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DULLES AND AQUINAS ON REVELATION

1. Beginning the Dialogue

RESPECT FOR Avery Dulles' achievement in *Models of Revelation*¹ need not consist entirely in "enthusiastic recognition of its many merits"² even though it is "the mature reflection of an experienced teacher" and "as of now . . . the most comprehensive treatment on revelation in the English-speaking world".³ Learning from it involves recognizing the "worthwhileness of dialogue with Dulles' work".⁴ In this questions are essential to advancing the discussion.

This article will proceed in appreciative dialogue by means of critical questions and will move in the direction of modifying aspects of Dulles' basic principle in *Models of Revelation*. Dialogue, according to the hermeneutical work of H.-G. Gadamer,⁵ is not first of all a genre for organizing and presenting themes and ideas already attained. It belongs to the act of understanding itself, occurs in reading a text, always takes place in and through tradition and is one of the ways in which interpretation enters into every experience. In this light, the *Summa Theologiae*⁶ of St. Thomas Aquinas belongs to a read-

¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983).

² Bernard Cooke, "God Revealing in Symbol", *Commonweal* 110:308, May 20, 1983.

³ Dermot Lane, "A Review Essay: Dulles on Revelation", *The Living Light*, 21:74-76, Oct. 1984; p. 74.

⁴ William Loewe, review in *New Catholic World*, 226:185, July-August, 1983.

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); pp. 325-341, 345-351.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 45, *Prophecy and Other*

ing of *Models of Revelation*, despite the absence of evidence that it influenced Dulles' theology of revelation. It does not belong to it, that is, because it served as a source for *Models of Revelation*. Nevertheless, the *Summa* is within, and has significantly changed, the theological tradition shared by *Models of Revelation*. Reading Dulles' book in light of its tradition, then, brings Aquinas into the dialogue⁷ in a way that would not be appropriate for a strictly historical-theological analysis of influences upon Dulles' theology of revelation.

The *Summa* stands as a classic⁸ work in the Catholic theological tradition. The inescapable magnitude of Aquinas' achievement makes it pertinent to every part of that tradition. Karl Rahner judged that, "Thomas Aquinas is to be numbered among the great figures of theology with whom any contemporary theology must engage in a genuine dialogue".⁹ Rahner observed, too, the way in which attitudes toward Aquinas have changed. He noted, "From being *the* teacher of theology in the theological schools themselves, Thomas has acquired the status of a Father of the Church".¹⁰ In this new and somewhat reduced condition, Aquinas' texts can assume their true proportions as theological classics whose claim upon generation after generation arises not so much from official sanction as from their self-evidencing power to speak about subject-matter whose intrinsic significance brings it before a succession of eras and to a variety of cultures. It is easy

Charisms (2a2ae, 171-8), Latin text; English translation, Introduction, Notes, Appendices & Glossary by Roland Potter, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969). English translations and Latin text will be from Vol. 45 through-out this article; references will be to parts of Aquinas' article.

⁷ M.-D. Chenu's *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, translated by A-M Landry & D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), it is true, places the modern reader in dialogue with medieval texts through careful recovery of their contexts. But the relationship tends to lead into Aquinas's texts and their meaning rather than back from them to contemporary themes.

⁸ H.-G. Gadamer, pp. 253-258.

⁹ Karl Rahner, "On Recognizing the Importance of Thomas Aquinas", *Theological Investigations* Vol. XIII, translated by D. Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); pp. 3-12, 6-7.

¹⁰ Rahner, p. 4.

enough to see that dialogue with Aquinas inspired the work of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan as well as the early writings of Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann Baptist Metz.

Yet this is not to propose that Dulles likewise constructed *Models of Revelation* under the inspiration of Aquinas even if not from direct use of Aquinas. Nor is it to presuppose that Aquinas' teaching needs to be regarded as "the one great ocean into which all conceivable streams of wisdom and knowledge flow and converge, so that it is from *this* ocean alone that we must draw our knowledge and inspiration, all other sources now being superfluous".¹¹ Rather, it is to set forth in preliminary manner the kind of relevance obtaining between a classical and a contemporary theology of revelation. It is to indicate in the briefest fashion that a common tradition and a subject-matter central to it constitute an initial justification for inquiring into *Models of Revelation* with the help of the *Summa Theologiae*.

Still, Dulles' critique of neo-Scholastic theology of revelation in Chapter III, "Revelation as Doctrine" could be read as preventing this dialogue. Far from offering insight into revelation, Aquinas' theology might be thought to be the prototypical case of revelation-as-doctrine, in which revelation is God's word manifesting and communicating divine knowledge "in the form of words having a clear propositional content."¹² And, if such a superseded Catholic neo-Scholastic version of propositional revelation looked back to Aquinas in some respects, does this not end the possibility of fruitful dialogue with him?

Allaying that suspicion will be the first moment in the dialogue. Does Aquinas fall under Dulles' critique of revelation-as-doctrine? To the extent that this model attributes an objectionably high degree of conceptual clarity and precision to revelation, almost as if God were at pains to abide by Cartesian norms, Aquinas' theology of revelation simply does not

¹¹ Rahner, p. 10.

