

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR DULLES—II

I presume that the logic of inviting me here was that I should respond to the section of the paper which deals with me. I will therefore confine my remarks almost exclusively to those pages of Professor Dulles's paper. Of the material in the last section of the paper I can only say that I find it very unpersuasive and that the categories used are inadequate to deal with the religious issue that interests me.

I am sure that most of you have had the surprising and depressing experience of seeing yourself summarized in print. Naturally one feels the summary is unfair; if it could be said in seven pages one would not have taken three hundred. I know that Professor Dulles has no axe to grind either ideological or personal in his criticism of me; neither do I in these remarks directed at him.

Dulles says of me: "I do not wish to imply that his reflections are of small value to the theology of revelation." That is a kind statement but not an accurate one. If his criticisms of me are correct then my work should be judged a disaster. More importantly, he assumes that I am writing theology although I was explicitly challenging the existence of theology. I was not attempting to out-theologize Karl Rahner; I was not writing in the field of theology at all. In an article I had in the *Wanderer* recently I wrote: The only thing I plead for is that I not be attacked for failing to throw touchdown passes when I am trying to hit home runs.

I could write a more negative review of my own book than any that has yet been written. But I would like it criticized for its obvious weaknesses, especially for its tinge of sexism and its inadequate development of religion. That is, it is still the work of a white, Western male even though he is trying to understand more of the world. In this regard, I see no indication in Professor Dulles's thirty-seven pages that at least 51 per cent of the race is women or that there is a social/cultural/religious transformation occurring world-wide of which feminism and ecology are the most prominent factors. My first chapter leads up to feminism and ecology as my basis for talking about experience and revelation. To neglect that is to miss what the book is about.

Professor Dulles has set up his criticism of me in a neat package of four which makes my task of response easier. Before taking those four in order, I wish to make two preliminary and related comments on: (1) the nature of synthesis, and (2) the limits of language.

In the last sentence of his criticism Professor Dulles writes: "I should prefer to strive for a synthesis in which all these elements are maintained in a dynamic equilibrium." That's the one sentence in the paper I'm sure I agree with and that's what I thought my book did. There can be a big gap between intention and execution but I thought my intention was at least clear. Of course, one person's synthesis can be another person's dichotomy.

Everybody thinks that he or she has created a synthesis. The relevant questions are: (a) how does one accomplish the synthesis, and (b) what is being synthesized. As for the how, the nice-looking, balanced way to do it is to add things together; half of this and half of that. Synthesis through juxtaposition is the most common but the most inadequate kind. It doesn't sound bad and it won't get you into trouble because it simply restates the problem. A helpful and human synthesis, in contrast, would come from finding a category within which one can distinguish relational poles so that a circular movement heightens the tension of unity and differentiation.

As for what the synthesis is of, that is, what the topic of this discussion is, my disagreement with Professor Dulles's paper is found in the first two sentences of page one. He writes: "Regarding the basic meaning of the term 'revelation' there is a fair degree of consensus in our time. The term may be defined either phenomenologically or theologically." And the two definitions follow. If there is consensus on that, then I don't know what the problem is other than a little intramural squabble. The trouble with saying to Christian theologians that you can define the word phenomenologically or theologically is that everything said under #1 is immediately coopted by #2 as the following thirty-six pages illustrate. I am interested in a religious synthesis which is a topic different from Dulles's two definitions.

That brings me to my other preliminary point. My book is in large part a study in the use and limits of language. I push my key terms to the very limit and then some. I am obviously open to the criticism that my choices are arbitrary or that I have unrealistically extended the

ordinary meaning of words. However, if someone says that to me then I want to know what his or her ultimate metaphor is because at the end one necessarily uses metaphor. The trick is to choose the right metaphor and to save its richness while purifying it.

The very last step is silence or if one insists on words a double negation, as in Aquinas's God is not not being. Double negation and silence are not easily used in books so that one is forced to choose a metaphor with which to bring attention to the right questions and not prematurely exclude anything before the silence.

Why do I choose the word revelation as my metaphor? Because it has some chance to comprehend the main divisions of Christian and Jewish, Western and Eastern, primitive and modern, religious and non-religious, masculine and feminine, human and non-human. I readily admit that the word may not be able to bear all the meaning I am loading on it but I know of few competing metaphors for the job. Christian theology, especially in recent years, uses faith as the fundamental category, a choice that is disastrous. If our problems are interpersonal, social, communal, ecological, institutional, and political, then revelation has some chance of doing the job but faith has no chance at all.

I turn to the four supposed dichotomies. The four are deceptively parallel in Professor Dulles's paper but they are not parallel or analogous issues in my book so that there is not one answer to the four cases. The first and fourth are to the point although they practically restate the whole issue. The second and third are revealing choices in a very curious language which is not mine. That the Christian institution does indict me on these two charges says far more about the accuser than the accused. As for all four, I plead not guilty to all of the charges.

First charge is that I choose the universal over the particular. Almost every page of my book reiterates the theme that the universal and particular go together, that the universal is only found embodied in the particular and that religion best conveys the universal precisely because it exists in concrete, particular activities. I do make the linguistic choice to use the word revelation for the universal. When I refer to the particular I say this form of, this expression of, this embodiment of revelation. If I were to use the word revelation for both universal and particular, it would cause the same problem as using the word being in the American

language to refer both to the act of to be and to the entities of the world. Of course, we do that all the time in ordinary speech which is what is wrong with ordinary speech. The intent of my book is to introduce a precision into ordinary speech and into the speech of the Christian past.

The relation between particular and universal is not well expressed by an adjective and a noun. My word revelation is not a noun so that it cannot take a qualifying adjective. If revelation is my ultimate metaphor, then it is not something that can be parceled out among religions; it is not a something at all.

