has been a hallmark for theologians from the early church fathers like Irenaeus to contemporary times who explore and expand the implications of this divine envisioning metaphor.
16 Matt 5: 16.
My task in this thesis is first to describe some of the prevailing patterns amidst the crisis that the term *revelation* faces in its contemporary contextualities, both in its adversaries and its advocates. Secondly, my task is to see where the patterns are currently shifting and refocussing. I will begin in chapter one by looking at the work of Avery Dulles who provides a helpful starting point to exploring the broadening landscape and viewpoints of the twentieth century. I will then in chapter two, contrast this with the ideas and critique of Mary Grey. From here in chapter three I will explore and comment on the Biblical witness, including the statistically surprising priority given in both Testaments, to seeing, sight metaphors and the eye, as compared with the ear and hearing, as evidenced in the research of Thomas Staubli and Sylvia Schroer. Continuing to explore the use of visual terms as evocative of seeking vision for revelation, in chapter three I will proceed to look briefly at vision, light and glory as presented in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Vladimir Lossky.

From this basis in chapter four I will explore the insights and work of John M. Hull, a Biblical and religious scholar, who interprets the Biblical witness from his contextual experience of becoming physically blind. His work alerts us to the emerging contributions of disability theologies to seeking vision for revelation in contemporary theology. In chapter five I will explore some of the more recent views of revelation, including postmodern contributors, highlighting the postmodern desire to reject any bigger picture scenarios that encapsulate a grand scheme or meta-narrative. Finally, in chapter six I will consider some contemporary influences on theology’s horizons, such as the renewal of theological aesthetics as indicative of revelation and the rise of technology and cyberspace. In doing this I will also explore the human experience of God as portrayed by Wildman in his phenomenological framing of human intense religious experiences. These newer vistas and horizons
encompass both a variety of ways of seeing, and in offering newer viewing angles, interspersed with critiques of past knowing, are poignant for seeking vision for revelation.

The description of revelation within the work of postmodern philosopher Jean-Luc Marion as *saturated phenomena* provides a new and exciting critique to any attempt to objectify the mode of revelation. Marion claims that phenomena may be saturated with the presenting of God as Godself, in a way we can never fully grasp. Rather, we find the latent and abundant phenomenon, which looks at us and imposes itself on us. This is analogous to the simile that we are like the screen that receives the phenomena, which is present in its *excess*. This alternate view, whilst diminishing the pre-eminence given to the knowing subject, (as a legacy of the Kantian thesis of *revelation within the limits of reason alone*), instead puts primacy on a new paradigm where ordinary phenomena become transparent to the transcendent, and in being received transform the viewer into a witness of the reality that is beyond our capacity to grasp.

In the late twentieth century, the influential work, *Models of Revelation* 17 by Avery Dulles looked at different theories and theologians, categorising them within a schema of different models as ways of describing revelation. With the contribution of Dulles’s work of defining and sorting different viewpoints, coupled with the insights provided by contextual theology, it appears that there was and continues to be, no longer room for assertions that fail to recognise the positional stance, and biased gaze of the knower. Whilst acknowledging the significance of Dulles’s scholarship on the topic of revelation it has become apparent there have been many points of departure in theology away from the tendency to contain revelation within a series of defined

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models in a kind of schematic mapping. This has been my journey too, as a theologian who sees things less in terms of form alone and more in terms of unfolding and becoming and beholding, with a particular emphasis on the gaze of the knower and acknowledgement of their Sitz im Leben.

My views are strongly influenced by Process theology, which assumes the notion of things becoming, and being in flux, rather than being a fait accompli. Process theology and the assumption that things are unfinished, always becoming and dynamic, are part of the theological impetus into the future. In this view revelation, whilst remaining as a given a priori by God at a perceived moment in time, is at the same time unfolding within the complexities and dynamism of the historical canvas. This is because “the future is never known, always free and open. Until it decides itself, it has no reality and cannot be predicted even by God. Consequently revelation could never be inerrant.” Rather revelation is then present and continuous, open to further discernment and meaning making, because it is not yet fully revealed. Revelation can thus be described as in process.

The insights of John M. Hull, who became blind as an adult, are particular and revealing. He speaks from both his experience and scholarship as a poignant voice of the other in a contextual, disability theology, alerting us to rich possibilities for contemporary theology. His work invites one to notice and engage with the different perception and attend to the minority. Consequently, by focussing on the less dominant and less obvious views of revelation, we are led to engage with the preferential options of postmodernity. How these alternative views, (not unlike the liberation and feminist theologies that have emerged in these last decades), will

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19 New Dictionary of Theology, 535.
continue to influence the overall landscape of theological views and perspectives, is both a contemporary challenge, and a fruitful birthing that will be ongoing in its impact and life.

My seeking vision concerning revelation has involved conversations with two theologians in Great Britain and the USA, whose views embrace both their personal, vocational and religious heritage. I talked with them early in my research and these conversations acted as springboards and exemplars of diversity within the current canvases of theological parlance. The first conversation was with Professor Mary C. Grey, a Catholic feminist scholar whose theology recognises the global cries for justice, as well as theology’s prophetic role. She appeals to the need for seeing God in the experience of women, and in the vulnerable of this world. The second conversation was with Professor Wesley Wildman, a Protestant theologian, who favors a pragmatist theological approach which enables the meeting of science and theology, where God is the ground of being and being itself, in the theological terminology of Paul Tillich.” For Wildman, revelation can exist as observable within phenomenological categories, where God “is experienced, through nature and creation, (including the religious community) rather than in any supernatural or interventionist breakthrough from outside.”

Informed by these differing starting points and perspectives and the diversity of contemporary views in my reading concerning revelation, I attempt to draw attention to the endeavour of discerning God in the crisis. Here I use the word crisis as it is both indicative and also a way of identifying the contemporary issues that

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20 Mary Grey was Scholar in residence in Contemporary Theology 2002, Sarum College, Salisbury, England and Honorary Professor of the University of Wales, Lampeter, England.
21 Wesley Wildman is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics, Boston University, Boston, USA.
22 The notion of God as ground of being and being itself is in Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology vol. 1 Reason and Revelation, Being and God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 237-241ff.
23 From conversation with Professor Wesley Wildman, in Boston, on 11th June, 2002.
present both opportunities and problems for describing revelation. There is firstly a crisis in attempting any closed definition for the term *revelation*. This is particularly evident when describing revelation as the ways by which God is seen and known in the Biblical witness. The Bible speaks by means of varying genres, metaphors and symbols in order to depict how God reveals Godself. Consequently if we look for shared meaning there are many points of departure and disagreement concerning interpretation and how *revelation* is first observed and then described. My assumption is that what can be described will depend on both theological assertions and also where theologians are directing their gaze.

Secondly, attention must be paid to the experience of crisis as signalling a shift in perspective, and a refocusing on what is a possible way forward. This enables a *kairos*; an opportunity to experience revelation as a radically new insight. In this way revelation becomes a ‘lifting of the veil’ to see life differently. Indeed, I have found my own views being shaped and reshaped by being willing to engage with the differing perspectives of living theologians in contemporary times and so to see the breadth in the current theological landscape.

Thus, amidst the paradox of differing and complementary theological viewpoints, pertaining to seeing and not seeing God’s revelation, we are confronted with the seeking of vision as evoking possibility. For seeking vision can invite continuing exploration. It demands a new appreciation of the unknown that can never be fully recognised, as revelation is contained within the limits and scopes of our horizons. There is rich imagination to be gained here, when the crisis of revelation can lead people into a radically new possibility. Here the experience of crisis is one of facing a limit or limits, where previous knowledge becomes superfluous, and as something you cannot fully comprehend, as “the profound experience of divine
This experience of making meaning from a numinous encounter as a response to the revelation of God can invite and question previous ways of seeing and making meaning. Clearly this crisis invites a new shaping of the real. It is part of the theologian’s task to describe and seek vision in the imagination and scope of new horizons that are prompted by contemporary engagement with revelation both conceptually and experientially.

Contemporary theological exploration includes the impulse of crisis because there is not only a “shaking of the foundations” to borrow Tillich’s cry in the face of the twentieth century, but also because postmodernity challenges theology to frame new understandings and embrace new visions and insights. In contemporary theology’s engagement with postmodern invitations there is the call to discard modernist tendencies so as to see, then to name revelation in a non-foundationalist sense.

Here, too, the call of Paul Ricoeur encourages us to attempt to see things through the lens of a “second naïveté,” as if looking for the first time without the filters of our previous assumptions. This is to allow the revelatory experience (in whatever form it appears), to act as a catalyst enabling us to see and know afresh. It is akin to letting the observation become one of childlike discovery and wonder at what is revealed and seen. Kelly makes a similar appeal for new organic ways of seeing in theology. In his appeal for the expansion of the theological gaze into broader horizons, he suggests that when “such a search for meaning shares today’s ecological optic and unfolds within an expanding cosmological horizon, something new is

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beginning." We see that the call to be seeking vision and to discern God in the crisis is the call to reinvigorate revelation as the way of seeing the divine in our midst in the contemporary unfolding vistas. This can also be an opportunity to make a space for more light to be revealed. If the light seems to be still hidden, it will entail making time, for waiting and further discerning. Wherever our gaze is directed, a crisis can issue a call to pay further attention, to look again, to explore and continue to seek beyond the horizons of our current views. So the seeking of vision for revelation in contemporary theology enhances theology’s scope into the future.

27 Kelly, An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections, 2.
Chapter 1: Seeking Vision: Background Vistas

The comprehensive work of Avery Dulles provides a background to some of the more recent influences and ideas concerning revelation that will emerge in the following chapters. Dulles, in *Models of Revelation*, provides an overview of the collage of ideas and theories concerning revelation in the twentieth century. He categorises these ideas and conceptual frameworks as *models*, demonstrating a carefully thought out typology. He does this in order to identify the predominant historical and traditional understandings of revelation. Dulles also identifies the assumptions that underpinned the theological *facts* of revelation. Dulles notes that

Christian faith and theology, for nearly two thousand years, have been predicated on the conviction that God gave a permanently valid revelation concerning himself in biblical times—a revelation that deepened progressively with the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, until it reached its unsurpassable climax in Jesus the Christ. The Christian Church down through the centuries has been committed to this revelation, and has sought to propagate it, defend it, and explain its implications.

In describing revelation within Dulles’s model schema and its foundational assumption of the validity of revelation, it can be seen that the patterns and theories that emerge reveal both diversity of views and also diverse theological points of departure.

Dulles firstly names the advocates of his particular models and their way of seeing revelation. He then explores their diversity and points of departure by comparing them and naming the strengths of each model, before addressing the objections to each model. Finally he proposes his own more comprehensive model called *Symbolic Mediation*.

The differences identified by Dulles centre on particular assumptions about either the *how* of revelation, or what may be viewed as an orthodox way of delineating God in the equation. *God* can be construed here as either a supernatural

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29 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 3
Holy Other who breaks through into human experience, or as a connatural influencing force, either in the realm of ideas or knowing, or in the language of insight and awareness, but certainly humanly accessible. I contend that both the possibility of, and opposition to, the notion of God being an interventionist, will often separate theologians within the contemporary scene. Another point of departure is the multiplicity of ways that God becomes apparent via human and transcendent means.

Terence Penelhum, in *Problems of Religious Knowledge*, also identifies theological points of departure concerning revelation that centre around “what is revealed and over what form it [the revelation] takes.” By appealing to revelation as a means of the reception of religious knowledge, Penelhum asserts that “like proof, revelation is person relative, there has to be someone to whom that which is revealed is revealed.” Hence there are a variety of points of difference in describing revelation. Consequently, whether by form or by content, the experience of the reception of revelation varies significantly. It becomes essential that the individual’s subjective experience of that reality must be taken into account as a necessary influence as to how a person views and receives revelation.

Dulles, early in his work, names some of his subjective and contextual bias, in being both a Roman Catholic priest and a Professor of Theology. These are obviously lenses through which he views the scope of revelation. Consequently he sees himself as championing a certain orthodoxy, appealing to and dwelling within the Roman Catholic Church’s tradition and discipline. He argues that this is advantageous because, by negating the role of being a dispassionate observer, he is enabled to see that God reveals within the tradition of those practising and living within the faith.

they propound. Consequently, Dulles identifies himself as a theologian whose task is both to seek new understanding and also to expand upon traditional understandings.

The issue of context pertaining to self-identity will necessarily influence our way of seeing and seeking vision regarding revelation. Dulles draws on Michael Polanyi’s assertion that “the theologian does need the capacity to perceive, at least by empathy, what beliefs are implied in (or compatible or incompatible with) commitments to the tradition of the Church. Tradition, like the body and its organs, is best known in a subsidiary way by dwelling in it, rather than in a focal way, by looking at it.” Thus from the vantage point of dwelling within a body of traditional knowing, Dulles propounds his own new model of revelation whilst acknowledging the contributions of those who shared and formed part of earlier theological traditions and so inhabited the wider theological landscape.

When naming the opponents of the historical understanding of revelation in the twentieth century under the heading *Contemporary Difficulties Against Revelation*, Dulles is identifiably a theoretical theologian, who is in continuity with the Enlightenment tendency to describe and contain knowledge within known categories and schools of thought. These schools of thought are evidenced as Dulles names *Contemporary Difficulties Against Revelation*, and include disciplines like Philosophy, Linguistics, Epistemology, History, Psychology and Sociology, Biblical Studies and Christian Doctrine. Initially he named three of the then contemporary dialogue partners with revelation as *Philosophical Agnosticism, Linguistic Analysis* and *Modern Epistemology*. I will argue that although these disciplines identified by Dulles as pivotal in the twentieth century, they have now lessened and changed.

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Consequently they are of lesser relevance as we seek revelation in the twenty-first century and beyond.

First Dulles identified the influence of “Philosophical Agnosticism, [which]… continues to question the capacity of human reason to go beyond the phenomena of worldly experience… Revelation… is viewed as a myth or metaphor that cannot be taken literally.”34 Whilst philosophical agnosticism seemed important as an influence in the twentieth century, its influence appears diminished in the twenty-first century. This is because the emphasis on reason and reasoned proofs is now secondary to exploring and seeing things as in process. In this sense meaning becomes more fluid. The use of metaphor and myth as ways to describe revelation are still pertinent, because being polysemic, myth and metaphor offer an authentic means of describing and naming God.

Nevertheless the debates and skepticism around belief, faith and doubt concerning God’s revelation to humankind continue. Frank Rees addresses the necessary relationship of faith and doubt which belong together not as opposites, but as correlative. In his work Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith35 he suggests that receiving a revelation of God is part of the divine human conversation that embraces seeking by questioning and ongoing dialogue. Rees calls God the “conversationalist [who] encounters us in three distinct ways, which we might call movements within the divine human conversation.”36 Rees describes these as “inviting, exploring and gathering.”37 Thus it seems clear that the reception of revelation is part of an ongoing dialogue that enables further interaction from the initial encounter as part of a continuum in the dynamic divine human

34 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
36 Rees, Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith, 158.
37 Rees, Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith, 158.
conversation. Furthering this illustration of movements within the divine human conversation, Rees posits that “the questions God asks us can undermine the false certitudes humans build for themselves including certitudes about God.”\textsuperscript{38} The use of words that denote enquiry without certitude and the posture of seeking God are vital to revelation. In this way the seeking of vision and engaging with the human experience of God, who is both mystery revealed, and also beyond human certitudes and knowing, move us beyond limits of philosophical framing into the more prevalent theological category of the human experience of God.

When contemporary theologians appeal to the human experience of God, there is necessarily a continued appeal to mystery. As David Tracy argues “authentic religious experience on the testimony of those all consider clearly religious, seems to be some experience of the whole that is sensed as the self-manifestation of an undeniable power not one’s own and is articulated not in the language of certainty and clarity but of scandal and mystery.”\textsuperscript{39} Tracy expands on the experience of revelation viewing it as surrender to such a mystery that is not able to be accomplished by human effort. He contends this in his assertion that “when religious persons speak of the language of revelation, they mean that something has happened to them that they cannot accomplish as their own effort.”\textsuperscript{40} Thus seeking vision for revelation will, of necessity, mean acknowledging what we cannot clearly articulate as engaging with both human contingency and also the greater whole, which is sensed as God’s powerful presence.

Contrary to typical philosophical framing, (which may or may not include an assumption of God as normative for human knowing), Christian framing will

\textsuperscript{38} Rees, \textit{Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith}, 165.
\textsuperscript{40} Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism}, 173.
necessarily conceive the God who is revealed in and through the Trinity. As Migliore elaborates “… the starting point of inquiry for the Christian is not self-consciousness but awareness of the reality of God who is creator and redeemer of all things. Not “I think, therefore I am,” but “God is, therefore we are.”⁴¹ Thus according to Migliore, the dialogue partner of philosophy can be seen as of lesser influence, as theology’s particular awareness and assumptions of God as ultimate appear afresh beyond the confines of cognitive knowing.

Secondly, Dulles cites the burgeoning field of Linguistic Analysis, which “calls attention to the paradoxical and symbolic character of God-talk.”⁴² The question addressed here is “whether language about the divine can have a definite cognitive content such as was implied by the classical doctrine of revelation.”⁴³ Without entering the debate here about the cognitive content of language as it enunciates the classical doctrine of revelation, it is important to recognize that there are linguistic challenges and limitations pertaining to revelation. This attention to the challenges of linguistic analysis will be ongoing in contemporary discussions as to how we see and interpret revelation. It alerts us to the genesis and synthesis of post-structuralist linguistic interpretation with its insights and theories. The shaping contribution of George A. Lindbeck in his work The Nature of Doctrine is pertinent here. He argues that the grammar of our doctrine acts a stabilizer to our religious worldview, whilst allowing for a tremendous subjective variety of output. He illustrates his point in the simile, which suggests that “just as genetic codes or computer programs may remain identical even whilst producing startling different products depending on input and situation, so also is the case with the basic grammar of cultures, languages and religions. They remain constant while the products change [and] are the lenses by

⁴¹ Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 5.
⁴² Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
⁴³ Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
which human beings see and respond to their changing worlds.” 44 There has certainly
been growth in linguistic analysis in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with
placing emphasis on analogical thinking and the way in which metaphors and symbols
are the primary effective means to describe revelation. Yet it is apparent that rather
than linguistic analysis being a major continuing dialogue partner with revelation,
language constructs and linguistic analysis function more as an undertone,
highlighting the diversity of patterns, images and limits to the ways we name and
describe human experiences of God.

The third dialogue partner Dulles identifies is the challenge of “Modern
Epistemology, where assumptions centre on the understanding that “… all human
knowledge must in some sense be “acquired,” and must be subject to the conditions
and limitations of the human subject.”45 This means that revelatory knowledge and
the categories or forms by which we seek vision are all contingent on our subjective
processes of acquiring knowledge and information. Consequently our means of
understanding God is filtered through the secondary lenses of the diversity of human
verbal and nonverbal (including visual) expressions of the divine in human
experience. How we know and express revelation may in this epistemological arena
have less to do with God’s authoritative revealing and more to do with our “own
powers.”46

Seeking vision for revelation is linked here with human insight sought from an
experience of God. I believe that seeking vision is a valuable guiding metaphor here;
as such insight would be part of an unfolding process. Harry Williams asserts that …
“that the living reality of God can be apprehended only through one’s immediate

44 George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age
45 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
46 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
experience [and]… we cannot know God, without also knowing ourselves in truth and depth.”47 Clearly this corollary between the immediacy of the human experience of receiving a revelation of God and our making meaning of such an experience as expressing our authentic humanity, is indicative of the theological impetus to continue to seek vision and understanding. This comprehensive interchange will also have ongoing implications for identifying the prevailing limits and horizons of human ways of knowing God.

David Pailin, in his attention to the anthropological character of theology alerts us to the limitations of revelation in its reception via a verbal form, when he argues that “if … revelation is given in verbal form, its content will not only be limited by the vocabulary and grammar of the language used. What was said will be variously apprehended because of the open-textured character of language48 and the changing interpretative capacities of those who hear it.”49 This, “openness”50 he adds, will also apply to “sacred scriptures, which purport to record what has been revealed.”51 Words as secondary means to express human experiences of beholding God reveal the complexities of contexts, implicit values and meanings. Consequently the way we interpret or see things will of necessity have a dynamic nature. Furthermore, Pailin claims “reflection on revelation shows that its apprehension is conditioned by the intellectual structures of those to whom it is given.”52 Consequently a given revelation requires openness to be expressed and explored. Such exploration must acknowledge variance because the language produced is both stilted and limited, and also

47 Harry William’s thoughts are explored in Rees, Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith, 121-122.
49 Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 130.
50 Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 130.
51 Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 130.
52 Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 126.
corresponds to one’s capacities. The reception of revelation must also take into account difficulties in both confining and defining the experience, and also be cognizant of the fact that the vision is still unfolding.

On a more positive note, Lindbeck sees language not as a barrier, but as an expression of the desire to recover a deeper ecumenism. He views it as a means to embrace the continued call to “dream dreams and see visions,” envisaging the time “to imagine far more than was possible a mere generation ago…”[This includes the vision] “that Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and heirs of the Reformation will learn to read the Bible together as the Christ-centered guide for themselves and their communities.” Here it is envisaged that the way we see and make meaning of any phenomenon that is revelatory will recognize opportunities for barriers to be removed to enable a common vision and mutual sharing. At the same time we must recognize and acknowledge the limitations imposed by our differing language constructs and communal biased gazes.

Dulles continues by naming another contemporary difficulty the field of Empirical Psychology. Dulles claims that Empirical Psychology “has destroyed any naive confidence that visions and auditions, purportedly received by seers and prophets can be credited as coming from on high… Some authors surmise that revelation in an age of rational thought is nothing but a vestige of primitive mentality, in which the subconscious or trans-marginal regions of the psyche were more easily activated than they normally are today.” Nevertheless it can be argued that contrary to the assertion of revelatory reception being merely the vestiges of a more primitive mentality and thus unnecessary, there is still, among some empirically driven scientists, a faith perspective that embraces and appeals to the evidence of the unseen.