¹² Dulles, p. 45.

fit within the model Chapter III outlines and rejects. As long ago as 1949 Victor White¹³ showed that for Aquinas clear and precisely defined concepts were not essential to revelation. He pointed out that "St. Thomas describes the typical revelation as 'quaedam cognitio obumbrata et oscuritate admixta . . .' (*De Veritate* 12.12)".¹⁴ For Aquinas, prophetic perception of the divine was "everything of which the controlled, orderly, logical and scientific reason is most suspicious".¹⁵ Aquinas recognized, said White, that in prophetic revelation "the typical vehicle is not the rational concept, but the concrete image, the phantasy, the dream, the hypnogogic uncontrolled imagination (*De Ver.* 12.7.8; 2-2 173.2, etc)".¹⁶ White pointed out that Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews 1:1 "stresses the extraordinary variety to be found in the methods which God has devised to make his saving ways known to men—even in the Old Testament alone".¹⁷ And among those ways, it was especially "the immense richness and variety of symbolism which revelation has employed for its medium".¹⁸ Aquinas, through familiarity with the Old Testament, saw that, as White said, "imagination is par excellence the vehicle of prophetic vision (*De Ver.* 12.7)".¹⁹ Moreover, he recognized that the images seen by the prophets were not "mere signs for what is otherwise knowable, but true *symbols* for what wholly transcends sense-perception or rational comprehension".²⁰ White's distinction between sign and symbol and his locating the essential role of symbols in Aquinas' idea of revelation opens up an affinity with Dulles' distinction between indicators and symbols as well as with his emphasis on symbolic mediation.

In fact, Dulles begins Chapter IX, "Symbolic Mediation",

¹³ Victor White, O.P., "St. Thomas's Conception of Revelation", *Dominican Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 1948; pp. 3-35.

¹⁴ White, p. 7.

¹⁵ White, p. 6.

¹⁶ White, p. 7.

¹⁷ White, p. 11.

¹⁸ White, p. 11.

¹⁹ White, p. 20.

²⁰ White, p. 20.

with an introductory comment on transcendence and symbolism that comes close to White's definition of what symbols do. Dulles remarks: "The poets have long been familiar with the connection between symbol and revelation. Samuel Taylor Coleridge affirmed very simply: 'It is by Symbols alone that we can acquire intellectual knowledge of the Divine'".²¹ Yet a difference between Aquinas and Dulles also emerges from White's further exposition of Aquinas. White joins to symbols something that Dulles, and arguably Coleridge, omit from knowledge of the divine. There is no escaping, that is, the central role of intellectual judgment in Aquinas' theology of revelation, and White does it some justice. For he states that in Aquinas there "is no apprehension of truth or falsehood, nor of veracious vision as opposed to hallucination (cf. 1-2,77.2; *De Malo* 3.3, 9) without a judgment or its equivalent (I.16.2)".²² In White's view Aquinas has room for both symbolic knowledge of the divine and for the judgment affirming its truth.

Does the important role for symbols mean that for Aquinas God revealed through obscure, and symbolic, messages instead of by means of clearly conceived formulae? René Latourelle's *The Theology of Revelation*²³ suffices to exempt Aquinas from the anthropomorphism that imagines divine communication taking place essentially through delivery of verbal statements, transparently clear or runic as the case may be, to a prophet who then gives assent. Latourelle remarked that Aquinas saw that "between the human word and the divine word there is an *analogy*".²⁴ The divine word of revelation was not just like the teacher instructing a pupil through spoken discourse. Aquinas said that God revealed to the prophets by means of an inner word, and that this inner word "is merely illumina-

²¹ Dulles, p. 131.

²² White, p. 24.

²³ René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1967); pp. 159-179.

²⁴ Latourelle, p. 166.

tion of the mind" ²⁵ so that the prophet can perceive something of divine things. In this regard, it can be said that the word of God comes into being in the mind of the prophet, as well as that it comes to the prophet, since what "comes to" the prophet is illumination essentially and not primarily verbal statements.

There are no less than four principles in 173,2 ²⁶ in particular that inhibit attributing the objectionable model to Aquinas. First, Aquinas strictly limited the teacher/pupil analogy for divine/human communication. This analogy lay at the root of the revelation-as-doctrine model, according to Dulles. The likeness between God revealing and a teacher instructing is in the giving of representations or ideas to another. God can do this directly by infusing them into the mind of the prophet, to whom God, therefore, is immanent.²⁷ The teacher can do this by speaking or writing; he "furnishes his pupils with realities through word-symbols" ²⁸ in propositions or statements. However, although it is not the point Aquinas made directly and

²⁵ Latourelle, p. 177, note 93: "Perceptio divinae locutionis, qua prophetam alloquitur interius, quae nihil est quam mentis illustratio" (*De Ver.*, 12. 1, ad 3).

²⁶ Question 173 takes up "the manner of prophetic knowledge" in four articles. Article 2, while only a fraction of Aquinas' theology of revelation, gives clear exposition of one principle: the act of revealing is an act of enlightenment, and the gift of divine light is the formal characteristic of prophetic revelation. *Prophecy and Inspiration*, Paul Synave, O.P. and Pierre Benoit, O.P. (New York: Desclee Co., 1961) pp. 33-38 analyzes in detail 173, 2 in regard to the several ways the prophet's mind could be engaged by God.

Some other *loci* for Aquinas' theology of revelation, in addition to 2a2ae, 171-178 are: *De Ver.* 12; S.C.G. L III, c.154; IVc. 25; *Expos. in Joannem; Ad Hebraeos; In Boet. de Trin.* 2, 3, ad 7; *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1; 2a2ae, 1-7; 1a2ae, 1, 6.

²⁷ 173, 2 *Responsio*: "In this second respect [conferral of species], not in the first [conferral of light], human teaching can be likened to prophetic revelation, for a man furnishes his pupil with realities through word-symbols, but he cannot illumine from within as God does."

Cf. also, 172, 6, ad 2m: "Demons manifest to men what they know, not by enlightening their intelligences, but by giving them imaginative vision, or even by addressing them in terms of sense-impressions."

²⁸ Note 27.

explicitly, God communicates not through statements but through infused species. New knowledge or new images can also come from divine influence upon the prophet's imagination stirring familiar images to a new arrangement, or from new sensible objects known in an ordinary way. The very fact that divine delivery of propositions to a prophet does not occur in every case demonstrates that it is not essential to, and is not formally the character of, revelation, should it occur.

