

REVELATION AND CHRISTIAN LEARNING

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Abstract

The subject of the thesis is the relation between the mechanisms of human learning and the appropriation of divine revelation. Its conclusion is that while revelation may be understood in the traditional sense as a definitive divine disclosure, the means by which such a disclosure is received and understood are those of the ordinary processes of human learning.

The study draws on the full range of disciplines integral to Christian education, particularly the philosophy and psychology of perception and learning and the theological doctrines of humanity and revelation. In the first chapter, a methodological framework is offered by which to relate these disciplines.

The conclusions of the thesis are as follows: Learning is an interactive process of "assimilation and accommodation", in which a psychological "world-model" is gradually developed. Such world-models, whose basic units are termed "schemata", consist of "tacit" rather than explicit knowledge. They are affectively or evaluatively structured, reflecting the fact that their formation is the result of the development of a sense of coherent identity. Revelation takes place by means of the gift of a new identity, characterised by a relation to God in Jesus Christ mediated by the Holy Spirit. Christ is the "exemplar", or concrete pattern of Christian identity, knowledge of whom is available as an historical figure interpreted by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christian learning is the

development and maintenance of that new identity. In revelation, God acts by his Holy Spirit in such a way as to preserve both human autonomy, which is itself a gift of God in creation, and the active character of the learning process.

A final chapter investigates some of the implications of the paradigm presented here against a wider philosophical background.