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54 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6-7.
This reasoned reclaiming of divine encounters as more than just primitive knowing, (despite some limitations of language available to capture the experience) is fruitful for theology as it pays attention to a more wholistic and broader scoping of where God can be seen and encountered.

Here it is relevant to consider the assertions of Hyung S. Choi who claims that

in light of our contemporary understanding of the world, the sharp demarcation between “natural” and “supernatural” is not tenable [and]…should now be discarded as an unjustified and an unfruitful category that stems from modern prejudice. The only valid demarcation may be the distinction between the seen (observable) and the unseen (unobservable) as they can be readily distinguished by our epistemic limits.55

In removing the demarcation between natural and supernatural, Choi argues “theology will be able to address again a fuller view of the world,”56 By engaging further with what is observable through science, Choi claims we can also be “exploring the knowledge of the possible rich texture of the unseen.”57 Choi’s plea is to expand our horizons and creative imaginations in order “to try to find a better and ever more adequate language… to describe in some limited way the things that may ultimately be indescribable. … For we know God is the ultimate reality.”58 This plea is to look beyond modernist prejudiced divisions in how we can see and know God and to seek a more wholistic vision, recognising that what can be seen and known is partial and unfolding.

It is also apparent that the advent of modern psychology signalled a further point of departure from what, in earlier centuries, was seen as integral to religious or spiritual frameworks and human experience, the realm of the psyche. Before the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the rise of secular psychology there was little

separation between natural and supernatural but rather the divine could be seen as pervasive in all of life.

Fifthly, in his schema of contemporary difficulties, Dulles names the challenges encountered when engaging with the assertions of Biblical Criticism [which] “has exposed the difficulty of attributing particular words and deeds to the divine agency. … [Any] attempted proofs of revelation from biblical miracles and prophecies have been abandoned by many scholars, who regard the accounts of such divine interventions as historically unreliable.”⁵⁹ Further to this, Dulles claims in addressing the contemporary difficulties posed by

_The History of Christian Doctrine_ [that this history] demonstrates that many beliefs formerly viewed as divinely revealed truths have been reclassified as human or even fallacious opinions…The question therefore arises whether doctrine still taught as divinely revealed - such as the virginal conception of Jesus, the Incarnation and the Resurrection-- may not in the course of time be set aside as myths and legends. … If the dividing line between revealed and non-revealed is in flux, the category of revelation itself appears questionable.⁶⁰

I think that this sort of debate as to what constitutes the realm of revelation is still vexed, for it will encompass the contexts of scholarly bias and communities of interpretation, and inevitably reveal trends and new insights. This questioning of revelation as a given in terms of the particularities of historical doctrinal validity necessarily will confine the seeking of vision for revelation to the truth claims that particular doctrines are historically inferior and no longer relevant when examined in the light of contemporary scholarship. Seeking vision for revelation will continue to address how one views both the possibilities, and also the limits, of our human horizons. This is inevitable as necessarily they describe the revealing of God through filters of new awareness and blurring of older visions.

⁵⁹ Dulles, _Models of Revelation_, 7.
⁶⁰ Dulles, _Models of Revelation_, 7.
Dulles, arguing for revelation of God as core and intrinsic to theology, addresses one of his antagonists in Karl Jaspers\(^{61}\) describing his views on God revealing as … “a mere cipher for transcendence…[and argues that] God cannot be said to speak and act in history except in a mythological sense.”\(^{62}\) Jaspers indeed doubts both the immediacy of revelation in any concrete sense and also the idea of an interventionist God. He preferred the notion of a cipher to describe the common mediated experience that “all over the world men hear and see and think in the suspended ambiguous ciphers of Transcendence – ciphers which are just a language, never God himself.”\(^{63}\) This difficulty of deciphering or naming revelation as an actual experience of the divine presence is part of a continuous dialogue amongst scholars who assert the Enlightenment notion that religion and revelation must always be viewed within the limits of reason alone (to use the Kantian schema). Consequently they are highly skeptical of the idea of divine intervention and the possibility of revelation. Jaspers expresses this in his confession, “I do not believe in revelation…\(^{64}\) I cannot but hold with Kant that if revelation were a reality it would be calamitous for man’s created freedom.”\(^{65}\) It must be recognized that those scholars who dismiss the assertions of any divine immediacy or engagement with God as transcendent mystery echo this view.

A further contemporary dialogue partner Dulles identifies is *Comparative Religion*, which “requires Christianity to relate itself to other religions which in some cases claim contrary revelations, and in other cases recognize no such thing as divine

Here it is clear that there is room for differences and dialogue on many fronts. Even the category of *Comparative Religion* seems of little threat to the notion of revelation, except perhaps in the huge variety of different religious interpretations it encompasses. What is the greater issue here is the presence and consequent ambiguities of the increasing plurality of belief systems, including those of other living faiths and of secular amalgams. Migliore urges convincingly “serious reflection on the relationship between Christian faith and other religions is one of the most important tasks facing the church and theology in the twenty-first century.” Here the invitation for theologians is to recognize the burgeoning horizons whilst also acknowledging their limits. They are challenged to find new ways of seeing that enable creativity and new visions for all people and the whole *oikomene*.

Dulles’ final dialogue partner is *Critical Sociology*, which he claims, “has exposed the ideological characteristic of belief systems. In many cases appeal to divine authority can be a hidden way of obtaining conformity and of suppressing doubt and dissent.” I propose here that a hermeneutic of suspicion is required. I think that theological questions should be invited as to how dominant ideologies can manipulate and reinforce the status quo through church and state authority structures. These structures and leadership can use divine authority for their own political advantages. I suggest that we have a surplus of reasons to view the revelation of God with some caution if used as the justification for the use of a divine *imprimatur* to control. Revelation in this context can be exploited in a way that includes and excludes those within a tradition or community.

After naming the aforementioned eight dialogue partners, Dulles continues by outlining a schema of models of revelation. These models include *Revelation as* 

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Doctrine, where revelation is seen “in clear propositional statements... attributed to God as authoritative teacher...”\(^{69}\) Clearly this could be interpreted as what God has said in terms of statements that become teaching maxims. The assumptions made by Dulles surrounding revelation as contained within authoritative statements appear somewhat problematic in their appeal to a clear, concise, almost dictatorial means of revelation, largely limited to the spoken or written word. In this model the human element of dialogue and interpretation is not adequately addressed. This model also implies a fairly monochrome, exclusive perception of the God who reveals, a God who is portrayed here as predominantly a verbal communicator.

Secondly Dulles refers to the model, Revelation as History, where this type of theory assumes that “God reveals... primarily in his great deeds, especially those which form the major themes of biblical history.”\(^{70}\) This can be summarized as what God has done, and achieved, through the arena of human history. Here revelation is largely perceived through a particular historical lens that sees the primary medium for revelation as historical accounts, which witness to the activity of God. This begs the question that if both the limited arena and horizon for revelation are confined to human history, how can this model take into account the so called hidden curriculum and matrix, where revelation is seen to critique human history? Consideration of the revelation received and proclaimed through the sight and voice of the prophets, who sought to address the injustices and the limited vision of God’s people throughout the centuries, surely indicate the limited gaze of this model.

It is clear that if revelation is only to be received or seen within the confines of a narrow definition of church and world, we are faced with a considerable dilemma if the church displays a lack of engagement with significant world issues such as the

\(^{69}\) Dulles, Models of Revelation, 27.  
\(^{70}\) Dulles, Models of Revelation, 27.
escalating ecological crises, (which are often the direct result of human activities).

Thus it becomes increasingly apparent that we need a revelation that is both salvific and broad. Revelation that both embraces the God who is revealed and is concurrently concerned for the welfare of all is seen preeminently for Christians in Jesus the Christ. In the Scriptural witness to Christ revealed in John chapter three, verses sixteen and seventeen, we see manifested the intent of God who both loved the world and entered the human en-fleshed experience. This God, revealed by Jesus the Christ, sought, and continues to seek salvation, not destruction. The revelation of God as the Spirit who is continually present in all living things highlights that God’s presence is seen in the small as much as the large. This idea of God in all things and beyond all things is depicted in the theological notion of panentheism, God in all and beyond all created things. The theological scope of panentheism is extremely broad in its definition and implied horizons for seeking vision, encompassing both the macrocosm and microcosm of human existence.

Thirdly, Dulles refers to the model Revelation as Inner Experience. This “is a privileged interior experience of grace or communion with God.”71 This model places priority on the receiving subject and emphasizes revelation as centred on inner knowing. In its narrow scope this model is open to the criticism of a biased pietistic, individualistic subjectivity. Whilst adhering to the theological criterion of experience, which is an essential lens for revelation, this model necessarily neglects both communal and wider sources as the actuality in which revelation can be seen and known.

An attempt to be more inclusive and combine subject and object can be recognized in Dulles’s next outlined model, Revelation as Dialectical Presence,

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71 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 27.
[where the] utterly transcendent, God encounters the human subject… by means of a word in which faith recognizes him to be present. The word of God simultaneously reveals and conceals the divine presence.” 72 This model, whilst promoting God’s communication in revelation as dialectical by means of a word announced and present, puts primacy on ‘the word of God.’ If the ‘word of God’ here is an expansive concept that can include varied means and mediums for divine communication, including the visual, as well as other sensate experiences, then it can encompass the complexity of activities and contexts whereby humans encounter God.

Counter to any interventionist notion of God engaging with the human subject directly, Dulles’ fifth model, Revelation as New Awareness claims “revelation takes place as an expansion of consciousness or shift in perspective when people join in the movements of secular history. God… is not a direct object of experience, but is mysteriously present as the transcendent dimension of human engagement in creative tasks.” 73 This model could be interpreted as revelation a posteriori, or as consequential, coming from the more reflective stance of someone who whilst engaged in a task suddenly sees things in a stronger light, with a divine clarity. It seems that revelation here has an effective outcome. It is known by a new awareness that leads to a gaining of greater perception. So that what is seen is not perceived impartially or from a disengaged perspective. The link here with revelation as connected with great discoveries and insights, say in the scientific field, expresses a more expansive definition of revelation, one that is effective and manifest in cases where people’s vision is lifted to that which is beyond their immediate knowledge and awareness.

72 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 28.
73 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 28.
From Dulles perspective, it is now apparent that each of these summarized models has its merits and limitations. From this position Dulles’ theological option was to create a new construct, “Symbolic Mediation.” He sees that each of the aforementioned five models, whether considered separately or in some combination, lack a comprehensiveness that would allow the dynamic clarity that symbols could bring to the scope of revelatory discourse and disclosure. Symbols, he argues, enable fuller engagement with, and greater clarity in the expression of, the paradoxical nature of revelation. In drawing on the efficacy of symbol as a way of mediating and drawing us into the reality of God’s revelation, Dulles acknowledges his debt to other theologians including Paul Tillich.

From Tillich, Dulles retrieves a developed schema and insights that draw on depth psychology, using the potential of the concept of the symbol to unlock multiple meanings. As Tillich describes it, a symbol “opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us… [and] also unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality.” Further to this, the notion of the symbol, participates in the reality, it represents. This is opposed to the sign, which is limited in that it can only point to the reality it represents from an interpretative and approximating distance. The symbol acts in an illuminating way, as it is open-ended.

According to Dorothy Lee, in her expansion of Tillich’s schema, “symbols point beyond themselves to what cannot be directly grasped, while participating in that same transcendent reality.” Further to this Lee argues, “a symbol has truth, it is adequate to the revelation it expresses. A symbol is true, it is the expression of a true

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74 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 131-154.  
Thus the symbol is a multifaceted icon “pregnant with a plenitude of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated.” The symbol is necessarily expansive and pregnant with interpretive possibility. Thus, the use of symbol in revelation allows for countless views and ways to observe and picture the human-divine encounter.

Revelation’s patterns can be viewed in various modes of symbolic communication. These modes of symbolic communication include the Biblical narratives and other literary genres, and “other forms such as analogy, myth, metaphor, allegory, parable and ritual.” Revelation also moves beyond these forms to include “cosmic or natural symbols…personal and historic symbols and artistic symbols.” These symbols are polysemic; they convey many meanings. Here is the paradox of knowledge expressed through revelation. It is both simultaneously concealed, and simultaneously revealed in both the way God is seen and from human perspectives. There is never a complete picture presented but a mystery is unveiled, seen in colours, patterns and forms, emerging through multivalent expressive symbols.

Tillich insists on the mysterious nature of revelation. “In being revealed [the transcendent] does not cease to remain concealed, since its secrecy pertains to its very essence; and when it is revealed it is so precisely as that which is hidden.” This orthodox understanding of revelation embraces the notions of simultaneous revealing and concealing, for God is never fully known and therefore we can only glimpse or see partial reality or traces of God’s presence.

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78 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 132.
79 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 133.
80 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 133.
In propounding his model *Symbolic Mediation*, Dulles acknowledges his debt to Karl Rahner apparent in his exploration of the way symbols mediate and express the paradox of revelation. Rahner is cited by Dulles as expressing this paradox by the term, “mediated immediacy.”\(^{82}\) “What is immediate for Rahner is the self-communication of the divine: the experience of grace, but the inner presence of God cannot be known and cannot achieve itself except in so far as it becomes mediated, or mediates itself in created symbols.”\(^{83}\) Dulles notes that in “Rahnerian terminology, transcendental revelation and categorical revelation are not two separate entities but two dimensions of a single complex reality.”\(^{84}\) Attempts such as this to integrate the immanent and transcendent as a living paradox that is not a contradiction but rather an assertion of the wholistic and interconnected reality of God as experienced by humanity, are a hallmark of the contemporary theologians’ attempts to overcome dualisms.

It is apparent that the legacy of such dualistic discourse emerging from Greek philosophers and persisting in philosophy and theology in many guises over previous centuries, has often created artificial constructs that set things like *matter* and *spirit*, or *flesh* and *spirit*, as separate and over against the other. However, in recent scholarship within twentieth and twenty first centuries, this dichotomy has been critiqued for it can be both inadequate to more wholistic ways of knowing and seeing (evidenced in the Scriptures by the incarnation) and can limit the perceived arena of God’s revelation.

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\(^{83}\) Karl Rahner, in Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 148-149.
This critique of dichotomies is relevant as Dulles explores the nature of Christ as “The Summit of revelation.” Dulles believes that by using the language of symbolic revelation, we can overcome the artificial dichotomies of the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of history, or the Christ of Scripture and the Christ of dogma. Again referring to Rahner, Dulles illustrates the way symbol can bridge these theological divides. For “in Christ, therefore, the manifestation and that which is manifested ontologically coincide… both the symbol and the incarnation… who communicates himself by becoming fully human without ceasing to be divine.” He contends further, “the classical doctrine of the “two natures” spells out in more conceptual language the implications of the symbolic character of Christ as God’s concrete revelation in the flesh.” Consequently it can be concluded that there is an integrating, corresponding power of the symbol to manifest, (even though mediated), the revelation of God in a myriad of ways, images and patterning. Yet pre-eminently for the Christian, God is revealed ‘in Christ,’ God made flesh, seen through the lenses of our own traditions and theological framing.

Dulles also argues for the certainty of revelation being seen and witnessed to in the community of faith. The Church makes visible the revelation of God’s presence, particularly in its liturgy, as the performative utterance and realisation of the Word made manifest. [For] “The anticipatory conceptions used in dogmatic speech are lenses through which we glimpse the transcendent,” … [For]… a sacrament …[is] … a visible presence of the invisible Christ, who communicates his life by means of it.” In equating the church with Christ, Dulles cites Rene Latourelle’s assertion: “As Christ appears as a theophany, so, … the church appears a

85 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 155.
86 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 158.
87 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 159.
88 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 227
89 Dulles, Models of Revelation, 227.
Nevertheless Dulles aptly points out that this parallelism is dangerous if seen as one of equivalence. Rather, he claims it is only analogous as Christ is one person, and the church is many persons. Here we are disclosing the mystery of faith in the *Body of Christ* as a metaphor, and not one of a mirrored likeness. We are also engaging the usefulness of metaphor and metaphorical analogous discourse, which is another hallmark of contemporary theological parlance. This is particularly seen in the work of David Tracy. Tracy differentiates between “… picture or (scale) models or disclosure (analogue) models.” Disclosure models in theology are attempts to describe analogically, “a transcendental moment [where] the true conditions of the possibility of that experience’s linguistic [is via] metaphors and concepts and non-linguistic images.” Dulles, in his usage of symbol, is also drawing on recognition of the limits of language unless the language can convey images or multiple realities. Thus symbol and analogous discourse can expand the current view rather than reduce it. In this way it can enhance the sense of participatory and correlative knowing.

In conclusion it can be seen that Dulles’s scholarship is a thorough attempt to delineate a systematic approach to the question of revelation and to address the twentieth century’s questions and assertions about revelation. Dulles contends that by using models it enables “people to get beyond the limitations of their own particular outlook, and to enter into fruitful conversation with others, having a fundamentally different mentality.” Through his construction of *models* and description of trends he speaks with the theological framing that is both analytical and willing to express the

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interplay of varying ways to view revelation and discern God’s revealing in human experience. Consequently he embraces the paradigm of the knowing subject that can, to some extent, analyse the objective reality. Dulles’ preference for models as indicative frameworks to represent the claims of revelation can be seen to be in continuity with the Enlightenment need to contain and express knowledge in measurable forms. Nevertheless the central limitations of this approach must be acknowledged. Dulles, acknowledges some limitations in *Models of the Church*, where exploring the use of models he says that “the models used in theology are not scale reproductions...[and] models are necessarily inadequate...they illumine certain phenomena but not others.”

Thus, this framework whilst seeking to acknowledge the limits of our horizons will necessarily be partial and contain knowledge, rather than recognize fluidity and the dynamic process in seeking significance of revelation.

Furthermore Dulles is limited by the orthodox theological assumption of seeing and naming revelation as a *given*. A critique of this developed by other contemporary theologians like Ray Hart. Hart insists that “there is no absolutely independent, ahistorical term or constant that counts in or as the revelatory given.”

Moreover Hart’s asserts that revelation can be perceived of in terms of “paradigmatic events... [where] all older images are placed in crisis... for the paradigmatic event is the spawning spring for the reconfiguration of images.” Clearly revelation here is the invitation to see things afresh with new imagining.

In conclusion, Dulles assertion of both the givenness of revelation and also the variety of ways that this is expressed is certainly persuasive. Nevertheless it is clearly evident that there are points of departure for many contemporary theologians

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in both the givenness of revelation and how that revelation should be conceptualized. These theologians will continue to facilitate new ways of seeking vision for revelation for theology into the future. All of the dialogue partners identified by Dulles seem less pertinent when viewed in the light of the emergence of postmodernity together with the contemporary challenges of increasing social diversity and plurality. However, I believe the shaping work of Dulles is a valid and helpful starting point for contemporary theologians who continue to seek vision through a variety of lenses and name revelation as worth claiming in their engagement with contemporary and future horizons.
Chapter 2: Seeking Vision: Revelation in Contemporary Feminist Theologies

Mary Grey speaks as a theologian within the context of emerging feminist theologies of the twentieth and twenty-first century that critique the dominance of patriarchy,\textsuperscript{98} and the authoritarian misuse of power. Her theology includes a critique of structures that fail to address injustices and are systemic in their exclusion of the minority voices both of women, and also the poor and marginalized. Grey’s gaze identifies the arena for revelation being both as wide as creation and the broad range of religious traditions, and also as particular as the seemingly infinite variety of human experience. This inclusiveness concurs with Mary Catherine Hilkert’s claim that “feminist theologians… rely on multiple sources of revelation drawn from the religious experience of traditions beyond Christianity, and from human experience.”\textsuperscript{99}

This attention to human experience, particularly that of the marginalized, coupled with the wider creational vista of revelation, enhances the scope and focus in seeking vision for revelation in contemporary theology.

Grey sees revelation as a dynamic that is linked with working for \textit{justice} and \textit{truth}. Truth here is not merely truth as an ideal, concept or construct but “rather truth in action that works.”\textsuperscript{100} Her theological views emphasize \textit{orthopraxis}, the call to live rightly and treat others in the light of God’s revealing presence. This call to live rightly can be asserted as an imperative towards exhibiting a lifestyle that connects with God, which then becomes apparent in people’s experience. Consequently such active witness affects the world and reveals God’s presence. It follows that revelation encompasses both the preceding action of God that initiates and invites the ethic of

\textsuperscript{98} The dominance of patriarchy is evident within traditions of Church that have excluded the voices of women in leadership and vocation.


\textsuperscript{100} From conversation with Mary Grey in Sarum College, Salisbury, England, July 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2002.
living differently, as well as the resultant embodied ethic that continues to witness and bear fruit to the revealing presence of God.

For Grey there is little merit in restricting the notion of revelation and the Christian God who reveals to the realm of theories and ideologies. Rather, Grey claims we should see revelation in terms of its fruit, which is “that people flourish and there is a sustaining of right relationships that include the pain of broken relationships.”

Revelation here is seen and known a posteriori, the result of living out the praxis of justice in the world. Grey’s underlying assumption is that the world is in need of God’s light and God’s intention is for people to live the truth in practice. Consequently God’s active presence is revealed where there is life and hope realized, and when people facing their real experiences, find God is there with them. These real experiences include the painful and antithetical experiences of the poor and disenfranchised which are seen in juxtaposition with a kingdom vision of what could be.

Grey in her book Redeeming the Dream, explores the theme of redemption and living the kingdom vision “… where redemption is deeply concerned with human liberation and resistance to oppression and the struggle for freedom…[and] human integrity and wholeness.” She further claims “creation and redemption are like two sides of a coin. Creating activity is redeeming activity.”

Here Grey’s stance connects with the Biblical imperative cited in the book of Amos “… let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.” For by doing justice one is also imaging and revealing God’s character and presence, a theme constantly alluded to by the prophets. Grey sees her views on revelation as in

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103 Grey, Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and the Christian Tradition, 4.
104 Amos 5: 24.
continuity with the traditional role of the prophet who speaks into her context with a contrary word and a life-giving critique of what appears in opposition to the vision of God for the world and humanity. Thus, for Grey, the seeking of vision that is revelatory is about seeking the vision of God that emerges whenever and wherever the justice of God is lived and human dignity and the dignity of God’s good creation are honoured.