Second, every analogy labors under the law of incommensurability according to which every similarity between the created and the uncreated contains a still greater dissimilarity. Without formal reference to this, Aquinas nonetheless respected it in regard to the teacher/pupil analogy. The major difference between God revealing and a teacher discoursing to pupils lay in the fact that the teacher "cannot illumine from within as God does".²⁹ Despite the most earnest efforts by students, no teacher can communicate more than intelligible signs, leaving the illumination of them—or not—to the light of the student's own mind; the light itself in which the teacher grasps and judges an argument cannot be communicated. God, on the other hand, can and does give precisely the light enabling the prophet to perform the judgment in that light; God communicates not only—in some cases—intelligible species, but also the light within which to judge their divine meaning and truth. And this is part of the uniqueness of the way in which God, and no creature, can communicate to and in a human mind.

Third, Aquinas did not present each and every act of judging taken into account in 173,2 as an instance of judgment acting upon a pre-formed proposition. In this article, and according to P. Lee,³⁰ in Aquinas' whole theory of judgment, there is

²⁹ Note 27.

³⁰ Patrick Lee, in "Aquinas on Knowledge of Truth and Existence", *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. LX, 1, Winter, 1986, pp. 46-71, argues convincingly that the position John of St. Thomas held on judgment is mistaken. According to John of St. Thomas, the first act of mind apprehends or forms a proposition which the second act of mind judges to be true or false. Lee considers the act of judging to be identical with composing or dividing a proposi-

no reason to think that the second act of the mind consists essentially in assenting to a pre-formed proposition offered to the prophet for a divinely assisted consent and subsequent proclamation to others. Instead, in 173,2, and in Aquinas' theory of judgment, the operation of composing or dividing is precisely that which forms and proposes. For the prophet, the word of God forms in the judgment.

For example, the case most able to be thought of as an instance of propositional revelation in 173,2 concerns the words written across the wall of Belshazzar's hall in *Daniel* 5. It might be possible to construe them as an elliptical sentence declaring in cryptic manner the political fortune of Belshazzar.³¹ If this were the case, and if Aquinas conceived revealing as an act of divinely enlightened assent to a divinely formulated and transmitted sentence, then Daniel's prophecy would amount to decoding the words in a first act that formed a proposition and then, by divine enlightenment, affirming its truth on the basis of its divine origin and authority in a second act. But, in fact, it is otherwise in 173,2. Daniel interpreted the words in an act of revealing that simultaneously apprehended their meaning and affirmed it as God's verdict on Belshazzar. That Aquinas explicitly saw Daniel's prophecy as an act of judging and not as apprehending is clear from the way he argued from this case to the conclusion that prophecy consists essentially in the con-

tion. "Proposition" here "refers not to the sentence, a linguistic entity but, to what a declarative sentence typically signifies, viz. a complex object of thought which is true or false, and which has, at least typically, a subject-predicate structure," Lee. p. 48.

In respect to the act of judging, as distinct from the content previously known, Aquinas' theology of revelation does not involve propositions, but primarily the inner word of enlightened judgment and only secondarily an outer word communicable to others. It is helpful to note, in this regard, the difference between the act of revelation, formally characterized as enlightenment, and the transmission of it to others by speech, which Aquinas identified as a distinct charism, in 177.

³¹ 173, 2, *Responsio*: "And so if anyone is favored by a God-given representation of certain realities through imaginative images, as with Pharoah and Nebuchadnezzar; or through bodily images, as with Belshazzar—such are not to be considered prophets, unless their minds are enlightened for judging."

ferral of new light for judgment. In that argument Daniel's interpretation exemplified the distinction between receiving new species (the words seen by all) and the gift of new light (which Daniel alone received). In this judgment, Daniel was not considered to be doing what pertains to the first act of the mind, apprehending the ideas conveyed by the words, but what pertains to the second act of the mind, asserting the truth. That is what made him a prophet. It is not the case, that is, that Daniel first apprehended the words in their meaning formulated into a proposition, then secondly, judged that these are true words. Aquinas did not treat enlightenment as an act upon a proposition formulated prior to and apart from judgment then subsequently given over to judgment. This would be what the revelation-as-doctrine model would expect Aquinas to teach if he adhered to that idea of revelation.

Fourth, what is common to prophecies is the giving of new light for judging. That is what Aquinas affirmed in order to move to the conclusion that the multiplicity in prophecies derives not from that light but from new species. In 173,2, however, Aquinas did not equate the gift of new light with the reception of a new proposition, as if the new light had a new proposition for its formal object. Three cases of prophecy, for example, do not even involve words: Joseph interpreting Pharoah's dream; Jeremiah seeing a boiling pot facing away from the north (Jer. 1:13); Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Yet all of these are acts of revelation. Therefore, the act of judgment in revelation does not necessarily have verbal statements as its object. Prophetic judgment is not a matter essentially of ratifying verbal messages received from God. It is also true that Aquinas did not exclude this, and in *In Joannem*, c.5, lect. 6 referred to divine spoken words in Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and at the Transfiguration.

Thus, Aquinas in 173,2 does not fit neatly under the model of revelation-as-doctrine. Because of this, there still remains open the possibility that there can be further dialogue between Dulles and Aquinas. What differences or conflicts there are can

be understood in a context other than that of the inadequate model of revelation-as-doctrine.

2. *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 173, 2 as Counter-point to Chapter IX, "Symbolic Mediation"

In Chapter IX Dulles argues the principle essential to the theology of revelation expounded in Part Two of *Models of Revelation*. Revelation, he proposes, is "always mediated through symbol".³² In diverging from models treating revelation as doctrine, as event, as inner experience, as dialectical presence, and as new awareness, he does not deductively apply a general theory of symbol to revelation since his ideas on symbol are themselves influenced by revelation and faith.³³ And his focus falls on the mediation of revelation, not so much on its content, though the two are inseparable. How does God reveal? God's self-manifestation is "always mediated through symbol". This means, he adds, that revelation is mediated by means of "an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define".³⁴ This principle will enable Dulles to retrieve and to incorporate into a symbolic theology elements from the five models analyzed and set aside in Part One. Did Aquinas, though, teach anything like symbolic mediation?