This is the reason for my rejection of the term Christian revelation as a linguistic, historical and ecumenical cul-de-sac. I insist, however, that my usage gives the particular religion of Christianity the way to continue its claim to be a religion of the universal. Many if not all religions make claim to universality; Christianity certainly has not given up the claim. Liberal Christian theology now allows that there is a Hindu revelation and a Moslem revelation as well as a Christian revelation. This is a disingenuous solution which fools no one. My language allows me to affirm the universal not only in Christian and not Christian religions but in a flower and a grain of sand.

The second charge is that I choose experience over authority. Professor Dulles writes: "Authority, in Moran's terminology, is regularly used in a pejorative sense." That sentence stuns me. As far as I know, I never use the word authority in a negative or pejorative sense. In fact, I sound to myself like a broken record going across the country saying: We must never attack authority, we must never use authority as a negative word. We have to criticize particular forms of authority or how someone is exercising an office of authority. Institutions are fragile and need our support. No authority, no institution. The choice is between authority and violence and I have never in my life advocated violence.

I do reject a meaning of experience that would set it over against authority so that to affirm experience would be to negate authority and vice versa. That is indeed the dilemma which the religious organization finds itself in today. I refuse the choice. I want the authority of experience and authority that is founded by experience. I want a form of authority that works and that has the support of the full matrix of human and non-human relationships.

My concern for authority is not a general lip service to an ideal. I have written and spoken in some detail on the form that authority should take in religious organizations. I might also add the ironic point that while I was writing this book I was the chief executive of a district of Christian Brothers.

Professor Dulles is not the first to say that I have a negative view of authority. That is a rumor which literally follows me around the world. Institutions that spread rumors like that indeed have a problem but it is not going to be dumped on me. There happen to be at least a few hundred million other people besides myself who think that the authority pattern of Catholic and Protestant churches is patently inadequate. It is both unfair and ineffective to attack the people misleadingly called authority. I prefer to work at a linguistic precision which would cut the institution's Gordian knot. So long as the term Christian revelation exists we will have liberal priests attacking conservative bishops. You can have it, fellows; most of the rest of us in the world want no part of your ecclesiastical civil wars.

The third charge is choosing personal over doctrinal. The categories of personal and doctrinal are not mine and I will not have them laid on me. The choice is a red herring, an intramural problem of Christian theology and not my problem at all. The real problem here and the one on which I am vulnerable is not the relation of personal and doctrinal but the relation of personal and non-personal. That is the problem of religion and that is the theme of *The Present Revelation*. In my categories, doctrinal is on the side of personal so that to the extent a religion is personal it is also doctrinal. I do make the elementary distinction between my term revelation and any Christian expressions including doctrine. Saying that Christian doctrine is not equivalent to revelation is not to negate Christian doctrine. In fact, with my distinction one is freed from obsession with the truth of doctrines so that one might also consider their beauty, goodness, practicality or appropriateness.

The location of me in this paper under the heading of existential and personalist is baffling. I cannot imagine anything I have ever written being called existentialist. What is connoted by the term personalist could perhaps be leveled against the book I wrote on revelation ten years ago. That is the reason I wrote *The Present Revelation* on a different foundation, namely, the relation of personal and non-personal.

Professor Dulles's choice of text here is revealing. As a conclusion to my third part on religion I have a little rhetorical flourish on what Buddha, Jesus or Jeremias might say today. Dulles criticizes me for seeming to imply that prophets don't take their words seriously. But he never gets to what the paragraph leads to, namely, the words that nature including human kind envelops you. The passage is about the relation of personal and non-personal, human and non-human. There is no choice between the prophets' words and the individual person. The question is what do the prophets' words concern. My answer is that I would not trust any prophet who did not speak about the relation of men, women and non-humans.

There is one word in that paragraph that I would take back, the very last word. I unwisely adapted a poetic sentence of Loren Eiseley and wrote: "He that sent me still lives in the body of man." In the three years since I wrote that I have learned to purify my speech further of sexism. If I had written the last sentence without an abstract masculine pronoun I would have said better what I had intended to say. Although I am not a prophet I take my own words very seriously.

Fourth and finally, I am accused of choosing the present over the historical past and future. What can I say; I wrote a book explaining my meaning of present. I knew I would fail because I was struggling against the concept of time that totally dominates white, Western, scientific man. I would like to be credited with trying, quixotically if you like, to change the meaning of time. I do not like having all the standard pieties trotted out. I wrote: "One must choose to make the present everything or nothing; I choose to make it everything." Before someone dismisses that statement as obviously unbalanced or exaggerated, he or she might consider the possibility that he or she does not understand the words. My use of the word present is my attempt to deal with the total ecological system.

I categorically reject the accusation that I am unconcerned with past and future. I can only claim that my use of present would give greater significance to the work of historians. I am very concerned about the whole human past and I think that Christian writers exaggerate the significance of a few selected documents. I am concerned with the future but I consider Christian theology's attempted alliance with futurology to be logical and dangerous. My concern with the present, in

short, is my concern with the relation between past and future, that is, I want to deal with the future within the integral context of the limited lives we women, men and others share on this earth.

One concluding remark on the implication of what I have said on revelation for the theme of this convention: Is there a Catholic theology? I suspect that the problematic word in that question is supposed to be Catholic but I have far less trouble with the word Catholic than the word theology. If the word revelation is identified with ancient documents that Catholic and Protestant hold in common, then there is no clear distinction between Catholic and Protestant study and the study should probably be called theology. If the word revelation is not so used then a specifically Catholic study becomes both possible and desirable. The history, doctrine, ritual and institution of Roman Catholicism is a discernible and studiable phenomenon. I doubt that that study should be called theology: I think that the word theology should be laid to rest.

GABRIEL MORAN, F.S.C.
New York Theological Seminary