Thus it is evident that Grey emphasizes and concludes that the modus operandi for revelation is orthopraxis, the right living out of one’s faith, rather than a disembodied orthodoxy. How and where this is manifest clearly will vary. Suffice to say that such orthopraxis will, at times, be counter-cultural to the prevailing powers and voices that are unwilling to see and respond to the God who calls one to care and act for others. The preferential option and “theological commitment to the poor,”105 advocated by many liberation theologians is also relevant here, as they assert the view that God can be seen most clearly in the poor in wealth and spirit. Thus the revelation of God encompasses the call to action with its implications as to how one treats others, particularly the little ones who are denied the necessities of life.

In her critique of Dulles’s schema, earthed as it is within the Church’s tradition, Grey highlights his lack of attention to the theological criterion of human experience in its wholeness and diversity. She is critical of “the ways in which churches have used the concept of revelation to enhance their claims and authority… without disputing the necessity of doctrinal statements, feminist theology, black theology and liberation theology from all continents [are] asking …what has happened to the experience of those on the underside of history, those who have always been denied access to the word of proclamation. Could there be a revelation,

105 Liberation theology is summarised in the New Dictionary of Theology, 389.
also divinely given, which is issuing from the wilderness experience?" Grey’s use of the wilderness metaphor is helpful here as it highlights her view that the arena of revelation may be less visible in the corridors of power, and may be more vividly seen in the marginal places where life is a struggle, and survival is acutely felt amidst the difficult terrain.

Wilderness is also a rich and potent Biblical metaphor, signifying both a testing place and also one where those who spend time there in its liminality find their vocation is redirected and a new perspective is gained. In the wilderness one may have to rely afresh on God for guidance and through receiving a revelation and insight, come to see things in a new way. In this way Grey creates a possibility for theology that revelatory vision can be seen in sharper, clearer perspective from the stance of marginalized peoples and places, expressed in the notion and image of the wilderness.

Further to this, Grey addresses and critiques the second model outlined by Dulles, Revelation as History, where the assumption is that revelation should be seen within the narrow confines of a definition of history that is framed by the key events which point to the unfolding plan of salvation history. Grey asks, “Do we not then run into the danger of restricting divine revelation to certain key events which ‘we,’ (that is those in power positions) dignify as ‘key,’ as the core of faith, and thus become deaf to the ‘silent music,’ God’s ceaselessly ongoing communication?” Here Grey’s critique is helpful in recognizing contemporary theology’s acknowledgement of the need to explore the less dominant views as pertinent vistas for revelation. This position links with the emergence and impetus of postmodern

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views (explored in later chapters) where the call is to see the particular, to observe the less dominant vistas and to hear the minor voices concerning revelation.

Grey advances the notion of revelation as being related to process in her assertion that “revelation embraces a process that works for justice and the processes of communication for daily living.”109 The emphasis on both process, and God’s ongoing, ceaseless communication, corresponds to the seeking vision motif of this thesis. For revelation, in contemporary theology (for those who claim a posture of faith that God is able to be seen and perceived) engages with the God who reveals and is constantly seeking to be recognized, in the sensate realm of human experience.

The way Grey seeks to describe revelation encompasses a metaphor of vision that connects with knowledge. Grey draws on the fifth category of the schema of Mary Belenky in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, the way of “connected vision, connected knowing”110 where one engages with the world and finds connections and even “epiphanies of connection.”111 This “connected knowing emerges from a way of experiencing the world in all its complexity and ambiguity. It recognizes the interweaving of good and evil, of passion, pain and celebration, in human living.”112 Following from this, Grey emphasizes that the seeking of vision for revelation invites one to see where things connect. Consequently you can find God manifest and particularly evident in places where things are interdependent and connected, both in the breadth of human experience and throughout the world. From the flow of such revelation, there was, and is, a call for human beings to discern and act from that realization of connection, to care for one another and the whole

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interconnected ecological circle of life. This theological view assumes that wherever a revelation of God is made manifest it will have a corresponding epistemological reframing, inviting, perhaps even compelling, one to see that all is connected in the ecology of a greater whole.

Grey’s phrase “epiphanies of connection”\textsuperscript{113} is central to her theology of revelation. Grey sees “the same task is expressed theologically by those process theologians who link the creative and redemptive moments as two aspects of the same process. Epiphany [is evident]… where a moment or experience takes on ultimate and transcendent significance.”\textsuperscript{114} By drawing on the Greek word \textit{epiphany} used within the Newer Testament, in its meaning of making something manifest and bringing it to light, Grey sees God manifesting both in the arena of the world and further, in a lived hope that dreams and envisions salvation. It could be argued that it is the hopes, dreams and lives of all creatures (including people) that image this salvation. Thus the entire created realm is the canvas provided for the revealing \textit{epiphanies} of God.

The revealing of God on the world’s canvas is a rich metaphor where the world is an unfinished masterpiece. This metaphor of revelation as a work of art embraces both the current view at hand of God’s creative illuminating patterning, and also the continuous invitation to let the painting unfold. Here there is the assumption of a \textit{process} theology of creation, implying an eschatology that is both realized, and unrealized, continuing into the future. In the unfolding and anticipatory dynamic art of salvation history, the revealing of God is like an unfinished, changing fresco with patterns that connect, but are painted afresh with new motifs and lines over time. Revelation, as implicit to this active patterning, is part of \textit{Heilgeschichte}, a continuing holy story that is not yet completed.

\textsuperscript{113} Grey, \textit{The Wisdom of Fools: Seeking Revelation for Today}, 60.
Here again, it is evident that the emphasis on connections as essential to revelation stem from Grey’s claim that redemption and creation are necessarily intrinsically interwoven. This emphasis on the prevalence of the immanence of God revealed in human experience and in creation, draws both from Grey’s theological underpinning and also from her passion for nature and ecology correlating with an envisioning of healing and hope for the brokenness of the world. She notes that whilst “traditionally revelation meant divinely revealed knowledge attainable for ‘man’ by his own efforts, … Aquinas saw revealed truths… as complementary to natural theology.”

By expanding on this assertion Grey sees “it is possible to come to some understanding of God …through human experiences of… beauty in nature or human finitude.” Grey claims that traditionally, revelation has been “coherent if God is understood as Pure Spirit, transcendent… separate from our universe; but if God is also immanent to the material world and to the depths of the human spirit, then the totality of human experience and perception is intimately bound up with the knowledge of God.” Thus it can be argued that the re-claiming of a connecting Pneumatology in contemporary theology that insists on the correspondence between the immanent and the transcendent unites and infuses theologies from above and below.

Embracing this position enables a more comprehensive theological understanding than offered by previous theologies that separated and divided humanity and nature, as separate realms for divine revelation. The theological movement that connects immanence with transcendence as part of the same whole acts as a corrective to past forensic theologies. The Holy Spirit as God’s dynamic life and presence is thus both indicative and indeed, essential, in seeking vision for

revelation. The dynamism of Spirit that is active and flowing, breaking down disunity and initiating a greater unity is the revelation that is seeking reconciliation in all creation.

In her work *Super, Natural Christians*... Sally McFague takes the experience of seeing God within human encounters and nature further. In turn she draws on the work of Martin Buber in his assertion of the *I-Thou* relationship. She argues that “the goal… of this I-Thou relationship is…in what he [Buber] calls ‘uncanny moments, movements of intense present awareness, [where] one can glimpse the eternal thou in and through the human and the natural thou of this world: Every particular thou is a glimpse through to the eternal thou…The goal of I-thou relationships whether with other people or with nature is mystical union with God.”\(^{118}\) Thus for many feminist and creation theologians the invitation is to reunite nature as the sacred arena and subject for God’s revealing with humanity.

Through engaging with nature as a *thou* that enables one to experience a revelation of God, there can be a corresponding invitation to integrate such experiences of revelation within the vision of a new world. Revelation here is glimpsed in encounters with the particular that open up our eyes to a wider vision of God’s presence as salvific. Revelation thus effects and inspires hope for the world, which has its very being shaped by the indwelling of “the God in whom we live and move and have our being.”\(^{119}\) Grey’s vision for a new world comes from her core stance that names God’s intentionality for salvation, healing and wholeness. In her aptly titled work, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope*...she draws from the Jewish creational imperative used by theologian Maria Harris who said our “vocation is

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\(^{119}\) Acts 17:28.
“tikkun olam, the repair of the world.” 120 Grey argues that this is essential to the revelatory task in which we are called to gather and refashion “the fragments of our broken world.” 121 Grey sees that it is through a theology of hope based on connectedness that we “must constantly look for healing connections between spirit and matter, people and earth and for the deep-seated links between the sufferings caused by poverty, race, gender, and heterosexism.” 122 The purpose of revelation, then, is to help us see more clearly and to link our intentions with God’s. Consequently we are to be reconcilers and healers of that which divides and diminishes. This reflecting of God’s light and manifesting revelation is response to the cries of the poor and the oppressed, a response which will necessarily lead us to do justice.

Thus, for Grey, the dialogue partners with revelation are not to be limited to the fields of academic disciplines and schools of thought, or to academic rhetoric, as Dulles has previously suggested in his work. Dulles has identified linguistic, cultural and religious spheres of influence as displaying contemporary challenges for claiming revelation into the future. Grey, in contrast, sees the scope of revelation in a broader sense, as engaging purposefully with justice issues and the healing of the world. For Grey, this involves revelation both as dialogue and orthopraxis, engaging the issues that divide and cause suffering to the disenfranchised. This dialogue and orthopraxis, she claims is in conjunction with the dynamic activity of God who is Spirit. This Spirit who infuses and moves within and beyond our known categories and yet can still be seen in the way people reveal the sacredness of everyday life.

121 Grey, The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-first Century, 41.
Grey’s views invite the wider beholding of God’s life-giving Spirit, who paradoxically, includes and celebrates the minutiae of difference and diversity whilst “… crossing the false boundaries between human and non-human, (and of course the boundaries of sexual and racial difference).” She argues that

At the very time of trying to leave Descartes’ narrow rationalized heritage behind, the cold objective view of the world and the detached observer, arrogant humanity seems to be demanding a wider and wider view whether from a space capsule or Foucault’s panopticon. And yet on the other hand the humble embodiedness of the Spirit is showing itself in contrasting ways. Shrines spring up at the places connected with accidents, people of the peace movements release flocks of doves into the air, the sacredness of ordinary life is rediscovered.

Here God is revealed in the concrete human experiences of those who have eyes to see that there is a Spirit infused and a companioning presence as God with, in and beyond.

Denis Edwards expounds on the theological assumption of God’s presence as Spirit in his assertion that “the Spirit is with all creatures in their finitude, death and incompletion, holding each suffering creature in redemptive love and drawing each into an unforeseeable eschatological future in the divine life.” Grey’s view of God, and where God can be seen in the world, encompasses the image of God present with the suffering as one who identifies with the vulnerable ones, the anawim of the world. She particularly favours the image used by Thomas Merton’s in his portrayal of the “fragile homeless God.” In this guise God is seen as in continuity with Christ who suffered and suffers still. This more radical incarnation can be extended from the particular to the universal, embracing nature and the whole created order. Thus it will speak of ‘God in Christ’s’ identification with all the suffering of the world.

Paradoxically, it is from the places of suffering that hope emerges. Grey argues that “places of intense suffering can become places where the very nature of hope is revealed -- its vulnerability, yet its power to gather up the fragments of shattered community, shattered humanity, and devastated nature.”

Grey’s view suggests that in the place of fragility, dislocation, and wounded-ness, there is this possibility for a theology of hope and new light to emerge. She draws attention to the fact that “after the Second World War, a theology of hope… began to emerge… It was in 1964 Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* appeared.” Thus Grey suggests “in the tragic coalescing of time and place, it is still possible as Isaiah knew, for a people who have walked in darkness to witness to a great light.” In doing so, she suggests that it is from these situations of human deprivation that there comes the call for a kind of prophetic resistance, leading to a revelation of God who “is the great passion for justice, who empowers and sustains all the movements for freedom and a transformed society.”

The call for freedom and transformation that issues from the connection between salvation and redemption of the created order is not all new. Yet the recovery of the theological partnering of salvation and redemption for creation and humanity is a growing affirmation in contemporary theology. This is paralleled by the emergence and attention given to eco-theology in the latter part of the twentieth century and the consequent assumptions of the interrelatedness of humanity creatures and creation. Significantly, in his recent work, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, Edwards expands on...
the need of, and call for, an “ecological conversion,”\textsuperscript{132} by which we are called “to witness to the God of Jesus Christ, and to this God’s love for all Earth’s creatures.”\textsuperscript{133} Advancing further than this, Edwards cites Thomas Berry’s plea for right action concerning the extinction of species on earth as a theological issue asserting that “when human beings cause the extinction of other species, they destroy creatures made by God. They damage a mode of God’s self-revelation.”\textsuperscript{134} The pertinent and important reuniting of theology with ecology coupled with a consequent call for humanity to be caregivers, in contrast to destroyers of the environment, is a horizon that will gain momentum in our imaging of revelation into the future.

Grey sees the continuing vistas of revelation within the expanding horizons of eco-theology and ecumenism. Clearly she desires to expand our horizons, and even our notions of the sacred, with a more inclusive vision, one, which will also, include a wider hospitality in “the sharing of sacraments with other [living] faiths.”\textsuperscript{135} Grey also sees “mystery as a component of revelation, where horizons are completely transformed and then [go] back into darkness.”\textsuperscript{136} For Grey, sacraments are visible symbols to the Mystery of God revealed, and yet simultaneously, still concealed. Thus sacraments are perceived as vivid sources of revelation if one has eyes to behold their performative potency.

Grey’s theology of revelation, in seeking to align with the ‘way of the prophet’, both critiques and announces a new vision for earth and humanity. This new vision also has its advocates in the way of the mystic. The mystics of all ages see and experience a vision of God via the paradox of the whole in the particular, or see

\textsuperscript{132} Edwards, \textit{Ecology at the Heart of Faith}, 3.
\textsuperscript{133} Edwards, \textit{Ecology at the Heart of Faith}, 3.
\textsuperscript{134} This idea of species as God’s self–revelation is developed in the work of Thomas Berry, \textit{The Dream of the Earth} (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1988), 11, in Edwards, \textit{Ecology at the Heart of Faith}, 2.
\textsuperscript{135} From conversation with Mary Grey in Sarum College, Salisbury, England, July 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2002.
\textsuperscript{136} From conversation with Mary Grey in Sarum College, Salisbury, England, July 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2002.
broader connections in their human experience of finitude and contingency. Thus mystics acknowledge that there is truth in paradox, in unknowing and letting go, as well as in knowing and taking hold.

It is evident that Grey’s views on revelation offer a more expansive vision for both the current and future landscapes of revelation as she explores wider scopes and encourages the engagement of dialogue partners beyond the confines of academia. It is clearly salutary for contemporary theology to embrace wider visions such as those Grey espouses. To be seeking vision is to be exploring more than conceptual notions of revelation: it is to advocate an embodied theology that images the dynamic activity of God.

In effort to see more clearly, there nevertheless remains a question for discerning and focusing as to where the Spirit is revealing. That, for Grey, centres in her utilizing of the term “epiphanies of connection.” This implies the correspondent discerning of the “divine force linking with the greater whole, [coupled with]… the value of the discernment of spirits encouraged by the Ignatian rules …[asking] a key question; where is the energy good?” Grey sees this is a question for both the individual and the community.” I would add that seeking vision for revelation of God embraces this desire for discerning where the energy is good and by implication seeking and fostering this energy, which is essentially from God. Furthermore the seeking of such revelation utilising ancient discernment practises is relevant to the whole created order. The revealing of God then needs its engaged, discerning receivers and interpreters who will live out God’s good energy in their faithing within the contexts they inhabit.

In the previous chapter by exploring the work of Dulles, and now focussing on Grey and her response to Dulles, I am seeking vision concerning revelation by examining different gazes, which highlight the diversity of views, within the compass of their Roman Catholic heritage. I have sought to contrast these views as indicative of contemporary theologies varied stances and views concerning revelation and how in particular, Grey, names an authentic revelation as being effective. This is because for Grey, revelation both stems from, and proceeds to, the patterns of living out one’s faith that elicits care for the poor, the earth and the other in a connected, interdependent mutuality. Nevertheless, it is clear that revelation will continue to be seen, described and experienced differently according to the essential conditions of personal, gender specific, communal and theoretical and conceptual framing. It is evident that a kaleidoscopic patterning of this nature will enable the theologian to observe patterns that shift and fragment, but are part of an unseen whole that is the mystery of God revealed in our experience.
Chapter 3: Seeking Vision: Exploring Metaphors of Sight

Seeking vision within Christian theology embraces the fact that although there are many explicit uses of the word vision in the Christian Scriptures, the idea of vision can also be linked implicitly to stories of seeing. In this chapter the links to vision, of seeing, light and glory and their interplay with the concept of revelation, will be explored. By exploring these visual metaphors and the particular emphases of Staubli and Schroer, and later the theological insights of Vladimir Lossky and Hans Urs von Balthasar, I will suggest that seeking vision is an appropriate dynamic descriptor for revelation in contemporary theology.

When the idea of seeing or not seeing is cited in the Biblical literature, there are analogous references to the eye as the instrument of sight; for example, the simile which likens the eyes, to the lamp of the body in Matthew chapter six verse twenty two. Thomas Staubli and Sylvia Schroer in their book Body Symbolism in the Bible point out that “the fact is, … from a purely statistical point of view, the First Testament accords a far greater importance to seeing, and the eye, than to hearing and the ear,”139 although the combination of seeing and hearing is often found together. “The… root for seeing appears one thousand and three hundred times, the root for hearing… about one thousand one hundred and sixty times.”140 Thus with the predominance of sight and visual metaphors, there is impetus to claim that their particular emphasis and nuances will pertain to the assumptions of how God is revealed in Scripture and contemporary theology.

Continuing their claims concerning the prevalence and importance of seeing in the Biblical witness, Staubli and Schroer argue that “seeing is thus the

139 Staubli, and Schroer, Body Symbolism in the Bible, 113.
method of sensing most frequently mentioned. The word for eye (ayin) occurs eight hundred and sixty six times, while the text speaks of the ear only one hundred and eighty seven times.”

The processes of seeing and hearing often appear together as the means of observing the deeds of God, for example in Exodus chapter fourteen, verses thirteen and thirty one, where Moses called the people to see the deliverance of the Lord and they saw, feared and believed. Consider, too, the encounter of Job, in the Hebrew Testament. When it is put in the first person “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you, therefore I despise myself and repent…”

Job’s experience of seeing the Lord is elevated. The priority of sight and seeing has often been given secondary importance within the Protestant tradition which traditionally has elevated the hearing of the word over against other ways of knowing and experiencing a revelation of God.

The ability to see and hear is also paired in Scripture as an indicator of receptivity to God, to either perceive or not perceive God’s message of revelation particularly as conveyed by the prophets. This is evident in Isaiah chapter six, verses nine and ten, where God’s call to Isaiah the prophet is to instruct the people: “to keep listening and do not comprehend and to keep looking and not understand.” With this instruction comes the corresponding imperative to stop the people’s ears and eyes “so that they may not look with their eyes and listen with their ears.” This passage from Isaiah is requoted and re-interpreted with slight variation in the Gospel according to Matthew, with an invitation and opportunity to move towards new vision and foresight with the additional pericope that says “but blessed are your eyes, for they see and your ears for they hear… many prophets and righteous people longed to

143 Is. 6:9b.
144 Is. 6:10b.
see what you see, but did not see it and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

Thus the reception of revelation highlighted here is the gaining of comprehension coupled with ability to see or not see, and hear or not hear within the prophetic scriptural narratives, and the longings of people to behold and see God.

Yet the eye as the instrument that enables sight is not neutral in its possibilities. “… The Biblical theology of the eye includes a critique of the eye as well. This is described in “Sirach chapter thirty one, verse twelve,” [there] the eye is described as “greedy” implying a need for discipline when its excess craves more than is wise. Further to this Staubli and Schroer elaborate “the strengths of the eyes, namely the ability to grasp many things at once, whole constellations and combinations of things, and to externalise internal emotions becomes weaknesses if they are used for their own sake.” In this sense the eyes operate as instruments of human satiate sensibilities. Thus “the eye also becomes the symbol of unbridled, hard to control desires.” If this is juxtaposed with the view that the eye is the medium of a loving gaze, and imaging the gaze of God which enables right seeing then there are possibilities for the glance or stare to be revelatory. It may indeed elicit a seeking of what is good and life-giving, enabling a caring, compassionate, covenantal relationship. This envisioning of the gaze that expresses such care aligns with the insight of the writings of Job, which intimate that despite God’s despising of the wicked “… [God] gives the afflicted their right. He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous.” Consequently, the eye is a potent symbol of an instrument that imparts and reveals the nature and relationship of God to humanity and creation.

146 Sirach 31: 12, in Staubli, and Schroer, Body Symbolism in the Bible, 118.
147 Staubli, and Schroer, Body Symbolism in the Bible, 118.
148 Staubli, and Schroer, Body Symbolism in the Bible, 118.
149 Staubli, and Schroer, Body Symbolism in the Bible, 118.
The notion of seeking vision becomes important in the experience of crisis, in its heightened need to find and make meaning. For it is the dissonance of a crisis event that can reveal a changed reality where the way one sees is magnified or distorted. This newer disproportional perception of things can open to a new field of vision, whilst there can also be the recognition of facing one’s limit and crossing a new threshold. The experience of limit or liminality in the crisis experience then becomes revelatory as an experienced epiphany, a manifestation of God’s presence. This pattern of the crisis experience producing a disorientation followed by a reorientation is depicted by the Biblical story of the conversion of Saul to Paul, recorded in Acts chapter nine.\textsuperscript{151} This provides narrative support to the human experience of seeing differently arising from a crisis and numinous encounter.