In general³⁵ Aquinas conceived divine revelation as an act of divinely enlightened knowledge and as one of the three ways in which human beings know something of divine things. The other two are rational ascent from knowledge of the objects of experience to some limited knowledge that God exists, is one, is first cause, is wise, etc., and beatific vision, which is vision because not mediated by created realities and their intelligibilities. Beatific vision is direct participation in divine knowledge,

³² Dulles, p. 131.

³³ Dulles, p. ix.

³⁴ Dulles, p. 131.

³⁵ Cf. Latourelle, p. 159, ff.

but not with a comprehensive grasp of the divine essence. That which is revealed, the content of revelation,³⁶ is some part of divine things. Divine things are what God knows, whether these be human or divine, past, present or future according to created existence and knowledge. In the act of revealing God let the prophet know what is, but is far removed from human knowledge. God lifted the veil of ignorance preventing the mind of the prophet from perceiving what is real but above human comprehension. Such prophetic revelation was a charism for the common salvific good of humanity, not solely for the personal good of the prophet. Its social destiny brought a secondary charism to the prophet, the ability to communicate what had been given in the act of revealing.³⁷

Also, though an extra-ordinary gift, and in no way due to a person's capacities of desires,³⁸ the act of enlightenment by God was not the gift of faith nor was revealing received in an act of belief or faith. Rather it was divinely conferred and actuated knowledge for communication to others, who did receive it in an act of faith in God and in the content. The prophets were obviously people of faith but what made them prophets was not the faith they shared with their fellow Israelites but the charism of knowledge given by God for Israel, and beyond.

In the *Summa*, 2a2ae, 173, 2 presents with unmistakable directness the principle essential for understanding how Aquinas conceived the way in which God revealed. In 173, 2, Aquinas inquired "whether in prophetic revelation God infuses new species in the mind of the prophet, or simply grants a new light".³⁹ The central argument is over how God revealed what was given to a prophet. Was it exclusively "new light" so

³⁶ On the questions pertaining to content, cf. also the discussion on "sacra doctrina": James Weisheipl, O.P., "The Meaning of Sacra Doctrina in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1", *The Thomist* 38: 1-2, Jan.-Apr. 1974; pp. 49-80.

³⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 177-178.

³⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 172, 3, 4.

³⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 173, 2, "utrum in prophetica revelatione imprimantur divinitus menti prophetae novae rerum species, vel solum novum lumen". The Latin text will be given selectively, not regularly.

that a prophet understood in new and divine perspective matters already learned from human experience? ⁴⁰ or had God also sometimes given "new species", that is, new knowledge not gained from previous experience? Aquinas argued that God's gift cannot be restricted to the conferring or infusing of new light for judgment, though sometimes God did just that. Sometimes, Aquinas pointed out, God had also given new content to knowledge. For example, the words written across the wall in Belshazzar's banquet hall in *Daniel 5* were new sensible objects. In *Jeremiah 1:13*, God gave Jeremiah a new fantasy, that of a "boiling pot facing away from the north". Moreover, if God had given only new light for judging what had already become part of the prophet's human knowledge and experience, there would be no basis for the diversity and multiplicity of prophetic revelations, since all would consist in the same thing, new divine enlightenment, which was what formally fulfilled and characterized prophecy. What was common to all would be also, then, the basis for their multiplicity as well.⁴¹ The divine light alone cannot be taken as the sole source for new and diverse knowledge of divine things received in prophecy.

But the main element in 173,2 germane to *Models of Revelation* is not so much the conclusion that "in prophetic revelation there is a new infusion of species and not simply an intellectual light" ⁴² as the exposition of the role judgment plays in prophecy. The act of revelation on its human side respected the structure of human knowledge while it fulfilled and elevated it. Because prophecy was an act of knowledge, divinely

⁴⁰ The first objection proposed that "in prophetic revelation God impresses no new species of realities on the prophet's mind, but merely a new light" because prophets "use images of objects with which they are familiar".

⁴¹ 173, 2, *Sed contra*: "But the multiplying of visions is not the work of intellectual light, which is common to all prophetic vision, by [*sic*: but] only according to the diversity of species, according to which there comes about an assimilation."

⁴² 173, 2, *Sed contra*: "Videtur quod in prophetica revelatione imprimantur novae species rerum, et non solum intelligibile lumen."

given to be sure, it can be examined in its human activity. So, Aquinas stated, "Two points arise as regards the knowledge of a human mind."⁴³ He proceeded to analyze prophetic revelation according to the two aspects present in all human knowing. In prophecy, too, there was both "the acceptance or representation of things and then the judgment about what is presented".⁴⁴ Revelation involved one or the other or both. The full case of prophecy involved both because knowledge or understanding (apprehension) prior to the act of judging remained incomplete. But there was no parity between reception of new species, the re-arranging⁴⁵ of familiar images or ideas, and the act of judging. The gift of new species by itself was not yet revelatory since their truth and meaning had not been grasped. Just as the act of judgment in general was the "full fruit of cognition" so too the gift of new ideas or images came to its fulness in the divinely given enlightenment enabling the prophet to discern the meaning and truth of what he had received.⁴⁶

For this reason, the divinely enlightened judgment "looms the larger in prophecy".⁴⁷ In fact, the judgment by the prophet was, according to Aquinas, the revelation. It was the full revelatory act. The divine knowledge by itself was not revelation. There was no communication of it until the act of enlightenment in the mind of the prophet. Aquinas adhered to

⁴³ 173, 2, *Responsio*: "Circa cognitionem autem humanae mentis duo oportet considerare, scilicet acceptionem sive repraesentationem rerum, et iudicium de rebus repraesentatis."

⁴⁴ 173, 2, *Responsio* (as above in n. 42): "acceptionem sine repraesentationem rerum, et iudicium de rebus repraesentatis."

