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AVERY DULLES'S ADVOCACY OF REFORMULATION
OF DOGMA AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

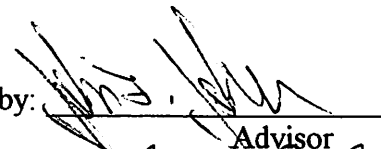
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of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

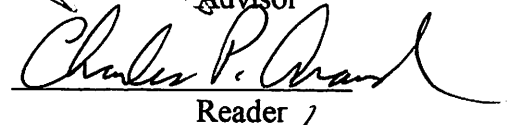
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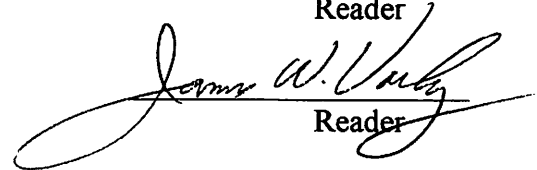
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INTRODUCTION

Father Avery Dulles, S.J., has advanced the possibility of dogmatic reformulation and development for implementing effectively the mission of the Roman Catholic Church in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI expressed the primary mission of this sacred Synod when he observed, the objectives of Vatican II, “. . . are definitely summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century even better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century.”¹ Father Dulles endorses that mission outlook. He anchors the vision for the Church’s mission in Scripture and ancient tradition. At the same time, he sees the Church as a dynamic reality. Hence, he urges that the Church be responsive to the demands of the times, for it has to signify and mediate God’s grace to different groups of peoples, in accordance with their particular gifts, needs, and capacities.² Furthermore, some amount

¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, “On Evangelization in the Modern World,” 2 (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1976), 6. Dulles adds that this fundamental thrust of the Council is conveyed in the opening lines of the Constitution on the Church: “Christ is the light of all nations. Hence this most sacred Synod, which has been gathered in the Holy Spirit, eagerly desires to shed on all men that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church. This it will do by proclaiming the gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15).” *Lumen gentium*, 1, in W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 14-15. Cited in Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 10.

² Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 1-2.

of updating will assist the Church to communicate its dogmatic teachings today. Although these teachings are true and irreversible in their substantive content, they may properly undergo reconceptualization and reformulation so as better to convey the revealed truth to new generations.³ Therefore, Father Dulles has advanced dogmatic reformulation and development as a positive contribution to the Church's mission.

Avery Dulles's Career and Confessional Stance

Father Dulles is a responsible and respected theologian of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ He understands "theology" in modern times to be, "... a scholarly reflection upon the faith by persons who have attained a high degree of competence, normally certified by advanced degrees or noteworthy publications."⁵ According to this understanding, Father Dulles is himself a leading American Catholic theologian. His distinguished teaching career in prestigious Catholic colleges and universities attests to his stature as does his prolific output of theological books, essays, and articles. "No North American theologian has a larger body of solid work to his credit!" That was George

³ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 195.

⁴ Born and raised in a Presbyterian family, Father Dulles was baptized as a Catholic Christian while a student at Harvard University. Upon graduation from Harvard, he spent several years in the United States Navy. Released from active duty in 1946, he joined the Society of Jesus. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1956. He completed his doctoral studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1960. He taught both philosophy and theology at Woodstock College and later at the Catholic University of America and Fordham University.

⁵ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 167.

Lindbeck's tribute to Father Dulles in 1992. Since the early 1990s, he has written and published no fewer than three major works. Already as an aspiring teacher and theologian in the years immediately following Vatican II, he had the confidence of superiors at Woodstock College who named him the principal exponent of the Council on the American scene. For most of his career, he has devoted himself to carrying forward the theological work of the Council.

Father Dulles is exemplary because he demonstrates how a modern Catholic theologian can be loyal to the Catholic faith even when he is less than submissive to a somewhat narrow and rigid neo-Scholastic framework. Indeed, he received his training within this framework. Frequently, he expresses indebtedness to a branch of learning which taught him logic, analytical thinking, and rhetorical structuring from neo-Scholastic philosophy and theology. Yet, his own thinking will not be restrained. He is influenced by personalistic existential theology and transcendental theology. Fiducial frameworks and the tacit dimensions of rationality are a fascination to him. He is frank to recognize the historical and cultural conditioning of dogmatic statements. As a result of these interests and influences, some may question his Catholic confessional posture. We reply, for all of his interest in the explorations of modern Catholic scholars and theologians, Father Dulles is loyal to the Catholic faith, yet without blind submission to a neo-Scholastic framework. The Catholic faith is inclusive of the ancient ecumenical creeds, the teachings of the councils, and the affirmations of the magisterium, particularly the papal encyclicals.

Purpose of the Dissertation

This study focuses on Father Dulles's notion of dogmatic development in the Roman Catholic Church. Though it is not his primary interest or concern, the subject of development is nonetheless important to his perception of *aggiornamento*, modernization, encouraged by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.⁶ In the long range assessment of Father Dulles's efforts to advance the Council's influence, his interest in reformulation and development as a service to the Church's mission, will receive its due. The specific intent here is to explore what lengths Father Dulles goes to propose and encourage such reformulation. Is he satisfied to merely revise and update traditional wording and phraseology of the Church's abiding doctrinal statements? Or, does he urge deeper and more substantive reconceptualization for the purpose of communicating the Gospel in thought patterns peculiar to the present age, especially those that are uniquely distinguished from neo-Scholasticism? The research sustains a positive answer to the latter question; and the study will identify factors in Father's Dulles's thought and theology which form the basis for his advocacy of doctrinal reformulation and development.