From the initial encounter in the story of Paul on the Damascus road accompanied by a flashing light from Heaven, we have the description of an ongoing dramatic revelation. This includes both visual and non-visual cues and an audition from Jesus, accompanied by physical blindness and fasting (for the symbolic three days).\textsuperscript{152} Following the initial numinous encounter come visions to both Saul and Ananias and the consequent restoration of Saul’s, now Paul’s, sight by the laying on of hands, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The conversion continues in this Biblical story with a corresponding call to mission and to preach amidst a new community. Thus this dramatic conversion story pictures the notion and pattern of crisis as a necessary catalyst and accompaniment to revelation. For many people over the centuries, in describing their experience of call to ministry, including my own, there has been a numinous experience with an accompanying sensate vision. In this crisis of perception, of seeing and hearing the presence of God in a life-changing way, there is

\textsuperscript{151} Acts 9.
\textsuperscript{152} The three-day motif is also used as a primary motif in the Synoptic gospel’s death and resurrection narratives of Jesus.
also call back to a new community. Thus the crisis experience prompts and challenges a person so called towards a new way ahead, which must be confirmed and blessed by the new community in which they are called to serve.

The idea of vision as a way of focusing, (also translated as prophecy) is presented in Proverbs chapter twenty nine verse eighteen which expresses both the need for a vision, some clarity and insight for God’s people, and also the need for discerning practically the way of God that can act as a stabilizing force for people. For “where there is no vision (KJV) /prophesy, (NRSV) the people cast off restraint,”153 (or lose their bearings, or even run amok, are helpful paraphrases). The human need for vision as a means to help facilitate guidance and aid in discerning choices is linked with call of the prophet, who is believed and received as one with special insight. The link of prophecy with revelation enables openness to the probability of the reception of what is revealed. It confirms the assumption that God does reveal, speak and illuminate God’s presence through the experiences of divinely gifted and discerning people, either as individuals or as communities.

Staubli and Schroer tell us “the archaic word for Israel's prophets (nabi), really meant seer (hose).”154 This encompassed the ability to foresee, to “see events coming before they happen.”155 Thus the prophet could reveal God’s will by employing foresight coupled with divine insight for the people. “In any case they see connections; their seeing is combined with knowing. Like a guiding thread that runs through the whole prophetic tradition and into the gospels the lament of the prophet over the people that has eyes to see and yet does not see.”156 The role of the prophet as seer meant that they were able to “see not only what was visible in the foreground,

153 Prov. 29: 18
[but] … farther or deeper.”157 In this sense they could be described as *anableptic*, with the ability to see above and below the peripheral vision of the majority viewpoint. The prophet’s gaze would seek to align with the gaze and focus of God. Taylor highlights the role of seer as the one whose gaze is interpenetrative when he asserts that, “the seer penetrates illusory appearance and discovers naked truth hiding beneath the play of veils.”158 The clarity sourced from such revelation makes a truth claim on the seer who receives it and responds faithfully witnessing to the beheld presence of God.

This view does not negate the gaze of the prophet as a human being whose faculties are limited in a physical sense, because with the eyes of faith and right discernment, the prophet’s view is akin to an engaged, attentive seeing which widens the foreground. In this wider *beholding* there is recognition of the priority and intentionality of God who seeks to reveal the unfolding flow of salvation in the context of covenantal salvation. Consider the prophetic announcement in the early church liturgy, ascribed to elder Simeon on beholding the infant Christ. This is recorded in the Lucan birth narrative, chapter two, verses twenty nine to thirty two, particularly in verses thirty to thirty two, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”159

The prophet is one who can call people into dangerous re-membering, (to enlarge upon the phrase “dangerous memory” used by Johannes Baptist Metz),160 and

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to “dream dreams and see visions.” Does this revealing still occur in our contexts today? Surely the experience of the prophetic is also still a clarion call to today’s communities of faith. Grey, in her work *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-first Century*, makes a contemporary appeal to reinvigorate prophecy by pleading for a community to be kept alive by the power both to remember its origins and “by its power to remember and dream dreams.” She cites Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman, who states that “unlike the claims of consumer society… the [faithful] community operates with a powerful vision, a vision that affirms that the future is not yet finished. God has a powerful intention and resolve to bring us to a wholeness not yet in hand.” This eschatological visioning assumes that the revelation of God is both ongoing and has powerful intent.

The role of the prophet is a continuous one. Whether this vocation is seen in an individual or a community, there is the call to see differently, with eyes wide open to the gaze of God. A subsequent concern is how can you by discerning the revelation of God, impart its effect and consequently respond to its converting power. This raises the need for an *apologia* and for criteria to establish how such discernment takes place. This must be coupled with a certain predisposition and openness to God that enhances the awareness of God’s divine presence required for such vision. For prophets, mystics and twentieth century contemplatives like Thomas Merton, it may be argued from experience that, for those with eyes to see, “the gate of Heaven is everywhere.” Thus a prerequisite for seeing the divine encompasses both the actual

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161 I make an analogy here to the reference of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the community alluded to by verses of the prophet Joel 2:28-30 and said to be realized in the experience of the Acts community in the Pentecost narrative of Acts 2:17.


revealing of God and the right seeing or perspective of the perceiver or one seeking vision.

According to Staubli and Schroer, the prerequisite for right seeing, which effects knowledge and action “is conversion, that is, a break with the existing praxis of death and a turn to the reign of God, which at first is still tiny and hidden.” So right seeing becomes a visual cue towards right action with a correlative obedient response. The beholding becomes a beckoning from God that enables the process of conversion and the call to mission. This alluring call to behold and respond is evidenced in John’s gospel where there are five invitations to “come and see.” Again in the gospels of Matthew and Luke the insistent repeated phrase “See I am sending you…” can be seen as a pattern for revelation that elicits a response to change, to trust and be sent in a new direction.

Particularly in John’s gospel there is a strong correlation between those who see and those who believe, whilst, in a correlative sense, the concept of belief is interchangeable with seeing with the eyes of faith. In the extensive narrative discourse of the healing of the blind man in John chapter nine, the subtext is that those who think they know and see are in fact the ones who lack sight, and their consequent false assumptions and judgments call into question their ability to see clearly. “Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see, your sin remains.’” Here the emphasis is on seeing with comprehension. By such recognition of the divine in one’s midst, you can accept as true what is ultimately worth focusing on. Consider also the

admonishment addressed to Thomas by Jesus in John chapter twenty, verse twenty-nine concerning his resurrection appearance, which asserts the need for authentic conversion even without corresponding visible proof. Here the Gospel writer shows Jesus challenging Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Seeing here is used as an adjunct to belief. This implies it is God’s prerogative, a priori, to bless and reveal by sight in its physicality if God so chooses. Yet God can also reveal without physical sight but rather by the illumination of seeing spiritually with the eyes of faith that has no correspondent need to have Jesus present physically. This involves a different kind of seeing within the faith community, one that will become apparent when Jesus is no longer present. This is a seeing by the eyes of faith, which embraces a trusting posture that does not demand physical evidence per se. Rather, it is a conversion to relationship with God by the Holy Spirit that elicits a response enabling one to witness to this reality.

The inference that the experience of becoming eyewitnesses to the Word made flesh, to God’s incarnated presence and consequently being called to witness to the continuing presence of Jesus beyond his earthly physical manifestation, moves us beyond the limitation of located individual physical sight, to the sight and insight expressed in the present continuous historical communities of faith. Here we see Christ’s continued embodiment in those who continue to live out and witness to their faith in Christ’s Way: those who recognize Jesus as the Christ in their contemporary contexts. Migliore cautions us to remember that all our vision and recognition is, to some extent, distorted and incomplete. Here he asserts that we must recognize “that

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168 John 20: 29.
there are flaws and distortions in all witnesses to revelation.‖ Furthermore it is “only as we enter the new freedom in Christ that resists every form of bondage... do we become active and responsible recipients of the revelation of God.‖ It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the link between revelation and freedom in Christ, but this notion is strongly reminiscent of the famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr, deemed a twentieth century prophet, in which he connected his dream for freedom from segregation with the vision of a world where all were created and treated equally drawing on the vision of the revelation of the prophet Isaiah.

The need for a contemporary re-appropriation of conversion as both a continuous process and also a mark of authentic faith is emphasized by Søren Kierkegaard’s visual metaphor, “the autopsy of faith.” He uses this phrase to evoke the experience of seeing with one’s own eyes, not in a literal sense, but as an active posture of choosing to trust, with a passionate, subjective, inward commitment. It is a gaze that acknowledges the reality of God as premise with corresponding faithing. Furthermore, Kierkegaard claims “God respects our humanity and seeks our free response.” Logically, the choice of such a faith posture and commitment embraces the notion of paradox, necessitating surrender to the mystery of God who is never fully known. To see with one’s own eyes is a commitment to trust in God not only in the present, but also to keep trusting in the future continuous vocatio of God, rather than being limited to trusting merely on the basis of present historical truths or appearances. Clearly the appeal to mystery is part of the reception of revelation, as is

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169 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 37.
170 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 38.
172 Is.40: 4-5, KJV.
the posture of faith that elicits a faithering response. To be eyewitnesses to the reality of God as seen and lived in one’s own experience is to risk faithful responding to who and how you have encountered God. This must be coupled with the need for individual and communal discernment within a faith community through which the vision is given clarity.

In his theological trilogy *Theo-Logic*, Hans Urs von Balthasar places revelation within the overarching criteria of truth and lived witness. He postulates that the glory of God is necessarily experienced as sheer gift in the relationship and freedom of those who participate in this mystery as *truth*. He asserts that God reveals truth by granting to the receiver the ability to participate as “a relative centre of truth which is then able to participate for its own part to know truth and to express something of itself.”\(^{175}\) Paradoxically, however, “at any given moment… being is still unveiled and has yet to be unveiled.”\(^{176}\) Yet the person who receives the revelation of God becomes more transparent in this revelation to others. “It is at the very moment when the creature most irradiates God’s truth and glory, when God is most immanent in the creature, that the creature is least the content and most the shell and vessel. When God shines through, the creature has to become most transparent.”\(^{177}\)

This appeal to God as both manifesting and simultaneously becoming transparent to others insists from the continuing Christian tradition that revelation is relevant to contemporary theology.

This desire for clarity and transparency for revelation is recognized by John F. Haught when he refers to the derivation of the English word revelation as “from the

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Latin, *revelare*, literally to remove a veil.¹⁷⁸ This removing of a veil or lifting of a visual barrier enables the beholder to behold the glorious light of the presence of the Divine One in the midst. Conscious allusions are made here to the Mosaic experience of wearing a veil described within the Exodus narratives.¹⁷⁹ The experience of being in the presence of God was seen to be both privileged and dangerous, as the brightness and holiness of the Shekinah presence of God was deemed too dazzling to behold for most humans. In these narratives, the consequence of such a numinous encounter on the privileged prophet Moses was the strange visual after-effect of having one’s face shining, often necessitating the continuing need for a facial covering so others would not ‘be blinded by the light’.

The promise outlined in Second Corinthians chapter three verse eighteen of a new vision, to see with unveiled faces, the glory of God,¹⁸⁰ corresponds with the aforementioned references in Exodus to the use of a veil on one’s face after manifestations of God’s glorious presence. Von Balthasar predominantly uses the cipher of *glory* as the means to describe the presence of the God who reveals and yet conceals simultaneously. He explores the New Testament expression ‘glory’ to depict “…the divine self-expression (word), self representation (image), and self realisation in the other (righteousness as grace).”¹⁸¹ In this comprehensive self-revelation of God there is still mystery and paradox, as “otherness and concealment become the realm of expression and manifestation.”¹⁸² This interplay between otherness and concealment,

¹⁷⁹ Exod.34: 34-35.
¹⁸⁰ 2 Cor.3: 13-15.
between expression and manifestation, is part of the character and nature of revelation as the way of *seeking vision*.

Von Balthasar asserts that the “visible form not only ‘points’ to an invisible, unfathomable mystery; form is the apparition of this mystery…. The content (*Gehalt*) does not lie behind the form (*Gestalt*) but within it.”¹⁸³ Dulles says that the subtitle of the first volume of von Balthasar’s theological trilogy, *The Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form* is indicative of the argument conveyed within the text, that “the splendor of divine truth is not simply believed on the basis of signs (which would involve a kind of extrinsicism), but is actually perceived as inhering in the form (*Gestalt*). We do not merely believe; we see what we believe.”¹⁸⁴ Leahy contends that in von Balthasar’s theology, which elaborates the manifestation of God’s glory, “the form of revelation and the act of revelation are inseparable.”¹⁸⁵

Furthermore, Dulles asserts, von Balthasar “confidently proclaims that biblical revelation has a divine beauty, and that all who fail to see this are blinded by the effects of sin.”¹⁸⁶ He continues this claim, asserting that “for von Balthasar, it seems to be axiomatic that the truth of Christianity is self evident to those who are open to its beauty, those with “the eyes of faith.”¹⁸⁷ To see with ‘the eyes of faith’ is to look and recognize that what is revealed is illumined by the light who is God.

In the first volume of his theological trilogy *The Glory Of the Lord: Seeing the Form*, von Balthasar develops a complex synergy between faith (*pistis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*). Dulles, in his work *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A

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Theology of Christian Faith highlights this relationship arguing that for von Balthasar, Anselm’s “medieval formula of faith seeking understanding falls somewhat short of what we find in the Scriptures. Faith is not merely searching and tentative… it is solidly grounded in its real object even though it continues to probe more deeply.”¹⁸⁸

For von Balthasar this reversal of the dualism between the object and subject, coupled with the critique of any Kantian overtones, which locate faith within the limits of reason alone. This clearly indicates that Balthasar’s view is both comprehensive and also “consciously in dialogue with the transcendental theology of Rahner.”¹⁸⁹ Von Balthasar argues convincingly for an integrating of the experience of revelation as seeing and knowing God both from within as immanent, while also from without as transcendent.

Thus the assertion of God’s revealing within the scope of human experience is a given for von Balthasar, yet it also remains a mystery. This is because the glory of God is always experienced within the confines and horizons of our human contexts. Nevertheless it is clear that God’s truth and being is always more than this. In exploring the scope of revelation, von Balthasar chooses the metaphor of drama for the patterning in which God reveals Godself in the unfolding Heilsgeschichte, the unfolding story of salvation from beginning to end.

The various acts in the drama of the Old Covenant, culminating in the incarnation, death and glorification of Christ, all of which constitute but one revealing Word, are like so many scenes of a drama which must be followed and taken in before one knows the plot, appreciates the conspiracy and perceives the characters in their true colours. What is most striking about this theandric drama, however, is that the spectators become protagonists… The divine action draws them from the floor of the theatre on to the stage for the action. ‘In the perception there lies the enrapturing.’¹⁹⁰

This makes it clear that for von Balthasar, revelation shows that God’s involvement with humanity is intertwined and mutual in that “revelation …consists in a continuum of events and words which set up a history of God with humankind and in humankind.”\textsuperscript{191} It is evident here that there is a corollary between soteriology and revelation. Yet what is recognised as revelatory in history is still a matter for human reception, recognition and discernment. This corresponds to von Balthasar’s emphasis on \textit{significance} as indicative for revelation’s expression.

Von Balthasar proposes the idea of \textit{significance} where “significance is an irreducible phenomenon. It requires an appearing surface upon which a non-appearing depth expresses and indicates its presence… What is contained in the hidden centre presses outward, as is nicely conveyed by the word \textit{expression}.”\textsuperscript{192} What is expressed by revelation is a \textit{vision of God}, not by any definition in its entirety, or even in its scope or possibilities, but rather as glimpse or fragment of the divine meeting permeating the knowing subject in \textit{existence}.

Such attention to the concept of the “\textit{vision of God}” is also evident in the writings of Vladimir Lossky. He retrieves this conceptual metaphor as both important and revelatory as part of the continuing dialogue with Byzantine theological insights in continuation with the tradition of the Greek Fathers.\textsuperscript{193} There is a strong correlation between seeing and knowing, both within Scripture and also in the Orthodox traditions. Lossky argues that the call to see God is both desirable and possible by referring to the text of First John chapter three, in the second part of verse two, “What we do know is this that when he is revealed, we will be like him for we will see him

\textsuperscript{191} The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, 219.
\textsuperscript{192} Balthasar, Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory, 139.
[God] as he is."\textsuperscript{194} This call to see God as both desirable for humanity and even realising the vision of God as inevitable, seems in contrast with the Christological assertion of the Johannine prologue that “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son… who has made him known.”\textsuperscript{195} The interpretation and emphasis from Scripture here is to the priority of God who reveals, recognising that this revelation will be in a manner and time of God’s choosing, “by the will of the Son”\textsuperscript{196} and via the lens of Christian faith and witness.

Nevertheless, this knowledge and sight of God is not merely abstract, but is evident in the lived witness of the faithing community who live out the Christian imperative of loving one another. The theological insight that revelation corresponds with orthopraxis is a theological argument \textit{a forteriori} in many contemporary liberation and feminist theologies, as illustrated by Grey in the previous chapter. Here, the community reveals in concrete actions what they have received through the vision of God. This is exhorted in the \textit{apologia} of First John chapter four verses eleven and twelve, “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us.”\textsuperscript{197} This is clearly evidenced and observed in the faithful Christian community where God is deemed present and active. Thus revelation is received in the grammatical \textit{tense} analogy of God’s revealing actions as \textit{present continuous}, not just \textit{past imperative}.

Supporting this notion of the continuing revelation of God in contemporary theology, Marianne Sawicki points out “the imaging of resurrection… puts lie to the proclamation, that Jesus got up and went a long time ago. It means to restore his rising

\textsuperscript{194} I John 3: 2b.  
\textsuperscript{195} John 1: 18.  
\textsuperscript{196} Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God}, 23.  
\textsuperscript{197} 1 John 4: 11-12.
in real time. Jesus is copy who copies. The Gospels identify Jesus with needy little ones. To see or recognize the Risen Lord is to see him in them.”

This analogy of Jesus as the copy who copies is to link our knowing of God with the realization of God’s continual reappearing or rising to life in the present and so to be open to such seeing and knowing as revelatory is to gaze with faithful intent.

Sawicki reminds us that if we are to consider knowing as “theoria, …the root meaning of the word is ‘to gaze,’” From this it can be argued that we can recover a contemporary appeal to contemplation as integral to theology’s gazing and seeking vision. For such seeking is to look with a focused reverence, with a prayerful attitude that acknowledges that God sources all our knowing. In contrast to this, Lossky reminds us that there are ongoing difficulties with the axiom that God can be seen and known. He highlights these difficulties in what he calls “the vision of knowledge and the vision of comprehension.” Thus we may see something and have some knowledge but not actually understand it in its depth or in any comprehensive sense. There have been varied emphases on the way God is seen and apprehended via difference perspectives within Scholasticism.

Lossky explores St Gregory Palamas’s schema of how we can know and behold the divine presence, which has been presented in what has been termed “the Palamite synthesis.” This synthesis addresses the seeming paradox relating to what is communicable and incommunicable concerning the divine nature. The Palamite view suggests that “we attain participation in the nature of God and yet he [God] remains totally inaccessible. [Yet] we must affirm both things at once and must

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preserve the antinomy as the criterion of piety.”\textsuperscript{202} Further to this, the Palamite synthesis seeks to “preserve the deep rooted mystery which dwells intact within the ineffable distinction between the essence (\textit{ousia}) and its natural energies… when someone experiences revelation in the way of illumination or divine or deifying grace [this] is not the essence but the energy of God.”\textsuperscript{203} Whilst it may appear that we are elaborating a dualistic understanding of how God reveals by the splitting of God into differing elements, nevertheless “essence and energies are not for Palamas two parts of God, but [rather] two different modes of the existence of God within His nature and outside His nature [and] the same God remains totally inaccessible in His essence, and communicates… totally by grace.”\textsuperscript{204} This Orthodox theological patterning is helpful for contemporary theology which is not averse to recovering ancient wisdom for contemporary times, particularly if it retrieves a more comprehensive or integrated picture of how the being of God is intrinsically connected to the existing and manifesting of God.

Contemporary theologians’ attempts to integrate and provide a more comprehensive and connected description of how we as humans can see and know God will continue to draw from both ancient and traditional theological wisdom. With multi-layered symbols and images like \textit{light} and \textit{vision}, \textit{sight} and \textit{eye} analogies and by exploring concepts such as ‘the light of faith’ we can find rich patterns and fragments that portray the experience and continual unfolding of revelation for contemporary theology. The association of light with the revelation of God is helpful in its appeal to clarity and heightened vision. Von Balthasar uses \textit{light} extensively as a vivid symbol portraying God’s initiative and intention that enables illumination.

\textsuperscript{202} Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God}, 127.
\textsuperscript{203} Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God}, 127.
\textsuperscript{204} Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God}, 127.
In contemporary theological debate there is a redressing of past tendencies towards dualism and the separating of parts in the contemporary exploring of the dynamic, interplay and synergy between subject and object. Moreover, whatever is observed and explored both in contemporary theology and into the future, will need to embrace as theological criteria notions of vision and seeing as appropriate and credible metaphors that enhance the seeking of vision for revelation. Whilst many postmodern theologians would beg to differ on the use of Scripture as authoritative or indicative, as evidenced in the research of Staubli and Schroer, or claim any strength from arguments or insights drawn from the wisdom of earlier philosophical concepts reinterpreted by theologians like von Balthasar and Lossky to promote revelation, there is still room for metaphors and analogies in postmodern knowing as means of describing the seeing or revealing of God today.

In the kaleidoscope of theology’s gazing we need the light to help us see all the patterns and colours and in the moving scopes of history. In the plurality of human experience there will always be more to see: our horizons expand. As we attend to the way we look and if we accept the thesis that God still chooses to reveal to us in the diversity of our contemporary contexts, there is still scope for further seeking of vision to be explored in theological stances that differ from our own. Clearly in my understanding (to paraphrase a line from a hymn concerning the search for truth and expansion of knowledge of God) “…that You [addressing God] have yet more light and truth to shine forth from your word,”205 the word here being like an unfolding illustrated parchment that invites closer contemporary examination.

Chapter 4: Seeking Vision: The Lens of a Disability Theology

One of the emerging theological scopes of the twenty first century is the experience of those with disabilities. It is both a valid and, indeed, a primary arena to focus on. The horizons of disability theology are broad and expansive. The appeal of disability theology’s perspective is heightened by postmodernity’s predisposition toward the *other* whose experience is different from mine. Although, it must be recognised that there are many and varied experiences of disability. There is nevertheless, much insight to be gained in what has previously largely been ignored as a lens that both reveals and conceals God in human experience and knowing.