⁴⁵ 173, 2, *Responsio*: "Just as the different ordering of the same letters of the alphabet produces different understandings, so too different dispositions of images bring out different intellectual species in the mind."

⁴⁶ 173, 2, *Responsio*: "Now by the gift of prophecy something is conferred on the human mind over and above the powers of its natural faculty in both respects, namely in respect of judgment by the infusion of intellectual light, and in respect of the acceptance or representation of realities which is done through certain species . . . Of these two aspects of knowledge, the first looms larger in prophecy: because judgment is the full fruit of cognition."

⁴⁷ Note 45.

Augustine's statement, which he quoted in the first sentence of the *Responsio*, "Prophetic knowledge most of all relates to the mind",⁴⁸ and he filled in the content of that throughout the article.

Aquinas' analysis implies that Dulles' theology of symbolic mediation is incomplete to the extent that it does not explain how the mediation of revelation occurs in the mind of the recipient. According to Aquinas nothing was actually revealed outside the mind of the prophet, and so no reality, no symbol can mediate revelation apart from the act of knowledge culminating in judgment, divinely enlightened. In Aquinas there can be no medium of revelation that pre-existed the act of judgment because there was no revealing outside it. There was no mediating of divine knowledge, intent, truth, guidance, love, fidelity, etc. except in the divinely enlightened judgment of the prophet. An event, person, action, sign may have been potentially revelatory outside the act of judgment, but it did not become actually revelatory until it became the content judged. So, to the extent that there is a tendency in *Models of Revelation* to describe the symbolic mediation of revelation as if it was actually symbolic and revelatory apart from the mind of a recipient, Aquinas' position recalls the indissoluble link between symbol and knowledge of the symbol. The link does not appear forcefully and systematically enough in Dulles' exposition of the role and nature of symbol in mediating and expressing God and His will, above all in and through Christ.

3. Christ as Revelatory Symbol in Chapter X:

Maximum Difficulty

It can be argued that Aquinas did not plan and organize the *Summa Theologiae* Christocentrically; it is obvious that Aquinas took up the theme of revelation primarily under the heading of prophecy; and it is something of a problem that

⁴⁸ 173, 2, "Dicendum quod, sicut Augustinus dicit, cognitio prophetica maxime ad mentem pertinet" [*Super Gen. ad litt.* xii, 9. PL 34, 461].

he had little in the way of Christological revelation. Both White and Latourelle, it is true, adumbrate the Christological implications contained in the few powerful principles Aquinas did teach in the 3a. But, with the Christocentric approach to revelation now firmly established, what is unexpected is an omission of part of that Christocentrism from *Models of Revelation*. Dulles states in Chapter IX that "no clear dichotomy can be drawn between the symbolic and the non-symbolic".⁴⁹ But Chapter X, "Christ, the Summit of Revelation", allows this to happen.

There, dividing the symbolic from the non-symbolic leads straight into the consequence that Christ the revelatory symbol did not interpret himself in non-symbolic judgments which would be central to his self-revelation. Christ, the supreme revelatory symbol, seems to exist without a human self-understanding. In Chapter X there is no role for that which modern Christology has come to think of as essential to appreciating the humanity of Christ: his self-understanding or self-consciousness or human subjectivity. The affirmative and negative judgments of self-definition, self-affirmation, and identity by which Jesus expressed and mediated himself do not figure into Dulles' theology of the revelatory Christ. Christ indeed is the fullness of revelation, reveals the Logos and, in that, the Father. And his human response to the Father is the revelation of the full human response to God. But apparently all of this is revelatory without the help of Christ's human mind interpreting himself in acts that Aquinas would have identified as judgments. Christ's words do have a small place in Dulles' theology. While "no doubt revelatory",⁵⁰ they simply do not receive express attention insofar as they express and mediate Christ's self-understanding. It seems that because his interpretative judgments that, for example, he is the Son of Man, or that some judgments made about him by others were acceptable and others, such as miracle-worker, were not fully

⁴⁹ Dulles, p. 132.

⁵⁰ Dulles, p. 161.

symbolic, they do not have a role in Chapter X. Acknowledging that Jesus was a teacher, Dulles insists that "Jesus taught by preference through parable and paradox".⁵¹ This, in light of Dulles' view on revelatory words, means that Jesus taught symbolically only. This view of Jesus' teaching holds, above all, that "it is misleading to speak of Jesus as an authoritative teacher according to the schematization of the propositional model".⁵² Little is offered by Dulles to compensate, however, for the absence of any role for Christ's self-interpretation as part of the content for, and as operative within, his teaching and preaching.

The problem has a Christological aspect, of course, insofar as Christ the revealer and the revealed seems not to engage in the affirmation of truth except insofar as this means being symbolic, and acting and speaking symbolically. This would seem to delete the Johannine "I am" declarations, for example, or not to read them as due in any way to Christ's own self-interpreting judgments. But the fundamental-theological aspect is that revelation in and by Christ seems to take place without any act of judgment by Christ on who and what he is. This may be due to the fact that symbolizing is conceived first of all ontologically and in terms of formal causality. Although this is a way of understanding how being is symbolic, it does not by that also succeed in showing how symbolizing is communication between beings. The symbolic ontology, but not the full Christology, of Rahner informs Dulles' approach here. The result, down-playing the role of Christ's self-understanding, re-directs fundamental theology to the revelatory aspect of the Incarnation. But at the same time it fails to bring into account significant elements in Christ's activity before and after the Resurrection. The Synoptic version of Jesus' preaching, for example, summed up in Mark 1:14 as "the Kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the gospel" contains a profound act of judgment. The Gospel does not consist solely in

⁵¹ Dulles, p. 161.