John M. Hull, a Christian educator and theologian, had the personal experience of becoming blind. Drawing on this experience he examines the differences in ways of knowing he has discovered. Consequently Hull offers profound insights concerning vision and the dominance of sight and sight language within the Christian Protestant (and I believe even broader), traditions. Hull’s writings are particularly insightful and relevant to the seeking of vision for revelation in contemporary theology. Hull offers opportunity to explore how God is revealed in the crisis of seeing things differently.

Grey\textsuperscript{206} refers to Hull’s writings as enabling one to see God in new ways. She highlights Hull’s term “world changing states” used in his article “Open letter from a Blind Disciple to a Sighted Saviour.”\textsuperscript{207} This experience of a changed world because the viewing *modus operandi* has altered radically is likened to entering another world. Consequently it must be considered to be an illuminating vantage point for theology. It can function to facilitate the naming of, and pointing to, one’s own disjunctive experience. In an indirect way it opens up the possibilities of alternate views within

\textsuperscript{206} I’m grateful to Mary Grey who referred me to the writings of John M. Hull in July 2002.
the wider horizons of both disability and minority experiences. Hull’s observations
and critique of the assumed common view is coupled with his personal exploration of
varied texts of the Bible, which notes the interplay of communities of interpretation
displays integrity to theology in dialogue with experience. This attention to the
particularities of human experience, seen through the lens of a disability theology, is
insightful for seeking vision for revelation.

Hull, in his book “Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness”\textsuperscript{208} claims
that he is exploring ‘faith in search of understanding.’ His assertion is that a personal
search is a valid means of seeking understanding with an inquiring and engaged
stance. This stance anticipates living the questions without knowing the full picture.
The insertion of the phrase in search of, in substitution for the word seeking from the
traditional theological definition from Anselm, changes the phrase’s meaning. It shifts
the emphasis from an exploring posture that encompasses some certainty in the quest
for knowledge to a more tentative recovery of what was lost or never discovered
before.

Hull also questions and explores both the foundationalism inherent in a
theological worldview of the Bible when viewed in a general sense. This particular
view is developed in his book “In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind
Persons Conversation with the Bible.”\textsuperscript{209} It is recognised that it is dangerous to make
generalisations when tackling the diversity of Biblical texts and their interpretations.
Nevertheless, Hull makes some illuminating observations, as he looks at them through
his perspective both of personal experience and also as a scholar whose blindness has
enabled a greater clarity of vision. Consequently, he presents vision that is beyond the

\textsuperscript{208} John M. Hull, Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness (London: SPCK, 1990), 123.
\textsuperscript{209} John M. Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible
scope of sighted prejudice, giving one that pierces the complacency inherent in a mono scoping that ignores other views and vantage points.

Vision, seeing and awareness may have little to do with the physicality of seeing and more to do with a complexity of interrelationships and spheres of influence in our knowing. These spheres of influence include limitations and transcendence within the human experience. The notion of seeing can be held in tension with the notion of blindness, or being unable to see, not merely as antithetical poles but as complementary stances. For when one alludes to revelation, there is implied, paradoxically both the seeing and not seeing of the God who reveals.

The insights Hull offers uncover a prejudicial, majority bias of the sighted world. He also highlight the limits of language and, surprisingly, some contradictions and paradoxes within the texts of the Bible and the communities of interpretation. Hull’s observations and critique seem to liken the tradition to an unfinished essay, which merits continuing the dialogue, without drawing any known conclusion, and without sitting with the questions and alternatives raised.

In naming Hull’s theology within the category of a disability theology, I am indebted to the work of Nancy L. Eiesland where the notion of any universally common human experience is questioned. The appropriateness of theological method if it is not accessible to persons with disabilities is also called into question. Sadly, the experience of disenfranchisement for those deemed disabled has in the past been seen as either derogatory or even incidental. This ignorance or elevation of the phantom of a common, or even dominant, human horizon for knowledge has been seen as self-evident. Consequently it has been adopted without a rigorous critique from those whose insights can sharpen the colours and patterns of the varieties of

human experience, particularly in the landscape of theological rhetoric. David Hevey writes that “the disabled are ‘dustbins for disavowal,’ they are often left suspended and their experiences blanked out; assumed not worth the mention.” At last the experiences of the disabled are being addressed and redressed as pertinent voices and perspectives in contemporary theology. The issues of embodiment and physicality are now seen as formative factors in naming both contexts and observed experience for theology into the future.

Hull proposes a “theology of blindness, where blindness is a state of human life… sufficiently distinct from others and sufficiently radical to create its own world.” This state of blindness offers as an alternative paradigm to the dominance of seeing within a narrow context. For Hull, this theology of blindness “will try to expose and denounce the negative imagery which flows from the sighted world, and will at the same time try to relativise the taken for granted assumption of the sighted world, that the sighted reality is absolute. Being sighted is also a state.” Thus, our state or capacity to see may vary according to our situation in life and our ability to look differently.

This idea of world changing states, or even the life world construct remarked upon by Wesley Wildman in our conversation, signifies and attempts to act as a framing device to help us stabilise and judge, even discern, how we are to live. Yet when your dominant life world becomes radically changed, and you lose the

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213 In this definition Hull acknowledges the categories of the French school of Mysticism set forth by Pierre Berulle in Henri Bremond, A Literary History of Religious Thought in France, III, The Triumph of Mysticism (London: SPCK, 1936), 56, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 176.
215 From conversation with Wesley Wildman in Boston, on 11th June, 2002, referring to the theories of George Lindbeck and Ludwig Wittgenstein on the grammar and function of language to shape a “lifeworld… and get things done.”

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language of your community, there is room for a new depth of vision from another angle. This is reminiscent of gazing through a new looking glass to borrow the metaphor of author Lewis Carroll.  

Here, suddenly, the familiar becomes transformed: you begin to see beyond the previously limited landscapes. Exploring this new vista will enable naming the instability but, paradoxically, also the finding of new illumination for the theological imagination. Exploring a new life world can afford a greater recognition of the infinite possibilities and variants within the theological spectrum. Teresa de Lauretis asserts that the “dislocation from the dominant discourse affords us a place of unusual knowing.” This is echoed in many postmodern perspectives that pronounce our need to look elsewhere than the dominant foreground because necessarily, it is limited and prejudicial.

In exploring the notion of vision, Hull acknowledges the limits of vision within the category of blindness. Nevertheless, he sees value in exploring both human and God’s sight capacities within the widely acknowledged correlation between vision and knowledge. Further to this, Hull explores the possibilities and actuality of not seeing, not as antithetical to vision, but as a pre-emptive catalyst towards seeking vision within alternate worldviews and theologies. His contention, based on First Timothy chapter six verse sixteen, is that there is a “darkness visible and there is a brightness invisible.” This assertion expounds the view that the “blindness of blind people and sighted God of sighted people are overcome, are transcended.”

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216 An allusion to the title and theme of the children’s book by Lewis Carroll where the world is out of kilter, Alice through the Looking Glass and what she found there, (London: Sydney Walker Books, 2005).
218 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 148.
219 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 148.
insight raises questions about the categories that limit vision and encapsulate our description of revelatory encounters.

Jean-Luc Marion also explores the notion that blindness is not all that it purports to be, claiming that it offers us a new horizon of vision. He asserts that “the ancients even suggested that the greatest seers, sages and poets or prophets have given up the vision of the sensible visible in order to exercise better that of the insensible visible intelligible or religious. As if visibility remained, there is still, the unsurpassing horizon of blindness.”220 What the horizon of blindness may reveal is reminiscent of the apophatic way, the way of intimacy with God attained by embracing mystery and not seeing. This is, indeed, unknowing and not seeing in order to recognise one’s finitude and thus paradoxically, find there may be new vision in this unknown place.

In contrast to the way of not seeing, Hull argues that it must be conceded that in the world of the Biblical texts “the act of reading in the ancient world was always visual.”221 He elaborates this contention by pointing out “that the use of the idea of opening the eyes to indicate understanding is very common [even prominent] in the Bible.”222 This predominance accorded to sight being linked with understanding has the corresponding implication that “blindness is a state of ignorance and insensitivity.”223 This is highlighted by such passages as Ecclesiastes chapter two verses thirteen to fourteen, “then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness, the wise have eyes in their head, but fools walk in darkness.”224 Hull critiques this pronouncement of blindness as mere folly (which is offensive in its

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221 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 67.
222 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 67.
223 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 67.
224 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 67.
obvious dismissive understanding of the state of being blind as a human condition), and highlights the fact that prejudice toward the blind is not merely a product of the ancient mores. There were then, and still are, various assumptions about blindness centred on a “lack of perfection”,\(^{225}\) which are associated with blindness as a physical deficiency.

Further to this, Hull draws on the study and research of Jane Wallman,\(^{226}\) which highlights the experience of those blind men and women who had sought ordination in the [Anglican] church. Hull infers from this study that “not only do we find the assumption that the blind Minister requires caring for… and therefore cannot care for others, but the assumptions about perfection lives on.”\(^{227}\) In proposing his theology of blindness as offering insight, and as a counter argument to this negative view of blindness, he again refers to Wallman’s study and claim that “a theology of blindness will show that instead of contemplating utopia in terms of a convergence upon a single image of normality, what we must converge upon is a wider acceptance of varieties as being normal.”\(^{228}\) In addition to this there has often been an unwillingness to see the contribution that many with disabilities have made to the schemas of theological discourse because their disabilities have been seen as limiting their creative capacities.

As Freeman rightly alerts us “…rarely are disabled people portrayed as courageous, caring, creative people but, instead, always in some space waiting to be healed or used as a prologue to better things.”\(^{229}\) Clearly the continued prejudice

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\(^{225}\) Hull, *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible*, 72.


\(^{227}\) Hull, *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible*, 73.

\(^{228}\) Hull, “Open letter from a Blind Disciple to a Sighted Saviour,” in *Borders Boundaries and the Bible*, 177.

associated with various forms of disability will continue to provide impetus to examine how we see God revealed in human experience. This has wide implications for contemporary and future theological viewpoints as it prompts the challenge as to whether the Biblical symbolic *veil or scales* necessarily need to be removed in order for people to finally see clearly, and to experience divine revelation.

There are also obvious challenges to some more traditional views as to the way God is said to reveal and be revealed within faith communities and the *circle of Biblical hermeneutics*. These theological vantage points come not only from a visually dominated milieu but also name signs of the *kingdom of God* as inclusive of the Christological mission imperative of “the eyes of the blind being opened.”230 In contrast, if we then engage with texts from the perspective of the blind, we will question any theological assumption that attempts to make absolute judgements and exclude blind people *per se*. Thus Hull proposes “a deconstruction of the cultural artefact through which we read the Bible, and also at a deeper level, a reconstruction of the cultural artefact of the sighted world out of which the Bible comes in the first place.”231 In this plea Hull wants the implied reader to move away from “the literalness … preferred by the devotional reader of the Bible”232 towards the development of “a critical metaphorical awareness of the biblical text.”233 Hull recognises that the biblical texts have been constructed within “the self enclosure of sighted people.”234 The predominance of a sighted culture affects the language and

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230 The sermon of Jesus recorded in Luke 4 is often interpreted as part of Jesus the Christ’s self-understanding of his revealed mission to usher in the kingdom of God where he expands on and alludes to the prophet Isaiah’s divine anointing, Is. 61:1-2 to proclaim “the year of the Lord’s favour.”
making of meaning and supports the thesis of philosophers like Richard Rorty. Mark I. Wallace refers to Rorty’s insights when he asserts “there is no extra linguistic “skyhook”… that permits an escape from the meaning-saturated and culturally embedded representations of reality to which all provincial perspectives, including those in the Bible are beholden.” These are helpful insights for theology, suggesting as they do that all who explore the Scriptures must recognise their sight is laden with cultural and meaning-making assumptions.

Hull’s discourse concerning the thesis that God is sighted is certainly insightful and illuminating. Within the bounds of his particular critical hermeneutic, there are significant insights for the seeking of vision for revelation. Hull cites the rhetorical questions of the Psalmist in Psalm ninety-four, in the second half of verse nine, “he who forms the eye does he not see?” As part of the extended narrative of Job’s conversation with God in Job chapter ten, verse four, the question is posed to God, “Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see?” This question can be seen as underpinning the basic premise that created beings who have the power of sight, must mirror the Creator who “formed the eye.” Furthermore, he continues his argument by alerting us to a difference between humanity and God (countering the charge of anthropomorphism), in the sense that the eyes of God are not like human eyes, [for] God who is all knowing, must be all seeing. This discussion of the relationship between human sight and God’s sight alerts the theologian to the varied perspectives and interplay that depend on where one’s focus is.

236 Ps. 94: 9b, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible, 73.
237 Job 10:4, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible, 73.
238 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible, 73.
239 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible, 73.
Hull’s next concern is the fact that in “most sighted people’s literature,”²⁴⁰ not only through the Bible, the analogies between “sight, light and knowledge… [mean] that it is inevitable to imagine God as sighted.”²⁴¹ However, as Hull rightly argues, there is not a monochrome understanding of God as sighted within the variety of Scriptural texts. Hull provides a thorough and convincing list of examples to point out some quite different understandings. It seems that God is sometimes described within limits and anthropomorphic terms, where God is seen to visit the earth (not unlike the Greek pantheon who also deign to visit the world of mortals, often in disguise), in order to see what humans are doing. This is seen in the tower of Babel narrative, when “the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which mortals had built,”²⁴² and the more cryptic reference in the ancient Creation myth to God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and addressing the man Adam, his wife Eve, and the Serpent.²⁴³ How these ancient stories picture and reveal God is a matter for interpretation and meaning making, where again, there will be different views and patterns that emerge.

At other times in Scripture, God’s sight is characterised more in the mode of being as a singular focus, or an eye akin to the *modus operandi* of the “eye of Mordor” in J. R. R. Tolkein’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.²⁴⁴ This imaging of God’s eye pictures a kind of all-seeing, invasive, supernatural eye that can traverse spatial and geographic boundaries, seeing those at a distance and searching for what is needed to increase its knowledge and scope. As Hull points out in the Scripture reference from Proverbs chapter fifteen, verse three, there is a metaphor associated with God’s eyesight: “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the

²⁴⁰ Hull, *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible*, 73.
²⁴¹ Hull, *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversation with the Bible*, 73.
²⁴² Gen. 11: 5.
²⁴³ Gen. 3: 8.
²⁴⁴ The eye of Mordor, is an active agent of Sauron the powerful source of darker forces described in J.R.R. Tolkein, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), in vol. 1 *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 345, and in vol. 3 *The Return of the King*, 152.
evil and the good.” In contrast to, and countering the negativity associated with, the gaze of the *eye of Mordor* analogy, the gaze of God can be seen as providential and gracious as it does not seek to influence adversely.

Staubli and Schroer alert us to what they describe as an oppressive pedagogy and individualistic pietistic morality that has taken the image of God as all-seeing. This is the “one who sees the injustices of the wicked [and becomes] unfortunately twisted… into a heavenly controller…the perverse God of the controlling eye.” Exploring this notion of the eye as being inherently value laden in character, intent and activity, Sally McFague pleads for a conversion of the *arrogant* eye to the *loving* eye, when the arrogant eye is “a distant, disembodied, objectifying controlling, eye of subject-object dualism.” The loving eye, however, is seeking to promulgate an “in-touch vision.” This is an appeal to a relational, embodied, responsive paying attention to the other in their particularity and difference because you are related in the gaze of God. Thus, when one is seeking vision for revelation, the character, intent, and activity of the God whose vision sees all, becomes relevant. Through both the act of looking, and also the character and intent of the eye itself, there is the possibility of expanding or limiting vision and what is revealed.

Here it is important to note that there continue to be hermeneutical problems in the way God is variously portrayed and interpreted. Wallace tells us that the Scriptures can be described as conflicted in their portrayal of God, asserting that “since the Bible is *conflicted* about its depiction of the divine life –God is alternately portrayed as healing and life giving on the one hand and capricious and judgemental

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245 Prov. 15: 3, in Hull, *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible*, 74.
on the other.\textsuperscript{249} Whilst acknowledging this hermeneutical dilemma, it is vital not to neglect the many images of God as righteous; a God who is gracious and merciful, tender and compassionate. Here, God is depicted as one whose gaze is not condemnatory. Rather, the gaze of God loves and seeks the well being of creation and the children of God. This is exemplified in Scriptures like the Psalm one hundred and twenty one where, with poetic licence, God is named and known as the one who protects and helps and is appealed to in times and places of human need. Psalm one hundred and twenty one, verse one, elucidates this image linked with right seeing, “I lift up my eyes to the hills-from where will my help come? My help comes from YHWH, who made heaven and earth.”\textsuperscript{250}

God, in many and varied ways, is seen and known as One who seeks to turn people back to just paths, right worship and covenantal relationship, rather than being interrogative or condemnatory, watching as an oppressive destructive tyrant. Consider the words of Psalm seventeen verses seven and fifteen, “Wondrously show your steadfast love, O saviour of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand… As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness, when I awake I shall be satisfied beholding your likeness.”\textsuperscript{251} It can be argued from Scripture that God’s eyes are intentional, seeking by their gaze to reveal the truth of what is needed for people to live in right relationships with creation and its creatures, including each other in the vision of covenantal fidelity. The powers in heaven and earth, cosmic, military, communal and personal, appear as of a secondary order when viewed in the light of God’s love, \textit{hesed}, covenant-faithfulness and mercy.

\textsuperscript{250} Ps. 121: 1, in Staubli and Schroer, \textit{Body Symbolism in the Bible}, 111.
\textsuperscript{251} Ps. 17: 7,15.
In Second Chronicles, chapter six, verses twenty and forty, we have an invoked petition for the eyes of God to be turned “toward this house.” Further petition asks that God’s eyes and ears “be open and attentive to the prayers offered in the [holy] place.” Again, in Proverbs, chapter fifteen, verse three, we have the ever-watchful eyes of God surveying the human predicament, acknowledging that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good.” The experience of Hagar who has God visit her in the wilderness of exile is one of both being seen and also naming God as the One who sees. Hull claims that “the text …has her name God as the God of seeing, El-roi,” for she said: “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” The dual points of reference here, from both above and below, define God as both seeing and able to be seen in a revelatory sense. God’s scope of gazing also extends to the one who is depicted as marginalised in the wilderness.

Within the varieties of prevailing analogies and themes explored thus far, the concept assumed is that God has keen eyesight, looking and seeing as the Anglican liturgy states in The Collect for Purity, as One “…from whom no secrets are hidden.” This is emphasised in Matthew, chapter six, verse four, where God as Father is pictured paradoxically as one who sees in secret, “… and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Hull describes this paradoxical, covert seeing as “a seeing of that which is hidden from normal sight.”

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252 2 Chron. 6: 20, 40, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 74.
253 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 74.
254 Prov. 15: 3, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 74.
255 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 74.
256 Gen. 16: 13.
258 Matt. 6: 4, in Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 75.
259 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 75.
When God is described in Scripture as the God who sees, aspects of human sight and knowing do not confine this assertion. God is shown to possess a penetrating vision beyond physical limits. Hull cites the passage in First Samuel, chapter sixteen, verse seven, … “For the Lord does not see as mortals see, they look on outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart,” as another example of this beyond seeing. This corresponds with the tone and intention of the petition in the Uniting Church’s liturgy, which is addressed to God who sees the longings and desires of one’s heart “Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known.”

So it seems, that, while assertions can be made from Scriptural inference as to the probability and actuality of God as sighted (within the limitations of language, conceptual frameworks and plurality within the various theological images and understandings of Scripture itself), there remain the contra indications that there are greater horizons to God’s seeing, which are clearly beyond human capacities. This understanding is coupled with the issue of difficulties of definition when it comes to paradoxical notions of God’s interpenetrative vision, which is also beyond the scope of human seeing. According to Hull, God’s seeing is therefore problematic if one attempts any form of comprehensive qualification. Nevertheless he argues that “God is at least sighted and when understood more perfectly, God is beyond sight and blindness.”

Yet, paradoxically, in the exploring of God’s seeing, we also embrace the notion of the God who reveals and comes in the hiddenness of what is not seen. This is highlighted by the poetic and somewhat challenging, evocative words of the poet Henry Vaughan, “There is in God -- some say/ A deep, but dazzling darkness: as men

260 I Sam. 16: 7b.
261 Uniting in Worship People’s Book, no. 48, 235.
262 Hull, In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible, 75.
here/ Say it is lack and dusky because they see/ See not at all clear”

This image of God as embracing “a deep but dazzling darkness” links with the story of Nicodemus in John, chapter three. Nicodemus comes to Jesus, significantly by night, seeking knowledge but paradoxically, receiving insight about his lack of knowledge, (his own blind spot) concerning the Spirit (who is God). As the story unfolds it tells of how God reveals in this reality of knowing by unknowing which is further highlighted by the Johannine themes of seeing and blindness, believing and not believing. God’s initiative, as expressed in John’s gospel, is both to reveal and conceal. Here, God also exhibits freedom to grant life and divine inclusion through a divine and heavenly birthing that is not of human achievement. God’s ways via the Spirit are not at all clear to humanity; they require divine initiative to help one to see.

Thus it is established that a theology of seeing and sight must hold within it the variances both within Scripture and also in the diversity of human experience. It must address the concept of not seeing and hiddenness as crucial to revelation, both as a correlative, and also as the implicit assertion about the limits of our knowing and horizons. As Hull rightly reveals in referring to the truth of the Bible, (which I would assert is equally so for the truth of any so called truth and theological insight), “the sighted truth about the Bible may be true and yet not all the truth. In so far as it is not the complete truth, we are misled if we absolutise it.” Hull’s helpful hermeneutic and contributions to the scope of revelation reminds us of the need for consideration of both the particularities of difference and the plurality of context in the broadening vista of disability theologies.