⁵² Dulles, p. 161.

symbolizing through a likeness between God's and a king's reign, but asserts that something is so: not just "the kingdom of God" but "the kingdom of God is upon you". And Paul's revelation on the way to Damascus was the gift of light to know who it was that confronted him, a person *Acts* 9:5 reported to have said "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". These are judgments, affirming something to be so. Some of the content may be symbolic, but the symbolic representations alone are but an essential part of what is revelatory.

4. An Unexpected Convergence

Nonetheless, Aquinas' principle that judgment is primary in the act of revelation does converge with *Models of Revelation* in two specific respects. First, it is not far removed from the way Dulles connects the revelatory sign-event to the discernment of its meaning by an observer with an orientation to God and His plan. One of the merits Dulles incorporates from the revelation-as-history model⁵³ is that it holds that certain events have an inherent divine meaning. However, he insists that this meaning does not appear to academic or scientific research but to, and only to, a person with the appropriate religious disposition. So he argues that "a revelatory sign-event, to the religiously disposed observer, can convey a divine meaning that truly belongs to the event".⁵⁴ The revelatory meaning does not evacuate the event of its own meaning nor add to it something extraneous; it identifies the divine meaning within it.⁵⁵ The Exodus would probably be as good an example of this as possible, though not one explicitly cited. Perhaps more important for the convergence with Aquinas than the religious disposition of the observer of the event is the fact

⁵³ Dulles, Chapter IV, "Revelation as History" and in sections by that title in Chapters IX-XVI.

⁵⁴ Dulles, p. 146.

⁵⁵ Dulles disagrees with W. Pannenberg's contention that rational analysis by itself can interpret the revelation in history, and that no special illumination is needed to interpret the meaning in the events; cf. "Pannenberg: Revelation as History", pp. 58-60 in Chapter IV.

that the event remains incomplete as revelation until the observer interprets its meaning correctly. In clarifying this facet of a revelatory sign-event, he states that the "revelation, then, is not situated outside the interpreter's mind, as though it were a physical object, nor is it something added on to the event, coming from the subjectivity of the interpreter . . ." ⁵⁶ Without denying that the event has meaning, objectively as it were, Dulles refuses to isolate the event from the act of its interpretation. ⁵⁷ Aquinas' analysis would add that knowledge and interpretation of that event comes to its own fullness in the judgment interpreting it in divinely given light.

Yet it would do some violence to Aquinas to say that his theology of revelation concurs with Dulles in regarding historical events as symbols mediating divine meaning. To the contrary, the primacy of judgment in prophecy implies that that which constitutes the full act of revelation, judgment, does not so much mediate revelation as illuminate contents which, by that illumination alone, become revelatory. It is the contents (but not propositions) known prior to and then in judgment that have a role closest to that given to symbols by Dulles. If anything could be said to mediate revelation for Aquinas it would be the representations or species (sensed, imagined, or thought) not the judgment. The light given for judgment could not mediate because of itself it is not content but power to reach the truth in what is known. Whether the light be uncreated or created, it could not mediate anything because it does not add new species to the content of what the prophet is given to know. With this said, there need be no difficulty in accepting White's view that Aquinas recognized that it is "the immense richness and variety of symbolism which revelation has employed for its medium". ⁵⁸ The "symbolism which

⁵⁶ Dulles, p. 146.

⁵⁷ He grants, with Pannenberg, that the event is meaningful. However, Pannenberg considers the linguistic element something prior to faith that belongs to the event, and is a matter of rational analysis. Cf. Dulles, p. 59.

⁵⁸ White, p. 11.

revelation has employed for its medium" is that which is known, the species. And the truth is in the judgment on what is known.

Secondly, 173,2 and *Models of Revelation* converge insofar as each understands revelation to involve creatures. Aquinas did not neglect the essential role of the representations, the species or knowledge in the revelatory judging. Even in the cases in which God gives only new light for judging what the prophet already knows in an ordinary way, something is judged, and this is some created reality grasped in new and divine perspective. In cases where God gives new knowledge as well as new light for judging it, the created realities known have an indispensable role as the contents in which the prophet begins to perceive something of divine things. Similarly, Dulles' whole theology of revelation depends on the principle that "revelation never occurs in a purely interior experience or an unmediated encounter with God".⁵⁹ He criticizes the model of revelation-as-inner-experience⁶⁰ precisely for conceiving divine self-manifestation as ineffable mystical nearness and no more.

But, again, for Aquinas the created realities known and judged in prophecy need not be verbal statements. And, the knowledge of created reality to be judged could come in everyday fashion from other human beings. Joseph and Daniel, for example, learned the contents of Pharaoh's and Nebuchadnezzar's dreams through oral communication of an ordinary sort. Yet, neither the dreams nor the verbal statements reporting them constituted the prophecy. The knowledge gained from propositions was of images which were not yet revelatory until the Lord enlightened Joseph and Daniel. Those cases, along with that of the new understanding the Apostles received allowing them to grasp the truth in the Old Testament in new fullness, exemplified how prophecy was essentially judgment. For in these three cases, the revelation did not consist in

⁵⁹ Dulles, p. 131.

⁶⁰ Dulles, Chapter V, "Model Three: Revelation as Inner Experience."

the realities known and communicated through human means but in new judgment. By divine light, the prophet could "pass judgment on those realities which have been seen by others as was said of Joseph and as appears with the Apostles, 'The Lord opened their minds so that they should understand the Scriptures'".⁶¹ The means by which the knowledge came into the act of judgment was not what constituted prophetic revelation. Rather the judgment in divine light that affirmed and asserted the truth in what had been received was the formal characteristic of prophecy.

An unexpected turn in the dialogue between Dulles and Aquinas happens when Dulles re-admits something like judgment back into his theology in his final Chapter. In Chapter XVI, "Revelation at its Present Value", Dulles briefly considers the objection that the very idea of divine revelation presumes an identifiable demarcation between revealed and acquired knowledge.