265 In particular this is explored in John 9.
Eiesland reminds us that identifying exactly who “people with disabilities” are is not necessarily self-evident. The differences among persons with disabilities are often so profound that few areas of commonality exist.”267 What does seem to have greater import is the acceptance in the twentieth, and into the twenty first century, of the claim that the reality and “the recognition that disability does not mean incomplete and that difference is not dangerous.”268 Theology must seek to address difference in a multiplicity of ways. In seeking vision we must be prepared to look differently at patterns that may have been previously overlooked.

The call to embrace the body as a locus of theology and revelation is a call to behold differently, as it moves us towards an incarnational way of seeing. Susan B. Philips, a spiritual director to those with disabilities, observes that “corporeality informs language, metaphor, morality and spirituality,”269 and consequently effects in profound ways the need to widen our foci and look more closely at the human experience of those deemed disabled. This is a call for theology into the future to continue to pay attention to the person’s unique experience of God. Certainly it should honour and celebrate diversity as offering new opportunities for sight and insight.

There is invitation here for theologians and those attentive to the revelation of God in the midst of life to widen their viewing parameters and to observe where God is seen and enfleshed in the arena that honours the experience of disability. Disability as an arena of human experience has in the past, and sometimes the present, been shifted to our peripheral vision. Consequently, the lens of disability becomes more a central focus as we pay attention with intent to what is tactile and sensate. This embraces the appeal to the seeing of an embodied theology rather than what is

268 Eiesland, The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability, 43.
exhibited merely in scholarly discourse. The theological insights elucidated by Hull are springboards to contemporary theology’s continued engagement with physicality and *difference*. Correspondingly, the diversity of human experience provides multifaceted lenses for seeking vision for revelation.
Contemporary theology postmodernity’s interpretative gazes invite a radically new way of looking, because they are sceptical of anything that is seen as belonging to a meta-narrative. Jean Francois Lyotard states that “incredulity towards meta-narratives”\textsuperscript{270} is definitive for postmodern culture. Wallace asserts that postmodernity’s critique of the meta-narrative includes the fact that “the reading of history through the template of a totalising master plan suppresses the differences resistant to the narrative whole.”\textsuperscript{271} Further to this act of suppression is what Wallace refers to as “the spectre of violence, [which] has always haunted the writing of master stories… [for] the master narratives of our time are soaked in the blood of the victims.”\textsuperscript{272} Revelation, as a concept, postulates assumptions of both the possibility and also the probability of God, who reveals. These positive assertions face enormous upheavals and critiques within the post-Enlightenment discourses of postmodernity. Brown asserts, when contrasting postmodernity with modernity, that “what then is at stake is the replacement of the all embracing meta-narrative of the enlightenment with a plurality of narratives, each to be assessed in terms of its own internal criteria and standards.”\textsuperscript{273} Thus, the call to contemporary theology is to foster a hermeneutic of suspicion concerning any broad and expansive pronouncements concerning revelation.

This hermeneutic of suspicion is in correlation with alertness to the potential for domination and power imbalances that come into play if a generalised and

majority view is asserted. Thus, the key emphases in postmodern gazing are attending to the less dominant views as pertinent for seeking vision for revelation.

Consequently in postmodern discourse there is a cry against “the tyranny of the whole,” and a refocussing on the viewing angle to the particular, especially in regard to how one reads and explores texts. Texts are used in this thesis in a broad sense as the means by which we make meaning. Texts can include visual, aural and verbal media. Texts can be genred, polyphonic, polyoptic and interactive. Thus, to engage with texts as multifaceted and revelatory, we must acknowledge both their complexity and their variance. This does not necessarily negate the possibility of texts functioning as icons of God. Wallace notes that, for Paul Ricoueur, “the reality of God is not a deliverance of universal reason… but, rather, the supreme trope within a series of genred texts, that invite the reader/[viewer] to think and live alongside their creative mimesis of the world.” Consequently there is an argument asserting that revelation of God is both a defining trope and also a creative interactive interpretative process. This interpretative process occurs amidst the multiplicity of human ‘varieties of religious experience,’ to borrow the title of William James’s book. It is like observing shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope in human experience, where the patterns of what is revealed are never fully grasped; they are shifting and dynamic, evolving as new unique meanings are experienced.

The call to pay attention to the unfinished dynamic of the moving patterns of revelation, and thus to see patterns taking shape afresh, links with Ray Hart’s desire to rediscover and recover revelation from a recognition of the veritable “silence of

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revelation as a given” towards the end of modernity. His desire was to open out revelation’s sphere of influence by naming a theological shift for revelation from a largely singular focus towards seeing revelation as unfinished. This was to assert that revelation is essentially an evolving process, not a static experience, and consequently revelation would expand its scope and possibilities. In a scholarly tribute to Hart’s seminal work, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination...: Essays in Honor of Ray L. Hart*, Thomas J. J. Altizer concludes that revelation

must far rather be seen as an evolving given, a given that is itself only as it extends and enlarges itself, or only as it becomes ever other, than its primal and original identity. Then the revelatory given can be identified as a once for all event only in so far as that event is apprehended as being actual and real, in an ever moving process of continual transformation.  

The influence of *process theology* and recognition of the dynamic nature of revelation are evidenced here. Yet there are still questions within postmodernity surrounding the way God is construed as actually present. These questions centre around both the form revelation takes and also whether what is seen or perceived as exclusively a human construct prevents God from existing outside our framing devices.

Revelation will continue to have both its advocates and adversaries. From his a/theological postmodern perspective, Taylor draws on the traditional *Koine* Greek meaning of the term *revelation*, and the corresponding impetus of visual metaphors. He asserts that “apocalypse {apokalyptein, uncover: apo, reversal + kaluptein, to cover} is always a matter of vision, sight and insight.” Thus *seeking vision* still provides a helpful motif for postmodern discourse.

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279 *Process theology* is developed on the basis of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne summarised in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 534.
With the advent of postmodernity, its protagonists, philosophers and theologians seek to pay closer attention to the understated as the discourse and view at hand. Consequently the focus is often on the periphery and minority viewpoint. This invites theologians to expand their vision to examine the overlooked and to perceive what is other than the dominant view. This retrieval and discovery of newer lenses for seeking revelation can enhance the scope of revelation. Thus theologians can refocus and see both what was neglected and also absent from the foreground of theology in the past. The call to look with newer gazes that transcend the division introduced into our thought and experience by the Enlightenment is the call of the contemporary. This call sees that the divisiveness and weighting of one dominant discourse over against the other is not just flawed but it neglects the reality of different perspectives.

Taking a complementary line Grey as a feminist theologian agrees that one must explore the experience of the less dominant, distanced view. She has no time for what she calls the “disengaged individual.” Grey sees that “the controversy over eternal truths of revelation is deadlocked… because the underlying relation between truth and power structures is disguised, [and thus fails to see] that theological doctrines are enunciated within a framework giving support to disengaged individuals… they are underpinned by a narrow confrontational logic.” She addresses this essential incongruity, which eventuates when traditional theologians are caught within the privilege of announcing and pronouncing orthodoxy from a distance. Without engaging the experience of the other, we fail to discern the presence of God that addresses imbalances of power. Consequently, Grey advocates that a task for contemporary theology (borrowing a phrase from Adrienne Rich) is to enact “a severer listening to the many conflicting discourses, gaps, silences and discontinuities

which may be more significant than the discourses issuing from corridors of power.”\(^{283}\) Clearly, here Grey is arguing from a postmodern perspective by seeking to pay attention to the minor voices, rather than the overarching polemic of a meta-discourse.

Further to this, Grey, in *The Wisdom of Fools: Seeking Revelation for Today*\(^{284}\) appeals to an ecological framework that seeks patterns that connect and liberate. This appeal to connecting patterns and a unifying liberating perspective may be interpreted as appealing to a meta-discourse encompassing a global vision. In this sense, Grey is arguing from the particular to a universal ecological perspective, foreseeing possibilities where the whole is addressed by smaller patterns that connect in a wider interdependent ecosystem. Grey argues for a correspondent orthopraxis to live out this ecological vision. Here God’s revelation is evident in how things interconnect. In the concrete human experiences of God revealing there is a correlative beckoning past limitations to effectively live and care for all life. Thus, in postmodernity, there are theological perspectives that embrace the paradox of human experience enabling the particular to link with a greater whole.

Thomas Kelly highlights the centrality and return to the priority of human experience in *Theology at the Void: The Retrieval of Experience*, as a key theological vantage point. It is from our human experience of God that we receive and interpret revelation in its contemporary theological expressions. In speaking to the charge of subjectivity in religious experience and in addressing trends in postmodernity, Kelly argues, “Christian theology is always anthropocentricly theocentric. Every Christian statement about God is also a statement about humanity.”\(^{285}\) This emphasis on the

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human subject as pivotal is nothing new: it came to prominence in the nineteenth
century with the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher who spoke as “one preoccupied
with human religion as a response to God’s self disclosure.”286 This emphasis on the
priority of the knowing subject is central to postmodern theological thinking as it
seeks to honor both particularity and plurality in how we can see and know God.

This emphasis on the priority of subjectivity is also seen in the contemporary
revisiting of the theology of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard sees the call to
subjectivity as pertaining to becoming the truth, because it sharpens you into “an “I”
rather than being dulled into a third person.”287 The desire of, and focus on, the
individual as an active participant in the shifting patterns of revelation who
participates by engagement in the divine vision, is gaining more prevalence. This is
both a byproduct of the visual paradigm becoming predominant, as asserted by
Staubli and Schroer,288 and also embraces the increased emphasis on the individual as
the active beholder who partakes of this divine vision. The contemporary emphasis on
the individual recognizes the significant otherness and difference in human
experience. Consequently, individual differences are acknowledged as relevant, both
in terms of revelation’s actual reception and also in terms of the perception of the
revelation through the lens of variance, which is a pervasive influence.

The call to be attentive and to turn to the other, claimed by David Tracy to be
indicative of postmodernity,289 is a call to look at the other as a polyoptic arena of
revelation. The call to be other focussed is also emphasised by Jacques Derrida in his

286 New Dictionary of Theology, 621.
287 Søren Kierkegaard, Journals (London and Princeton, New Jersey, 1938), 533, in New Dictionary of
Theology, 366.
288 This assertion is evidenced in Introduction 6, Footnote 2.
108.
appeal to the category of “differance.” Here Derrida postulates that differance is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences of the spacing by which elements are related to each other, and that “everything differs, which is to say everything defers.” Whilst not wanting to engage with the complexities of Derrida’s philosophical and theological assertions, it can be argued that Derrida’s use of this term differance opens up the possibilities of recognising the significance of his aligning difference with the corresponding impetus to defer. The category of difference can help us to both engage with that which is other and enhance the meaning and value of our own essential identity, which must also be recognised. Thus we are continually beckoned to behold and interact with that which is other than ourselves and to defer any closure of such interaction. This opens us to a wider knowing that assumes and recognises one’s individual limitations as essential to this knowing.

This notion of engaging with the other is also highlighted in the categorization of Martin Buber with his I and Thou paradigm. Buber calls us to recognise that there is a distinctive otherness to God and to other people as distinct subjects, unlike ourselves. This means that when we engage and observe an other, we will find that, by relating to them as other, we are enabled to see more comprehensively. We can then reverence them as both inviting and drawing our gaze, and as being transparent to the divine, as we are. Langdon Gilkey takes the argument further when he sees that “this awareness of the other--- what I term a “personal” relation and so a consciousness of a “person,” a Thou--- is also a product of natural processes. It thus reveals, as does self- consciousness, the richness of nature, the
capacity of its mystery to produce the personal and awareness of the personal.”

The dynamic of human and divine otherness is implicit for revelation. It is a rich landscape of continuing discovery for contemporary theology.

Emmanuel Levinas explores further this invitation to see the other as both distinctive and as opening us to the potential and actuality of divine-human interfacing. He privileges the ‘face’ of another being as a visible arena of sensible revelation, both in its refusal to be contained and its expression.

Manifestation καθ’αυτό consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, expressing itself. Here, contrary to all the conditions for the visibility of objects, a being... presents itself in the manifestation that should only announce it; it is present as directing this very manifestation --- present before the manifestation, which only manifests it. The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form.

Clearly, Levinas sees that manifestation, named as revelation, can be seen in the beatific vision of a human face.

In postmodernity and contemporary theology there is a renewed appeal to the body as locus for revelation, which embraces an appeal to the tactile and sensate. The term embodiment, that depicts the intrinsic connection between flesh and spirit, is pertinent as both a growing edge for contemporary theology and also as a locus for revelation. Marion in his appeal to saturated phenomena as the presenting of Godself, names the flesh and the face as a sense of the presence of a person. Consequently, he asserts, these are key aspects of revelation for us to behold.

Marion envisages revelation as saturated phenomena by which the numinous becomes visible in the human person in a heightened way, which is seen and

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296 The call to an embodied theology is discussed briefly in Chapter 4, 91-92.

297 Notes taken from Shane MacKinlay, “God’s Saturated Appearing: Jean-Luc Marion’s Theory of Revelation” (lecture presented at Catholic Theological College, Victoria Street, Melbourne, August 3rd 2006).
comprehended in its *excess.* Marion acknowledges that he draws from the work of Levinas, which denotes *the face* as a particularly poignant arena for seeing God.

Marion concludes that:

There are therefore phenomena that I call saturated, where the excess of intuition over signification censures the constitution of an object and more radically, the visibility of a unified and defined spectacle. Among these paradoxically invisible phenomena, I have privileged the face, because the analysis of Levinas has acquired an exemplary phenomenological status for it already.  

There is rich insight to be explored in the claiming of the face and the body as continuing potent metaphors and mediums for perceiving and seeing divine revelation.

Another potent medium for revelation of God, that has gained renewed attention in postmodern and contemporary theology is the significant arena of nature and ecology. The rise of eco-theology describes ways of knowing that declare the revelation of God is seen clearly in and through nature. Away from any Cartesian divide of natural versus supernatural revelation, nature is seen as revelatory both in itself, and also as via media for others to behold and see the “traces” of God. Langdon Gilkey argues that these “traces… are there, present in nature… for anyone to observe and to ponder… but to see them as traces of God is an act of “faith”; it presupposes that through these media the divine discloses itself to us and that we respond to that disclosure with acknowledgement and assent.” He continues to assert that nature, “so viewed discloses significantly if not exhaustively the glory of God, that it represents an essential if not yet a sufficient mirroring of the divine.”

Whilst it is not my task to explore issues of sufficiency and exhaustivity which Gilkey elaborates both with theological and scientific corroboration, I find this reinstating of

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nature as the viewing screen to see the glory of God, and as iconic to the divine essence, both obvious and inspiring.

It is clear that if we assume and declare God to infuse creation in mysterious ways, a polemic is asserted against the Deist understanding of a detached God who does not live and breath within the created order. Thus Gilkey reclaims nature as sacred reality. Consequently, through this revelatory lens, we can view nature as an open canvas for revelation in its inherent capacity for enabling the perception of the divine interfacing with human knowing. Gilkey argues, referring to nature as sourcing the image of God, that

as source of both objects and subjects what we experience and ourselves as experencers, what we know and ourselves as knowers, nature represents an essential “mystery,” partly known, comprehended and articulated but escaping always complete formulation—not only because of its dynamic character and its depth, but also because it includes and thus transcends knower and known alike.\textsuperscript{302}

Arguing for nature to be retrieved and indeed honoured, as intrinsically connected to revelation, rather than revelation being seen as separated out from nature, allows for greater comprehensiveness for theology in seeking vision for revelation into the future.

Dulles, in his anticipation in the twentieth century of some contemporary difficulties for revelation, was partly right in his contention that one of the challenges is “modern epistemology, which highlighted the fact that knowledge must always interface with the limitations of the human subject.”\textsuperscript{303} This acknowledgement of the human subject’s limitations concerning knowledge, including revealed knowledge, will necessarily influence one’s comprehension and naming of the experience of the divine. In contemporary theology, subjective limits need to be held in tension with the increasing breadth, variety and permutations of what is recognised and acquired as

\textsuperscript{302} Gilkey, Nature, Reality and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion, 179.
\textsuperscript{303} Dulles, Models of Revelation, 6.
knowledge within the continuum and complexity of varying contexts and change. This recognition of knowledge as *in process* and evolving correlates to the interplay of *plurality* and *flow* amidst a multiplicity of contexts and consequently, there are varieties of vision.

In the context of this discourse we must necessarily recognise that, there are negative voices that oppose and question the possibility of revelation as a major decisive factor in the present theological landscape. These include the voice of postmodern theologians such as Taylor who, according to John W. Riggs, seeks to *purify* and remove from theology any semblance of its “church accretions”\(^\text{304}\) and traditional categorisation. Taylor regards reality as nothing more than semblances or signs. He decries religion and its trappings as having a “slippery character… we can never be sure where to look at.”\(^\text{305}\) Whilst declaring his lack of belief in God, he admits that he does believe in the sacred, confessing, “While I no longer believe in God, I can no longer avoid believing in the sacred.”\(^\text{306}\) Taylor continues in declaring that he sees “the sacred ‘is’ the denegation of ‘God’ and God is the denegation of the sacred.”\(^\text{307}\)

Consequently Taylor, in a complex philosophical appeal to the negation of religious and theological terms as positive affirmations for theology, declares “since revealing concealment and concealing revelation are absolute, the sacred can ‘show’ itself only by not showing itself or by showing not.”\(^\text{308}\) Taylor’s theological stance and assertions are attempts to deconstruct the traditional descriptors and ways that God could be seen as revealed in human experience. His provocative theological views are difficult to engage with because they appear to lead to a nihilistic end point. Yet in seeking

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vision for revelation Taylor’s view can offer a radical alternate vantage point for contemporary theology.

Taylor explores and recovers the concept of the image not as a thing in itself, but rather, he sees the image as an icon - a representation of the divine that reveals beyond itself but not to some other world or God but rather reveals a humanly imaginatively created image. Taylor asks “what if a thing is not a thing but is an image? What if a thing is actually, (coded) information?”

Further to this Taylor asserts, “Reality… became a matter (or non matter) of image.” Consequently Taylor opposes any traditional notion of a divine creative essence or of a God beyond human construction. Taylor prefers to see that what we may deem revelatory is, in fact, nothing more than a product of self-reference.

Contrary to Taylor’s theological view, which deems revelation as a human construction, not divinely mediated, Joseph S. O’Leary argues, from his standpoint as a philosopher of religion, that, “to see religions as human constructs does not exclude the possibility that they are vehicles of revelation… precisely in their fragility as historical constructs that they best serve the reality of revelation.”

Further to this, O’Leary argues that this quest for ultimacy brings forth greater awareness as

When a luminous perspective emerges, which both perfects the pre-given religious framework (through clarifying the ultimate sense of the conventional designations) and exceeds it (through an immediate tasting or touching of ultimacy that shows up all the conventions of discourse as mere straw)... We should think of ultimacy in adjectival rather than nominal terms. It is a quality of pristine religious insight, its character of insurpassability of being supremely, indubitably real. Awareness of the ultimate is immediate, luminous, blissful.”

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Thus, for O’Leary in the elaboration of the view that revelation exists within the human dynamic of a quest for ultimacy, there exists the re-establishing of revelation as both normative and an expression of the divine that can illuminate human experience.

Consequently, in the movement and amalgam of views termed postmodernity, seeking vision for revelation continues to engage with possibilities and actualities of seeing and perceiving God. This is true even when the language of theology appears limiting and prohibitive. There is still the desire of contemporary theology to encompass and articulate authentic meaning and experience in describing and picturing the revelatory encounter with God. Whilst even without a foundational or traditional framework, revelation is not seen as irrelevant. Rather, revelation is reclaimed in new ways with an appeal to the fragmentation of knowledge and the particularity of difference. Thus, even with its adversaries like Taylor, who argues against the concept of revelation in its traditional guises, there is still a recognition that humans will continue to represent or image the divine in an iconic fashion which, by definition, offers a window to the divine and implies the God who reveals.

Thus, in postmodernity’s attentiveness to revelation as either a subliminal idea, seen as less to the fore (perhaps mimicked or hidden), or by contrast, seen as a potential and wonder-filled arena of vividly observed and engaged difference, there is a continuing invitation to seek vision for revelation. This invitation is to explore and seek to see God revealed via clearer perspectives and new horizons. Thus there is renewed impetus to seek vision by engaging with new theological insights and observations. In doing this we are seeking vision by looking as through a kaleidoscope, at a multiplicity of shifting patterns, colours and moving multifaceted frames.
Chapter 6: Seeking Vision: Further Horizons

This chapter will explore trends and views in contemporary theology that engage and expand theological horizons in seeking vision for revelation. These trends and views include an increased emphasis on theological aesthetics, continuing insights of philosophy and phenomenology on theological framing, and the rise of technology and cyberspace. These further horizons occur within the current contexts of global vistas, plural viewpoints and significant scientific perspectives concerning what is now observable and what is still hidden but can be inferred. Concerning the scientific perspectives, there is renewed emphasis on revelation in dialogue with science and religion. In identifying the need to distinguish between inauthentic and authentic revelation, this chapter will also seek to identify some blind spots and explore some limits to one’s seeing God. This will include the exploration of the notion of revelation’s counterfeit in the appearance of the idol. A further horizon I will then explore is the phenomenology of intense religious experiences, as outlined by Wildman. The aforementioned further horizons function as vantage points that encourage creative ways of seeking vision for revelation. These newer vantage points will, of necessity, both expand horizons and reveal limits for revelation within the contemporary milieu. Thus, seeking vision here will necessarily encompass exploring and looking through various theological lenses in order to gaze at the evolving patterns that appear.