He asserts that "the reality of revelation in no way depends on a clear line of demarcation"⁶² between revealed and acquired knowledge. This might seem to run counter to Aquinas' theology but it actually does not, because for Aquinas prophetic revelation did not always involve revealed knowledge in the form of divinely conferred species. It sometimes was a matter of new light for judgment upon acquired knowledge. In these cases, the content for judgment would be acquired knowledge while the act of judging would be enlightened by God and would make the whole act revelatory. In the one revelatory judgment, therefore, acquired knowledge became divinely revealing due to the judgment interpreting it. This principle does not fully answer the objection, nor does it make Aquinas completely compatible with Dulles' response. It does

⁶¹ 173, 2, *Responsio*: "But a prophet is he whose mind only is enlightened to pass judgment even on those elements which have been seen by others in imaginative forms . . . God sometimes infuses an intellectual light into the mind of man so as to pass judgment . . .".

⁶² Dulles, p. 273.

indicate an area in which Dulles and Aquinas do not stand as far apart as might easily be thought.

Dulles goes on to acknowledge that "it is true that all revelation is acquired by the subject who receives it".⁶³ In this respect, there can be complete concurrence with Aquinas' locating of revelation in the mind of the prophet. And when Dulles proceeds to identify revelation as "knowledge or awareness gained through the special assistance of God"⁶⁴ he holds a view in close proximity to Aquinas on the special assistance by which God gives either new species or, and frequently, new light. He does not go into detail on the nature of the special divine assistance but indicates that the content so known is how God "freely manifests himself through tangible clues."⁶⁵

5. The Role of Interpretation:

Models of Revelation and 173,2.

Both Dulles and Aquinas locate an act of interpretation within the occurrence of revelation. When analyzing the merits of the revelation-as-history model, Dulles spells out that role. He qualifies the interpretation of the revelatory sign-event by distinguishing academic or historical interpretation from religious interpretation. Only the "religiously disposed observer" is capable of discerning the "divine meaning that truly belongs to the event".⁶⁶ In that religious interpretation, the meaning does not come from the observer but from the event. And in that act of discernment there occurs the revelation given by means of historical event. The role of the interpreting act also plays a part in his examination and sublation of the revelation-as-dialectical presence model. He points out that any non-verbal symbol through which God manifests Himself needs an accompanying word to interpret it.

The word itself, however, is the most spiritual of symbols.

⁶³ Dulles, p. 273.

⁶⁴ Dulles, p. 273.

⁶⁵ Dulles, p. 273.

⁶⁶ Dulles, p. 146.

The word "is the sign which articulates meaning".⁶⁷ Dulles does not divide nonverbal from verbal revelation. Rather the word is "a necessary complement to revelation through any other kind of symbol".⁶⁸ Any other symbol (e.g. nature, deed, artifact) "becomes revelation only when interpreted and interpretation never occurs without a linguistic component".⁶⁹ Dulles refuses to accept, that is, a conventional division between deed and word, and in seeing both as complementary to one another he moves along the path outlined by Vatican II in "Dei Verbum".⁷⁰

Dulles gives this view an unusual nuance consistent with the principle that only symbols mediate revelation. He identifies the verbal aspect of revelation as symbolic, not as explanatory or as doctrine. While there is the need for "external words, capable of being heard or seen" within public revelation, they share the symbolic character of what they attest. These words have the purpose of bringing into statement the preverbal meaning symbolized in an event, person, deed, etc. But the words have a symbolic nature themselves and are "necessarily symbolic, for otherwise they could not be conducive to a salvific union with the divine".⁷¹ The words, therefore, do not perform the same function as doctrines, which also derive from symbolized divine meaning. Doctrine, however, arises in crossing over from the symbolic to the non-symbolic. For Dulles, words as part of revelation remain on the side of the symbolic.

Aquinas held a different view. 173,2 located revelation in the act of divinely enlightened judgment in the mind of the prophet. This tied the non-verbal and verbal inextricably together. For example, Jeremiah's non-verbal imaginative vision

⁶⁷ Dulles, p. 152.

⁶⁸ Dulles, p. 152.

⁶⁹ Dulles, p. 152.

⁷⁰ Austin Flannery, O.P., Editor, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, pp. 750-765, "The economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other," p. 751.

⁷¹ Dulles, p. 152.

became that which was grasped and then proclaimed in words to Israel. The communication is extrinsic to the revelation but the prophecy has an orientation toward this public declaration by the fact of its being part of God's salvific plan as well as by the public scope of its content.

But, more to the point, Aquinas also saw the symbolic and the non-symbolic as indissoluble from one another within the act of revelation. It was not Aquinas' objective in 173,2 to expand on precisely that point. Yet his account of prophecy permits that conclusion from the analysis he gives. Four Old Testament prophecies in this article are essentially interpretations of symbols. In each case, the act of revelation was the event of interpretation in the mind of the prophet. In none of these cases was revelation located primarily in the knowledge prior to judgment. In every instance, that act of prophetic judgment had symbolic species or knowledge as its content which the divine gift enlightened. Because the content and the judgment are inseparable from each other in any act of judging, for Aquinas' analysis in 173,2 at least, the symbolic species and the non-symbolic affirmation are likewise indivisible from one another.

In the case of Jeremiah's vision of "a boiling pot facing away from the north" (Jer. 1:13), the revelation was not given by the conferring of this image or the re-arranging of familiar images to produce this one. The grasp of its meaning in the act of judgment completed and formally constituted the prophecy. The uninterpreted image was not yet the word of the Lord. Jeremiah's grasp of its meaning in the act of interpretation saw the forecasting of Judah's affliction by armies advancing from the north. This was the word of the Lord (Jer. 1:14ff).