The evolving process of revelation becomes evident when acknowledging the influence of technology as a further horizon. The rise and increase of computer and communication technologies with their emphasis on the visual can become a new medium for seeing and beholding God. Clearly, the immediacy provided by the instantly present, rapid-fire images of sight and sound viewed on screens of varying
sizes has correspondingly enlarged the horizons of what can be seen and known. Consequently there has been an expansion of global awareness because the scope of human seeing and the actual communication of information through visual data have increased. The exponential growth and use of computer technology has created its own etymology and layers of meaning, a development, which, in turn has created new terms and inferences in common language usage. The pervasive influence of the computer and the new terms produced has generated the observation that

The widespread model of the computer has given rise to words, which are now applied to humans – children particularly have been observed to do this. They speak of being ‘programmed’ to do something or of ‘interfacing’ with someone. They define themselves in terms of similarities and differences between themselves and the computer.\textsuperscript{313}

This redefining of reality with its correspondent language, symbols and metaphors as descriptors influences the scope of revelation. Moreover, these contemporary tropes will continue to influence our self-definitions.

The adoption of computer technology which influences conceptual framing is evidenced by philosopher Marion in his use of the term \textit{screen} to describe the way revelation occurs upon and in us. For Marion, we are like the screens that God reveals Godself on. This experience of being the “saturated phenomena,”\textsuperscript{314} when someone or something appears in their/its \textit{excess} and fullness, as if on a screen for others to behold, is only readily understandable since the advent of the visual screen. Thus, like Marion, theologians and philosophers, in order to illustrate the reality of revelation they describe, will assimilate the language of their contemporary cultural artefacts. They will construct analogies from the everyday contexts in which they live. This will necessarily influence both the initial revelatory encounter and its consequential


\textsuperscript{314}Marion, \textit{In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena}, xiv.
meaning-making, in attempting to define and display the reality of God within these emergent vantage points and horizons.

The momentum provided by the rise of new technologies as a further horizon hold in tension both possibilities and problems for revelation. This is because these new horizons interface firstly, with the positive assumption that there is revelation of the divine mystery in the experience of these new technologies. Secondly, the rise of new technologies engages with the assumption that, as lenses of human construction, they may construe revelation in distorted ways and assume either no divine influence or, at least, question any positive reference to the divine mystery and presence of God. Clearly these assumptions will continue to influence contemporary theological assertions and descriptions concerning the notion and experience of revelation.

One way to describe revelation is as a re-cognition process, a combined ‘seeing-with-knowing’ experience that draws from the insight that the categorisation of subject and object is less pertinent because it fails to acknowledge their flow and interconnectedness. Altizer, acknowledging the work of Hart, illustrates how such seeming opposites are in relationship with one another when he comments that

... Hart’s hermeneutical theology can be of decisive importance in leading dialectical theology into a concrete realisation that objectivity and subjectivity are fully dialectical opposites and are in so far as each flows fully into the other. If a critical hermeneutics can lead theology into a recognition that revelation is ever other than its manifest or simply given identity then, it can lead the way to a truly theological response to the work of art.315

Significantly, Hart saw that the twentieth century’s crisis in the identity of revelation has become an opportunity to reclaim art as an arena for revelation.

Furthering this appeal to art as being revelatory, Altizer continues

... if the very identity of revelation has become veiled ...not simply because of the historical situation in late modernity but also because of the paradoxical and elusive nature of faith itself, then works of art become an arena in which to seek out not simply a witness to the presence and absence of

315 Unfinished....: Essays in Honor of Ray L. Hart, 106.
Consequently, art is seen in contemporary theology as a primary medium for revelation. Further to this, by looking through the lens of theological aesthetics, there is both renewed attention and an increased appeal to observe and picture the human experience of God revealed. Art and imagination expressed in visual forms act as a conduit to the divine presence. Here, God is seen and experienced through the creative act of the imaging of God, and also in the visionary subject which draws and holds our gaze. Thus there is a renewed and recovered theological naming of art as revelation’s manifest iconic patterning.

Revelation through art can be seen as embracing the visual image as both the receptor of divine revelation and also as that which gazes at us, ourselves, enabling revelation of the divine. This rediscovering of art as a *via media* for theology and revelation has led to the precedence of aesthetics in contemporary theological scholarship. According to Aidan Nichols in his work *The Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in the Christian Tradition*, “this is why the visual image plays such a crucial part in knowing the divine…. by discovering how artworks can initiate us, through our own aesthetic [perceiving]… into a new world.”\(^{317}\) Richard Viladesau, in his work *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art*, suggests, “we may conceive three interconnected divisions of the task of a ‘fundamental’ theological aesthetics as a study of the perception of revelation in sensible form.”\(^{318}\)

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\(^{316}\) *Unfinished…: Essays in Honor of Ray L. Hart*, 107.


These are firstly “...knowing God through a mind intrinsically tied to sensibility... This involves the recognition of the radical openness of the personal subject to the transcendent: in traditional theological language, the doctrine of the human person as ‘image’ of God.” Secondly, Viladesau identifies “receiving (or embodying) a historical revelation from God in personal and symbolic form. This involves understanding the notion of the ‘image’ of God as extending to interpersonal relations, so that materially and linguistically located human history can be the embodiment of revelation.” Thirdly, Viladesau emphasises the notion of using ‘word’ or language (in the widest sense, including verbal, pictorial, musical, and gestural symbols and images) to embody, formulate, interpret and communicate the knowledge of God and of historical revelation. This implies the possibility of ‘analogous’ discourse on the level of both concept and image.

This analogous discourse of the concept and image, of necessity, interacts with the receptivity and imagination of the one who receives such art as revelatory.

Furthermore, Garrett Green explores the correlation between image and imagination. Green suggests that “the revelatory Anknüpfungspunkt... depends wholly on the initiative of divine grace and nevertheless appears in the wholly human form of imagination. The divine-human point of contact can be described as the faithful imagination, the human power to imagine, conformed to the image of God.” The power to imagine highlights the increasing awareness of our human capacity and search for understanding as indicative of seeking vision of God present with us as part of the unfolding human story. This revelatory vision of God is described by means of analogous references which attempt to depict what is both mystery and yet also part of one’s concrete human experience.

319 Theological Aesthetics: A Reader, 362.
320 Theological Aesthetics: A Reader, 362.
321 Theological Aesthetics: A Reader, 362.
The attention given to analogous discourse is prominent in the work of theologian David Tracy. Tracy discusses (drawing on the correlative method of theology of Paul Tillich), the use of language (including symbol and metaphor) in conjunction with human experience. Such language can facilitate “actualisations and representations”\(^{323}\) in the moments of revelation as disclosure that combines both the phenomenological and the transcendental. For Tracy, the test of authenticity “…on the testimony of those all consider clearly religious… [is] some experience of the whole, that is sensed as the self manifestation of an undeniable power, not one’s own.”\(^{324}\) Furthering this assertion, Tracy says that this manifestation, this revelation, does not disclose the certainty of a clarity and a control but the reality of a power at once tremendum et fascinans. The event of revelation does not seem to disclose only our radical participation in the whole. The event conceals that participation with equal radicality, precisely as a participation in a realised experience of the whole as radical mystery both disclosing and concealing itself.\(^{325}\)

Amplifying this, Marianne Sawicki (acknowledging her debt to a Heideggerian aesthetic approach), appeals to the revelation of God in the sacraments as visible, divine-laden symbols, through which “…we experience the sacraments as artworks which let God’s revelation happen, as things that enable us to dwell in the world that they open up.”\(^{326}\) This appeal to sacraments as artworks implicates them as potent and creative symbols that function as revelatory in their ability to disclose the divine presence.

Contrary to the possibility of the sacraments as potent revelatory symbols and the probability of the image as a site and vehicle of revelation, Taylor argues that some contemporary art and use of the visual image is not transparent to the divine.

\(^{324}\) Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 173.
Taylor proposes that the image (or any visible representation) in Photo-realism particularly (but also in Pop art and Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Conceptualism), far from being a referent for the divine, ostensibly reveals itself only. He argues, “when the sign is a sign of a sign, the image an image of an image and the representation, a representation of a representation, ostensible reference is actually self reference.” Clearly, Taylor’s contrary view is a challenge to the assumptions of how one seeks vision and experiences revelation. He addresses the limitation of human vantage points by questioning whether the perceived validity in the eye and experience of the beholder is purely self-referential. He questions whether there are some external criteria beyond a self-reflective appraisal by which one judges a genuine revelation.

Another contemporary dilemma that influences revelation’s horizons is the awareness of scarcity of life-sustaining resources, which highlights human limitations in terms of availability of future resources to sustain populations and support life. In this global crisis of resourcing life, coupled with the advancement of the global technological enterprise, we see a colonisation of what are the means of power in controlling information and resources. This influences what information and resources can be distributed, and shared, and will necessarily, entail, encapsulating what is known and available in order to preserve and maintain global systems. Commenting on what he sees as a new form of imperialism, Ziauddin Sardar describes a process he names as the “museumization of the world.” Here Sardar draws our attention to the human propensity to break everything down into models and bits that can be objectified as commodities and components. This is deemed to be a consequence of

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the fact that whilst we are engaging in the immediacy presented by the World Wide Web we are less concerned about the past. Instead, by focussing on the new and being future oriented “there is no genuine respect for the traditions of any culture.” Thus the tendencies to manage, contain and discard are part of the horizon of the digital frontier where ”traditional ways of thinking and being are all too easily reduced to quaint curiosities.” What does this mean for the horizons for revelation, which desire to reveal a visible sense of God’s creative purpose in relation to the future of humanity and the world? Clearly, if our horizon is limited by the constraints and the drive to contain and control, and restricted by this so called “museumisation” of the world, we are confined to the scope of reductionism where what is deemed observable and of some future value is categorised and stored as artefacts without intrinsic value.

This limited confining of the scope of revelation reduces the reality of revelatory phenomena to a display of cultural artefacts, models, and containers for classification and storage, with no divine imprimatur or sense of openness to the mystery of the transcendent Other. Thus revelation is reduced to observable phenomena, where what is revealed is displayed in a kind of clinical convenience storehouse placed there in order to preserve a historical tradition. Clearly, this approach grants to humanity a God-like quality that implies that what we can see is all there is of God’s being or presence. It asserts that revelation is nothing more than something we can gaze at in the manner of looking at a display object in a museum. The object thus displayed conveys some significance as part of the annals of history, depicted, perhaps, with some novel meaning and description. Yet its meaning is limited, due to the extent that the display is objectified, contained, and categorised without reference to any ongoing, unfolding process and divine effecting.

329 Wertheim, The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet, 297.
Consequently, revelation becomes a closed system. Contrary to this, revelation could be interpreted through the theological lens that acknowledges the continuous all-pervasive spiritual presence of God, known as the very ground of our being and the source of all that is. For without the dynamic of this spiritual impetus, and God known as *a priori* and continuously revealing the unfolding eschatological future, the view remains static.

If God’s presence is seen both within concrete visible phenomena and human experience and also as part of an unfolding mystery not confined, then it holds the paradoxical tension of being both seen and not seen. Hyung Choi, a scientist, confirms the interrelationship between the seen and unseen. In so doing, he claims an inherent link between theology and science. Choi argues for the reality of the unseen and for the probability of the mystery of God as observed through what can and cannot be seen in creation. He maintains that

… exploring the knowledge of the possible rich texture of the unseen—the “physical” or otherwise---should be a part of our endeavour to restore what we have lost from the treasury of human ideas… There are significant epistemological and methodological parallel between scientific and theological claims concerning the unseen…[they] are often inferred from the seen. 331

The ongoing organic relationship between science and theology will continue as a lively colour scheme in the kaleidoscopic patterning of how we envision and describe revelation of the divine. With prophetic overtones, George Bugliarello (president of the Polytechnic University of New York from 1973 to 1994), argues that

… all of these discussions about the goals and values of science must include a religious dimension not least because science itself is global and therefore multicultural, the religious principles and ethics of the world religions must come into play in the working out of any new compact between technology and society. 332

Thus, whilst exploring the constantly changing innovations in science and technologies, it is important to see that there are overt and covert correspondences


with contemporary theology available through the scope of what is termed religious and, by implication, revelatory. The interplay and correspondence between religion, science and technology will both affect known horizons to seeking vision for revelation and also effect how concepts and experience of the divine are expressed.

Margaret Wertheim, in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*, traces complexities and developments in the awareness of space, cyberspace and the divine realm. She explores the development of notions of the divine realm in correlation to notions of space and spatial terms exhibited in the burgeoning expansion of computer technology. Wertheim notes that “… now cyberspace is going through its own inflationary period. In the past fifteen years the Internet has swelled from fewer than a thousand host computers to more than thirty-seven million ---and growing by the day.” With this escalation of computers as a primary network to link the world, there has been a corresponding adoption and integration of language that borrows from the traditional religious and divine and often produces a new quasi-divine rhetoric.

Wertheim illustrates this subtle and not so subtle ellipsis and a synthesising of language, images and symbols of the divine. She refers to the opening words of a speech by Mark Pesce:

Let us begin with the object of desire. It exists, it has existed for all of time, and will continue eternally. It has held the attention of all mystics and witches and hackers for all time. It is the Graal. …The Holy Grail is the archetype of the revealed illumination withdrawn. The revelation of the *graal* is always a personal and unique experience. … I know – because I have heard it countless times from many people across the world – that this moment of revelation is the common element in our experience as a community. The graal is our firm foundation.

Pesce’s usage of quasi-religious language interspersed with the mythic symbol of the ‘Holy Grail’ mixes and reinterprets religious image and concepts whilst distorting

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them for our contemporary contexts. Wertheim contends that, “... surely the
“community” being referred to must be Christian” while with the clue...[being] the
word “hackers” we find instead, that this speech pertaining to revelation, whilst
using obvious religious language and symbolism names computer hackers as allies in
the experience and quest for seeking vision of the inferred divine objective.
According to Wertheim’s research: “in one form or another a ‘religious’ attitude has
been voiced by almost all of the leading champions of cyberspace.”

What does this mean for the seeking of vision for revelation in a context where
cyberspace images and concepts take on a religious character as indicative of the
divine? Can such images and named religious experience in the realm and rhetoric of
cyberspace function as either substitutes or new mediums for revelation? Clearly a
hermeneutic of suspicion is required when the creators of computer virtual realities
are claiming a divine imprimatur without reference to other theological criteria.

Jacques Ellul critiques technology’s claims to revelation. He insists that
technology has hijacked and reduced Christian revelation by a “penetration of
Christianity by technology.” He alerts us to the tendency of people to express “a
boundless admiration, for the technologies... our hope is placed on an improvement
of the technologies... Consequently we have a kind of redirection of faith towards
something other than revelation.” Further to this, he argues that this focus on
technology neglects “a transcendence” Here “the existence of the transcendent
permits us to evaluate the world in which we find ourselves.”

337 Wertheim, The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet, 255.
338 Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, ed. William H. Vanderburg
(Ontario, Canada: Anansi, 1997), 99
339 Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 99-100.
340 Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 101.
341 Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 101.
as transcendent and not included in our system, he contends, “…this then gives us the outside vantage point that permits the critique of the system.” By reclaiming and asserting the reality of transcendence we can engage in a wider horizon of knowing.

This wider horizon points beyond the reduced knowing of human structural systems as defining worldviews. The artefacts seen in the rise of technological computer generated scopes and the virtual reality culture tend to only point to their own constructs. Thus the question arises, can the medium of technological constructs be the poiesis for revelation? Garry Deverell addresses the supposition that technology is the purveyor of human ways of expressing the divine and is, by inference, revelatory. Whilst acknowledging the call to freedom within human capacities, he provides some cautions and principles to examine in order to discern whether what is being revealed is, indeed, revelation. There is also he suggests, the possibility of a narcissistic, idolatrous creation that limits the integrity of revelation. Deverell cautions that he “personally can’t see why any technology can be excluded from the making of worship out of hand, [but]… it needs to be conformed to a number of principles. These principles include “a need to be conformed to the structure of Christian tradition and belief,” and a correspondence and “integrity… between word and action.” To use technology in worship, Deverell argues that one must recognise the gap between the divine and human that cannot “simply be collapsed into the experience of technology that dominates the rest of our lives… for it is the gap that … makes the difference, the possibility of the ordinary becoming revelatory.” Thus, Deverell contends, “the word of God is given opportunity to transfigure that which at the beginning, communicates itself only as human

342 Vanderburg, Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 102.
artifice.” As an act of prayer, the liturgy as performative worship “should be hospitable to the ‘secret’ who is Christ, the mystery of God.” So, for Deverell, the criterion of openness and hospitality to the paradoxically hidden secret of Christ, the mystery of God, is pivotal as to whether revelation through technology can be acknowledged as Christian revelation.

Susan White also examines how worship as faithful responding to the God, who reveals, interrelates with technology. She suggests that when and if “technology and worship can enter into a relationship of mutual critique, there is the possibility that both may undergo genuine renewal.” This recognition of the interface and interrelationship between technology, worship and revelation of God is an evolving horizon for contemporary and future theology.

The nature of the subject of worship, if it is not God (however this is revealed) raises the question about what replaces the divine. This must be that which theologians would label an idol. The idol is that which is viewed and deemed worthy of worship. Although the idol does not reveal the divine, nevertheless it operates in place of the divine. The probability and the possibility of seeing and perceiving God, and the probability of seeing and revering the idol as a kind of substitute and intermediary for God, remain matters for discernment.

Marion discusses these alternative possibilities as to how we can perceive either the idol or the divine presence. Philip Blond refers to Marion’s understanding of how the idol operates when he concludes “to speak very simply, immanence produces idols that stand in front of transcendence and conceal a higher phenomenology. In Dieu sans l’être, … Marion describes this structure as being akin

to the function of an invisible mirror.” Blond elaborates this process of seeing the idol where

the secular gaze approaches the mirror, and the mirror reflects back the look, so that this gaze never transcends itself. Yet the idol never announces itself as an idol; as its reflective function wholly conceals its form, the mirror never reveals itself as a mirror. Moreover, Marion goes on to suggest that this idolatrous structure is itself a product of the thought, which unknowingly venerates the idol as something glorious and eternal. Idols thus block the fullest possibility of perception.

Thus, Marion contends, “… the invisible is prohibited by the idol, and the divine, in consequence, is only allowed to occur by human measure.” The priority given to the receiving and knowing subject who is able to apprehend God, in what is not seen fully, yet is both visible in concrete form and also transcendent, is a strong argument for both the actuality of divine revelation and also for the idol as a more limited counterfeit. Pailin draws attention to Thomas F. Torrance’s appeal to an authentic revelatory encounter with God, who is both within, and beyond, human scope and experience. Torrance insists that “the subject matter of theology is ‘the living God… who communicates… to us’: unless theologians are ‘obedient to the given… Word and Act of God’, they will only produce ‘a dumb idol’ which reflects the character of its human makers.” In seeking vision for revelation in contemporary theology this dialogue between what constitutes authentic revelation, and what is merely an idol as substitution of the divine, is ongoing.

Yet, while the artefacts of technology expand in scope, the appeal to the divine Other does not diminish. Rather, this appeal to the divine is retrieved and reconstrued in new and challenging ways. The rise of computer images and the corresponding expansion of visual data to enhance knowledge and imagination have, indeed,

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350 Heelas, Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity, 305-306.


produced new arenas for theological exploration. Consequently, questions arise as to whether the sight on view is genuinely revelatory.

Wertheim alerts us to the claim of virtual reality animator, Nicole Stenger, that “on the other side of our data gloves... we will all become angels.” Is this merely a reconstrued diluted form of the initially Athanasian emphasis on a theology of divinisation where “the Logos of God became man so that you might learn from a man how a man may become God?” This theology of divinisation infers that God in Christ became human in order that humans could become God. On the contrary, is this view merely an allusion to a self-referential enlarged anthropomorphic pantheism that claims our human potentiality in terms of our data constructs, which become the all-embracing substitute and encapsulation of the divine presence?

Clearly one must remain sceptical of any apparent revelation of God if the experience of what is viewed has no corresponding effect and an evidenced conversion to such divine co-relationship. The historical fruits that stem from a converting revelation, necessarily, will elicit a corresponding call to act differently, to be transformed. Correlatively, there will be a reshaping of one’s perceptions. This redefining perception of the beholder invites a new awareness of one’s relationship to God and the reception of this revelation call forth a new way of being in the world. Moreover, God’s beheld glory is pivotal in effecting how one treats and reveres the other as also interrelated to God. Otherwise, the experience of seeing and knowing God (and having a religious experience) could be deemed as merely a gaze that

353 Nicole Stenger, in Wertheim, The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet, 255.
355 Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Greeks, 1.8.4, in McKim, Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought, 84.
bedazzles. Thus revelation becomes not an end in itself, but by the revealing of God and the reception of that revealing, there is recognition of a correspondent call to love and care for the world. This correspondent call is towards all who inhabit the hospitality of God’s goodness: thus horizons expand.

With the contemporary theologian’s horizons also expanded by the globalising impetus of the world-wide web and its fragmented, multiple vantage points, there is a corresponding impulse to redefine reality. Seeking vision for revelation will continue to engage such paradigm shifts and the variance experienced within the historical challenges provoked by globalisation. This is nothing new, for major shifts occurred to theological methods as a result of technological innovations in the past, as seen in the seminal advent of the printing press which expanded the horizons of reading and hearing, making the Scriptures more accessible.

The influence of the Reformations initially across Europe, and then into the wider world, initiated theological shifts and spread new understandings of God revealed in Scripture and preached by the churches. Similarly, another historical shift led to a recovery of the laity as a wider voice for accessing and interpreting revelation. Thus, historical and theological paradigm shifts act as processes that infiltrate and flow into other realms of knowledge. The influence of the Reformations and later the Industrial Revolution, with its increased technological means of production, changed the landscape of the known world, opening new vistas for revelation.

Further to this, with the advent of television in the early twentieth century and its rapid adoption as the new medium of communication, there was a corresponding enhancement and integration of the senses of sight and hearing. Marshall McLuhan characterised the stage of Western culture prior to printing as ‘hearing humanity’.  

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McLuhan “claimed this caused a cultural explosion, in which the ear and the eye were
dissociated, and in parallel with this, there was a separation of the emotions and the
intellect.”\(^{357}\) This dissociation between feelings and thoughts is explored in more
depth by Andrew Louth who draws on the concept of a *dissociation of sensibility*
estespoused in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. Louth identifies the mindset which holds that
“the refinement of language in the eighteenth century is not matched by any
corresponding refinements of feeling—rather the reverse. It is a dissociation between
thought and feeling, between the mind and the heart.”\(^{358}\) Louth proceeds to assert that
these divisions and dissociations go deeper as a legacy of the Enlightenment (noting
that, even earlier, Platonic dualisms were suspicious of the emotions), which
displayed a widening gap between theology and spirituality. Louth points out that “
‘theology’ [in its narrow sense becomes] discourse about God [whilst] *theologia* ... is
broader than our term for it means not just the *doctrine* of the Trinity, but [also]
*contemplation* of the Trinity.”\(^{359}\) If we follow Louth’s argument here we will see that
theology must expand beyond mere understanding about God to, necessarily, also
embrace contemplation and prayerful experience of God.

The practice of contemplation seeks to integrate vision with other senses, and
to take time to notice and be aware of God revealed in human experience. This wider
visioning includes both the affective insights of sensate experience and the
annunciation of both visual and aural connectedness. It also includes the realisation of
equity between thought and feeling with a corresponding willingness to acknowledge
their interrelationship. The call to integrate visual and aural connectedness evidences
more wholistic knowing and reference to the God who is seen and known in all

\(^{359}\) This is discussed in Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*, 3-4.
things. The greater call for *epiphanies of connection*\(^{360}\) marks a new theological
imprimatur for our century and into the future.

In contemporary contexts, the medium of the larger, clearer image provided by
television and video screens still calls for a reintegration of the senses. Southgate
holds that

The two-dimensional, indistinct image they project, smaller than the objects represented,
require the viewer to participate in imagination, to fill up the gaps and make the shapes real in the
mind. The input for this is both visual and aural, so that once again, the emotional impact of sights and
sounds become significant.\(^{361}\)

The combining of our senses is integrated with, and linked to, the flow on
effect of making meaning. Revelation, necessarily, requires that we engage in
meaning-making and ongoing discernment in order to bring further light to bear on
the revelatory event and process.

Taylor reminds us that the dominance of the image is a new shaping force that
communicates dramatically in making meaning as *information*. Taylor observes “the
McLuhanesque world of the late twentieth century makes the informational value of
images increasingly evident. When the ‘medium is the message,’ images not only
shape perception but also communicate information and convey ideas.”\(^{362}\) Do the
images we see, then, become windows to the divine, or to use Marion’s analogy,\(^{363}\)
act as reflecting mirrors? Within the new conceptual framing provided by the vistas of
*virtual reality*, theologians must continue to seek further clarity of vision by
addressing questions such as: In the creation of virtual realities and artificial
constructs, how does one perceive the divine whilst the shapes shift, imitate, distort
and fragment the sight before us? Here we are, necessarily, confronted with both our

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\(^{363}\) Marion’s analogy of a mirror reflecting is discussed on page 119.
flawed linguistic devices and also the recognition of limits as to how we make meaning.

Recognising the colonising nature of technology, theology's role is to critique and assert the religious truth claims of revelation. Ellul invites an iconoclastic response to address the advancing of technology. He considers that the task is “to destroy the deified religious character of technology [and] to subject science and technology to the critique of revelation.” Ellul is also concerned that “technological conditioning is getting more and more rigorous…[resulting in] more and more determining for people.” Clearly, the determining influence of technology will, necessarily, continue to present challenges for seeking vision for revelation. Thus the making of meaning in seeking of vision for revelation is subject to complex variables. Furthermore, as contended throughout this chapter, the advent of new technologies can have a defining role in how we understand ourselves and how we describe or image God or the divine, however we encounter, or are encountered.

Hart describes two languages relevant to the event of revelation and the consequent description of the experience. First, we see what appears to us as the initial expression, which is then placed in the larger framing of a common currency to describe what we see. Fritz Buri, referring to Hart’s scholarship, explains

…it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of language: a ‘first order language’ which-- as [Hart] characterises it--- preserves that body-heat intimacy which obtains between apprehension and the reconfiguration of linguistic debris which expresses it’ and ‘as such, is eventful’, and a ‘second order language’ which withdraws from the language-event in order to place it in a larger frame, to connect it with apprehensions embedded in the language of common currency, and so to enhance its communicability.

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364 Vanderburg, Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 108.
365 Vanderburg, Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul speaks on His Life and Work, 110.
According to Hart, “theology belongs to second order language [as part] of this communicability in and to the public domain.”

If theology belongs in the public domain it must, consequently, dialogue and reflect on different human experiences, recognising the need to express those human experiences as being loci to the reality of God.

Wildman describes the human experience of revelation within a phenomenological framing. This recognises that revelation emerges from particular experiences that enhance -- expand our perception. Consequently, in order to describe what has been experienced, Wildman includes the aspect of one’s horizon as primary. He names the horizon as one of five features that are indicative in these revelatory experiences. Wildman identifies these five features as depth, horizon, scale, complexity and mystery. He suggests that these features necessarily influence one’s experience of God and are described and evidenced within the particularity of intense human experiences.

Wildman links each of these five features with a corresponding registry of associated feelings. Using a phenomenological methodology and acknowledging insights drawn from both theology and the philosophy of religion, Wildman appeals to “intense experiences -- which have corresponding emotional impulses or “pressures” to express from these experiences some meaning and depth for religious belief and practice.

First, for depth, Wildman associates feelings of intense fear, and joy or bliss. His correspondent spiritual activity is one of surrender and trust to that which “may or may not be worthy of our trust …this is the import of Yahweh placing Moses in the

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cleft of the rock for his protection [and] David dancing in the temple…surrender is the
natural response.” 370 Secondly, in the case of horizon, Wildman suggests “horizon is
registered in feelings associated with recognising difference such as fascination…
fear, disgust or hate… The primary activity associated [with one’s] horizon is
engagement.” 371 This will include the fight or flight response: the desire to defend or
attack or even such ways of engagement as “dialogue and flirting.” 372 Thirdly,
Wildman identifies the feature of scale, where the associated feelings are “awe…
which leads out into feelings of benevolence, compassion, wideness of heart, or loss
of self.” 373 It may evidence itself in the awareness of “an all encompassing vista… so
that my interests are viscerally experienced with those of every being everywhere.” 374
This is because one is confronted by the spatial and temporal in ways that make one
see one’s own place in situ differently. Fourthly, the feature of “complexity is
registered in feelings of confusion, disorientation, irritation, surprise and wonder…
[the correspondent activity is] the satisfaction of curiosity.” 375 Finally, the fifth feature
of “mystery, is registered in feelings of ignorance and incomprehension [and]… the
primary activity associated… is reverence.” 376

Wildman’s five features explored and evidenced within intense experiences
invite us to recognise how we see differently when affected by a numinous
experience. It follows that any human experience that in its intensity leads us to
contemplate the divine in our midst is, by inference, indicative of, and important for,
revelation. Thus, in Wildman’s schema, value is given both to the phenomena
themselves and also the associated emotions and activities that will enable the

373 Wildman, A Phenomenology of Intense Experiences, n.p.
374 Wildman, A Phenomenology of Intense Experiences, n.p.
375 Wildman, A Phenomenology of Intense Experiences, n.p.
376 Wildman, A Phenomenology of Intense Experiences, n.p.
revelatory encounter to be described. Consequently, such meaning making enhances the scope and validity of such revelation.

While the question of whether what anyone is experiencing can be deemed revelatory is subject to the charge of relativism due to the uniqueness of the encounter for the person concerned, we can also acknowledge other knowledge limits. Wildman draws our attention to “our limited understanding of the ways intense experiences are like and unlike perception.” Further to this, Taylor refers to the relevant work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in The Phenomenology of Perception. Taylor notes that Merleau-Ponty insists, “that perception is more primordial than conception.” Taylor also asserts “the immediate contact between subject and object which is the aim of phenomenological inquiry …can only be attained through pre-reflective perceptual experience.” This pre-reflective phase is assumed in the revelatory encounter when the immediate contact between God and humanity occurs, prior to meaning and concepts being formed.

In correlation with this discussion, we can hear the pertinent understanding of Kant that “percepts without concepts are blind; concepts without percepts are empty.” McEnhill, referring to Kant’s assertion, suggests, knowledge is construed as “the interaction between that which we perceive via sensory input and the innate concepts in our minds by which we order and interpret our perceptions.” Revelation will, of necessity, include a process encompassing both the initial sensate perceived experience and the consequent, but integral, reflection and meaning making using

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381 McEnhill and Newlands, Fifty Key Christian Thinkers, 163.
concepts. Thus the interplay between the precognitive perception and the consequent conceptual reflecting and connecting are essential to the reception of revelation.

Pailin correspondingly contends that, in the apprehension of revelation, if “God is held to have a personal mode of being… the active qualities of the divine can only be perceived a posteriori through some form of revelation.”\textsuperscript{382} Here, the theological assumption is that “revelation is limited to what human beings can apprehend.”\textsuperscript{383} Pailin, in The Anthropological Character of Theology, elaborates the need for appropriate human reception by suggesting that: “… concepts can only have content and not be mere labels which convey no information at all about what they label,\textsuperscript{384} … if they are applicable to a range of states or objects.”\textsuperscript{385} “…Consequently, either God must make the contents of a revelation publicly communicable or nothing is apprehended by anyone.”\textsuperscript{386} The importance of naming the horizons for apprehending revelation invites further theological consideration, as it contributes to the revitalisation of the theological category of ‘the human experience of God’ in contemporary theology. Thus the theological category of the human experience of God is seen as normative for seeking vision for revelation.Interestingly, it can be noted that another vantage point not considered here is whether the human experience of God affords an exclusive vista, or rather, whether other creatures and living things can also apprehend God.

\textsuperscript{382} Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 117.
\textsuperscript{383} Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 118.
\textsuperscript{384} Pailin refers to the work of P.F. Strawson, Individuals (London, Methuen, 1964), 20, where he asserts that, “it is no good using a name for a particular unless one knows who or what is referred to by the use of that name.” in Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 124.
\textsuperscript{385} Pailin cites P.F. Strawson, Individuals, 99, with the theological [comparability] example that… ‘God exists only as a concept if the concepts they use to describe God could be applied to more than one God.’ in Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 124.
\textsuperscript{386} Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding, 124.
Thus, as has been observed throughout this thesis, revelation is not absent from current theological discourse and the vistas of contemporary theology. There are further horizons to be engaged. These include the rise of technology and the various views expressed as to what constitutes authentic revelation. They also include the phenomenological insights given in the work of Wildman and others. These contemporary factors were not seen as prominent or even on the horizon in past centuries.

These further horizons act as potent lenses and inevitably influence the landscape of what is both observable and what is also hidden, nuanced, and acts as background to what is visible in the foreground. The named further horizons of theological aesthetics, scientific perspectives, the rise of technology and cyberspace, and the phenomenological framing of revelation engaging with human experience are seen as part of a wider landscape of horizons to be viewed in contemporary theology. They can be viewed and explored, either as significant points of departure, or as brief glimpses that may be given little more than a sideways look. The theological conditions that indicate authenticity will also engage these further horizons.

Thus, this chapter suggests how some of these newer horizons can provide insights that shift our perspectives and expand our theological scope when seeking vision for revelation. Our horizons and limits to seeking vision concerning revelation clearly act as influencing background and foreground schema that infuse and infiltrate human knowledge in many arenas. Consequently, as we pay attention to such influences, we can seek to enhance visioning into the future through new vantage points and cleansing the lenses of theology’s kaleidoscopic looking. Clearly, revelation will continue to draw the human gaze. Further horizons will remain
significant in their attentiveness to the divine, wherever, and however, a divine revelation is deemed manifest.
Conclusion

This thesis explores the contemporary theological vistas of revelation through the impetus of seeking vision. I have used the idea of seeking vision as pertaining to the nature of theology itself as exploratory. This seeking of vision included exploring metaphors of sight and blindness, light and glory, as scopes presenting horizons and limits, as theological vantage points. Thus, visual indicators of sight and not seeing have been used as pertinent descriptors. They are both mediums and vantage points for theology. Seeking vision for revelation is, necessarily, an incomplete endeavour, as views of revelation are constantly changing, moving and unfolding in the contemporary contexts of the twentieth, twenty first centuries and into the future.

This thesis began with a selective overview of the contemporary theological landscape, alerting the reader to prevailing patterns, horizons and voices in the twentieth and twenty first century. My task in this thesis was to identify some of these prevailing patterns in order to seek vision for revelation in its contemporary contextualities, identifying theological views that indicate diversity either as adversaries or advocates of revelation. Secondly, my task was to see where the patterns are currently shifting and refocussing. I began in chapter one by considering the work of Avery Dulles, whose influential, typological schema scoped the twentieth century’s theological views of revelation, while chapter two contrasted Dulles views with the theological ideas and critique of feminist theologians such as Mary Grey. From here, in chapter three I explored the Biblical witness, as multivalent to seeking vision for revelation. This exploration included reference to seeing, sight metaphors and the eye, as evidenced in the research of Thomas Staubli and Sylvia Schroer. Continuing to explore the use of visual terms as evocative of seeking vision for
revelation, in chapter three I proceeded to explore briefly vision, light, and glory as presented in the work of Hans urs von Balthasar and Vladimir Lossky.

From this basis, in chapter four, I explored the insights and work of John M. Hull, who interprets the Biblical witness from his contextual experience of becoming physically blind. His work alerts us to the emerging contributions of disability theologies for seeking vision for revelation in contemporary theology. In chapter five, I explored some recent views of revelation, including postmodern contributors, highlighting the postmodern desire to reject the meta-narrative and focus on the lens of the particular. I also gave attention to the fact that in postmodernity, there is the rise of newer lenses that look towards the other as a primary referent. Finally, in chapter six, I outlined some contemporary influences on theology’s horizons, such as the renewal of theological aesthetics, globalisation and the rise of technology and cyberspace as indicative for revelation. In addition to these horizons, I also explored the human experience of God, as depicted by Wildman in his phenomenological framing of human intense religious experiences. These newer vistas and horizons encompass a variety of ways of seeing, while offering new viewing angles, interspersed with critiques of past knowing. Thus they are poignant arenas for seeking vision for revelation.

By including newer contemporary perspectives as influences in the seeking of vision for revelation, we can engage with a surplus of meaning and theologically reflect on trends. Whilst acknowledging the fragmentary nature of knowledge within postmodern perspectives, which propose avoidance and dispute with any meta-narrative, it becomes apparent that in these last centuries there has been new freedom in exploring and developing the possibilities of revelation. By utilising the kaleidoscope motif and research method, I have sought to recognise that what we can
see is constantly changing. Thus, claiming the adequacy of seeing glimpses of revelation through a lens of variance and constantly shifting patterns, I invite theologians to look differently. Throughout this thesis I have sought to acknowledge both the limitations of seeing the divine, and also the burgeoning horizons of our contemporary contexts.

Clearly, what we can see and say about the probability, actuality and potentiality of revelation will always be contextually limited human descriptions of our experiences of God. Yet these experiences have a qualitatively different sense, inviting one to depth and change one’s perception. Pailin alludes to depth as relevant to revelation. He cites John Macquarrie’s insight that describes “the revelatory experience as one of perceiving things ‘in depth’ … or as seeing ‘an extra dimension,’ or as becoming ‘aware of the being that is present and manifest in, with, and through particular persons or things.”

Seeing this ‘extra dimension’ manifesting will present both visible and hidden mystery as coinciding and present.

Thus the prevailing patterns of revelation concurrently announce, whilst also mysteriously hide, the reality of God. God, here, can be construed as infinitely present, personal or pervasive other and also as elusive hidden mystery. Thus, our making meaning of revelation beckons us beyond human comprehensibility to reveal God in the authenticity of divine paradoxicality. Hence God, according to Christian theological assertions, is known as both infinitely beyond any picture or image we construct, and also as present in the life and story of Jesus the Christ.

This faith story in its contextual embodiments includes its continuing story within contemporary and future faithing communities. Wallace concludes that a “revived interest in … revelation can help facilitate…in the possibility of hearing [and

seeing] God’s Word again in the play between text and reader, the building of renewed communities of faith and hope.”

Thus God can still be perceived (according to those theologians with a positive assumption of the reality of revelation) in moments of human experience that are both particular and communal. Correspondingly, we can claim that revelation is intrinsically linked with our lived practice, our faithing and revealing of God with, in and through all living things. This view is counter to seeing revelation from a disengaged perspective, where the theologian seeks to engage simply in abstract discussion. To name revelation as necessarily linked to one’s lived practice, is to acknowledge both the lenses of our varied contexts, and also our passionate energies and differing expressions of how and who God is: God who reveals and is revealed in ways that effect our living.

The variety and particularity of the ways God is described will, of necessity, continue to present challenges to any attempt to make conclusive and exhaustive fixed statements. For, as Brown rightly asserts, “God defies our desire for tidy categories.”

The insights of process theology appear more valid as they present theological knowledge and creation itself as continuously unfolding. Even when we assume creation itself is infused with the glory of God, we must simultaneously acknowledge the hidden unseen mystery of what is yet to be discovered as pregnant to the divine. It is evident that revelation is always an unfolding process through which what is observed and experienced as God present, either in its fullness, “saturation and excess” (to borrow Marion’s image), or in its brevity, requires interpretation and ‘the eyes of faith’ to name what is seen as revelatory. Then, in the secondary

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posture of seeing and knowing in the light of faith, the trusting receiver can affirm a beholding of the divine mystery of “God with us.”

This thesis has evidenced the myriad of ways of looking, seeking and glimpsing God in contemporary theology without naming any foregone conclusions, because we tend to see only partially. Essentially, as theologians, we are engaged with the beauty and significance of what we see.

Thus, in seeking vision for revelation, we will, necessarily, confront limits. Clearly we must recognise that the lens and the vantage points from which we look are clouded by our perspectival biases. As newer observable parameters emerge to act both as impetus to expand our horizons and also as challenge to explore our finitudinal limits, the theologian’s task is to engage with contemporary vistas. This is in order to discern revelation by engaging with both emerging patterns and also narrower gazes. Thus, inevitably, as new vistas for theology continuously emerge, they will require further exploring. The perspectives offered by contemporary theologians and religious scholars explored in this thesis such as Dulles, Grey, Staubli and Schroer, Lossky, von Balthasar, Hull, Wildman, Marion and many others cited, will, of necessity, enrich and expand both current vantage points for revelation, and also enable further exploration.

Paradoxically, it is clear that God is also inferred by all the arguments against revelation, for there hovers a divine rumour of possible presence within the absence of revelation, even if not named in theological or religious language constructs. For God is, by definition, bigger than our knowledge and our sight, and God as the source of all creative visioning, continually breaks forth from any human moulding or containment.
Through the kaleidoscope metaphor we are invited as theologians in our time and context, in the spirit of the Johannine invitation to “Come and see.” For, if by seeking vision for revelation we engage with this visual invitation, we will, see depending on the light and our capacities, see clearly, dimly, and at other times, paradoxically, both clearly and dimly. We tend to see only in part, but for those able to see and discern in the light, which is of God, and also paradoxically in the dark which is of God, it is the impetus of theology to continue to seek vision. This is to be engaged with the beauty, the mystery and significance of what we see. It is to anticipate what we cannot see as alluding to the God who fundamentally reveals.

Whilst the patterns of revelation form and change quickly, so the dynamic of theology is invited to be less flat and more attentive to the wonder of what is seen and not seen. Essentially the envisioning of revelation is like a rainbow, with its broad meshing of the whole colour spectrum. Thus it is hard to discern where the view and vision begins and ends. Revelation therefore cannot be fixed and closed in its analogous observation.

Clearly it is evident that a pivotal ongoing task of theology pertaining to revelation is to engage in the spiritual observance and practise of paying attention. To direct our gaze and have it directed by, and towards God, and correspondingly to know the gaze of God on all creation, and us, is to recognise “the God in whom we live and move and have our being.” To be seeking vision of God is to recover the prospect of gazing and contemplating as a future continuous task of theology. Consequently, as we contemplate and reunite theology with the act of prayerful gazing, we will develop the faculty of imagination and seek a more expansive vision that extends the boundaries of familiar limited scopes and traditional lenses. The call

\[391\] John 1: 46
of theology in all times is to engage, observe, describe and continue to pay attention to the new and the old, the patterns and the colours of the way we recognise God, coupled with those where we do not. From each vantage point we seek vision for revelation and the possibility and probability of God being revealed in our times. From this, we can infer that the task for the theologian seeking vision for revelation in these contemporary times is to discern how the insights and effects of newer perspectives can help us see afresh and expand our horizons.

Philips describes a pertinent image which is an embodied gesture calling us to pay attention. This image beckons us towards further seeking of vision in contemporary theology. She describes how in North American Synagogues in the

Shema, which begins with the call to the people to Hear… [is] interpreted for the deaf, with the sign “pay attention.” This sign does not indicate the ears but employs the physical metaphor of vision. It involves holding one’s hands flat palmed on either side of one’s head and wrists bending forward pointing all fingers outward in the line of sight as though directing vision in the channel between the palms of the hands.393

This visual engaged gesture helps highlight the distinctive emphasis of this thesis, that seeking vision is illustrative of theology’s call to continue to pay attention to the mystery of God with, for and beyond us. If we acknowledge that we need to direct our vision and have our vision directed in the context of a faithful response, we will see God revealed in new and in familiar ways. God will necessarily remain both seen, and also hidden, in the patterns of our gazing.

Moreover, in the faith stance that says that we are always in process of beholding an unfolding vision, we continue to engage in the tradition of apocalyptic visioning. This seeking of vision embraces the call to see differently and prophetically through the lens of a faith that longs for a new heaven and earth. Seeking vision for revelation acknowledges the human experience of finitude and partial vision, whilst

393 Philips, in Supervision of Spiritual Directors: Engaging in Holy Mystery, 174.
continuing to seek and live this vision. Thus, drawing from verse three, in chapter twenty-one of Revelation, we can affirm in a myriad of ways in contemporary theology that we may “see the home of God is among mortals, God will dwell with them and they will be God’s people.”\textsuperscript{394} Even now, as the prophet Isaiah proleptically invited, “Do you not perceive it?”\textsuperscript{395}, God will continue to be both revealed and concealed into the future, which is indeed hidden in God.

\textsuperscript{394} Rev. 21:3b.
\textsuperscript{395} Is. 43:19b.
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