In the three cases mentioned above, from *Genesis* 41, *Daniel* 1, and *Daniel* 5, it was not the representations of a symbolic sort that were the revelations. In fact Aquinas introduced each to support the exact point that the judgment alone was the revelatory act. In each case, judgment was nothing other than

an act interpreting symbols, whether they were Pharoah's dreamed images, Nebuchadnezzar's towering figure in the troubling dream, or the eerie spectacle of words written across Belshazzar's wall. In none of these cases was the symbolism self-evident or self-interpreting. The symbolic images, given by God indeed, remained enigmatic and perplexing until the revelatory act occurred in divinely enlightened interpretation. In these prophecies, the symbolic images formed the content of the prophet's judgment while the judgment itself provided their meaning in a non-symbolic judgment. Moreover, it can be noted that the symbolism was not so rich in meaning that it was unable to be grasped in its meaning. To the contrary, the meaning was precise, definite, and divinely causative upon events. Aquinas considered the symbolic and non-symbolic to be as closely and indivisibly joined together as the content and the act of judgment were elements in one act. Symbol and interpretation could not be, on this view, considered in isolation from one another. Symbolic representations became actually revelatory not by their presence in someone's imagination but by their meaning's being grasped and affirmed within the gift of divine illumination.

Interpretation has, then, a different nature for Dulles and for Aquinas. In *Models of Revelation*, the interpreting word belongs within revelation as a symbolic statement of non-verbal, symbolized meaning. In the *Summa Theologiae*, 173,2, the revelatory act of judgment in four cases is precisely an act interpreting symbols, and it is the transition from the symbol to the non-symbolic. Dulles reserves such a transition to the passage from revelatory symbols into doctrinal propositions, a helpful adjunct to revelation, but not part of it. It would be difficult, on this count, for Aquinas' theology to separate symbolized meaning from doctrine.⁷² It would be more consistent to link symbol and content of judgment as symbol and doctrine, both indivisibly within the act of revealing.

⁷² Might it not be possible that a divinely enlightened judgment by a prophet, or by Christ, or by an apostle could contain more truth than any single statement could express and convey?

6. Inquiry Arising From *Models of Revelation*

Dialogue involves questions in two directions. 173,2 has served to raise the question about the truth in revelation and about the role of judgment in it. But *Models of Revelation* can also become the source for inquiry into the *Summa Theologiae*. Can it evoke something new from a classical theology of revelation?

The answer is positive. Dulles' stress on the symbolic nature of divine revelation draws an incontrovertible yet unnoticed fact into view. In 173,2 Aquinas brought a number of individual instances of prophecy into his analysis. Four have symbolic imagery as their content, their species. And since there is no reason to think that prophetic judgment has a nature separate from any human judgment, in its human aspect, what is true of prophetic judgment is true of human judgment generally.⁷³ And something remarkable is true of prophetic judgment in 173,2.

Joseph, Jeremiah, and Daniel perform acts of judgment that do not manifest the plain, straight-forward simplicity usually characteristic of judgments in the "X is Y" form. The acts of revelation do not take place in direct predication affirming what or that something is or is not. Rather, and precisely because their content is symbolic, their judgments have an "X means Y" structure. Their function is to interpret symbols. The dreams of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, the image seen by Jeremiah, the writing on Belshazzar's wall are symbols because they are more than glyphs indicating something outside themselves. These images, on the contrary, in some way make present what they mean, they embody what they signify, they

⁷³ Denis Bradley, "Aristotelian Science and the Science of Thomistic Theology", *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 22, April 81, 161-171, emphasizes that "revelation, as St. Thomas understood it, is fundamentally circumscribed; it alters *what* we know but not *how* we know", p. 168. But his comment that "divine grace can strengthen the intellect" in revelation does not also note that in revelation the way divine grace acts is precisely as divine enlightenment for judging, p. 168.

are the presence of that meaning. They belong to that kind of sign Dulles defined as a symbol—"an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define".⁷⁴ Dreamed imagery can be included among external signs both because it has sensible qualities and because these dreams were regarded as coming from outside the dreamers. However, the meaning of the imagery was unavailable until the prophetic enlightenment interpreted it.

The revelatory acts by prophets in 173,2 that is, are acts grasping the meaning in symbols. Their judgments did not have the purpose or form of affirming, for example, that these were only images, not realities, or that God acts in the lives of people. They did not affirm directly and simply what or that something is. Instead they grasped and affirmed what something meant.

Because of this quality in the judgments, what Aquinas considered to be instances of intellectual judgment seem able to be considered under the heading of interpretation. The prophets were enlightened by God to give full and just interpretation of symbolized meanings.⁷⁵ This implication links Aquinas' theology of revelation and the theory of judgment within it to hermeneutics. This does not locate a fully hermeneutical approach in the *Summa Theologiae*, not least of all because for Aquinas judgment has an interiority prior to (but inseparable from?) language. But there is some basis here for regarding 173,2 as both exemplifying and adding to Aquinas' theology in a way that invites further analysis of the hermeneutical aspects in his theology and philosophy.

Such analysis would be the optimal context within which to place a propositional element in Aquinas' theology of revelation. Not that verbal propositions are formulated by God,

⁷⁴ Dulles p. 131.

⁷⁵ Cf. I, 1, 9 on the suitability of symbols and metaphorical language in the Bible; and cf. Regino Cortes, O.P. "Biblical Foundations of St. Thomas' Treatise on Prophecy", *Phillipiana Sacra*, 10, 1975, pp. 7-29.

transmitted as such to a prophet, then received in an affirmative judgment, but that the act of enlightened judgment can have an interpretative element, namely the judging itself. Then, the inner word of truth could be understood to be an interpreting judgment. In that context, the propositional element in the act of revelation is the interpretative element.

And then, if Dulles wishes to keep an interpretative element entirely outside symbolic revelation, the question arises, how can an uninterpreted symbol be revelatory? Is there an uninterrupted, unbroken circle of symbolic communication in revelation, or anywhere? As D. Lane wondered, "is a theology of revelation as symbolic not a starting-point for further consideration rather than an end-point as it seems to be in *Models of Revelation?*"⁷⁶ One suspects that Dulles might well answer, "yes."

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⁷⁶ Lane, p. 76.