⁶ Dulles explains that *aggiornamento*, modernization, was one of the fundamental aims of Vatican II. According to the intentions of Pope John XXIII, *aggiornamento* was not simply modernization of the Church's law and administrative machinery but also of its manner of understanding and presenting the faith. See Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), 63.

Outline of the Study

The first chapter of this study examines the setting for Father Dulles's energetic work in the years immediately following Vatican Council II. With respect to the Church's dogmatic formulations, it was apparent to Father Dulles that the Council tacitly proclaimed the end of irreformability. The Church's doctrinal statements must undergo reformulation in order to express adequately and communicate incisively the Christian faith to the world of the late twentieth century. Furthermore, his own epistemology, methodology, and theology did, in effect, shape his outlook regarding reformulation. These subjects are treated at length in chapter two, complemented by close attention to his revelation theology as a prime factor figuring prominently in the formation of his development theory. This is the content of chapter four which follows a discussion in chapter three of how church dogma fares following Vatican II when compared to typical dogmatic expressions of the former neo-Scholastic era, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The intricacies of this comparison demonstrate the urgency for reformulation, if the Church is to honor its commitment to reach the post-modern world with the Gospel. These investigations lead to a final chapter marking the lengths to which Father Dulles extends his thinking about dogmatic development as reconceptualization and reformulation.

Lutheran Concern over Development

Both Catholic and Lutheran readers may be surprised to see a study about doctrinal development emanating from a center of Lutheran theology which has

traditionally rejected any notion of development.⁷ However, there are indications that development, though rejected and even disdained, is a reality within late twentieth century Lutheranism. Frequently it occurs informally and sometimes almost incidentally. This is a concern! For instance, doctrinal development of a kind enters quietly into the Lutheran Church through the doors of congregation and pastoral practice. In particular settings, there is an inversion of doctrine and practice, the latter exercising normative influence on the former. The result is a semblance of doctrinal development.⁸

⁷ Theodore Engelder, dogmatician of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, resists the notion of development of doctrine. He cites numerous Lutheran theologians who believe in the absolute authority of Scripture, that the doctrine presented in the Bible is unchangeable, and that the final authority of Scripture will suffice for the church in the future as it was sufficient for the church in the past since the time of the Apostles of the first century. See Theodore Engelder, “No Development of Doctrine for Us!” Parts 1-3, *Concordia Theological Monthly* 20, no. 8 (1949): 564-575; no. 9 (1949): 641-651; no. 10 (1949): 721-727.

⁸ In Convention Resolution 3-05B adopted at Wichita, Kansas, July 7-14, 1989, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod granted to laymen Word and Sacrament ministry which formerly had been exercised only by ordained pastors of the church. The title *deacon* was assigned to laymen temporarily serving in Word and Sacrament ministry “in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies.” These circumstances notwithstanding, the new privileges granted to laymen represent movement away from the long held confessional stance expressed by the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV, which states that no one should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called (*rite vocatus*). The call to this public office had previously been reserved for ordained pastors. But the Wichita Convention states that laymen licensed by their District President may prepare and preach sermons under the supervision of an ordained pastor. Also, the licensed layman may administer Holy Baptism and preside for the celebration of Holy Communion. Noteworthy is the fact that a proposed amendment to this resolution which would have reserved the celebration of Holy Communion only for ordained clergy was defeated. Thus some amount of development occurs as the result of circumstances when an ordained pastor is not immediately available to exercise public ministry. See, Resolution 3-05B, “To Adopt Recommendations of Lay Worker Study Committee Report as Amended.” The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings of the 57th Regular Convention*. Wichita, Kansas, July 7-14, 1989 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 111-114.

For generations, Lutheran practitioners depended upon the theologians to articulate confessional norms governing church practice. Today, the theologians are not listened to closely. The practitioners formulate and execute practice sometimes without astute theological judgment. Then, practice becomes assertive to a point that the church's doctrine is questioned and in some instances revised, resulting in new interpretations. Whether it be the democratization of congregations or the centralization of authority in some mega churches, or even similar centralization at the level of District or Synod administrative centers, practice and/or polity in these settings are determined frequently by leaders who seem to be oblivious to theological and confessional norms. The teaching once thought to abide immutable now develops. Liberties taken in the domain of church practice may result in unwarranted liberties with doctrine itself. The subtleties here are not always recognized. Nor are they easily understood. For this reason, a study of Father Dulles's consideration of development may be both informative and helpful when Lutheran confessional theology confronts what appear to be instances of development.

Notations

Two principal concerns are noted at the outset. The first is differentiation between Father Dulles's early and later thinking. Second, apparent inconsistencies over the long span of his theological literary output almost defy attempts to represent his position on numerous issues with precision and finality. Regarding the first concern, we acknowledge what may be labeled an early and a late Dulles. He was an outspoken exponent of Vatican II through the 1970s and beyond. But some of his statements take a different turn

following the late 1980s. Sensitive to liberal interpretations of the Council and certain excessive practices, Father Dulles stressed the need to honor norms in traditional Roman Catholic theology. His early 1990s discussions of such topics as teaching theology in Catholic universities, the relationship of Catholic theologians to the magisterium, and academic freedom reflect sensitivities not always apparent in his writings of the 1960s.⁹ However, one should recognize the difficulty of accurately documenting distinct changes in his thinking. Unless such variance is specifically noted, it should be understood that statements attributed to Father Dulles are assumed by this writer to be representative of his overall position.

Second, what some readers may judge to be inconsistencies in Father Dulles's writings, we elect to label a normal multivalency expected from a theologian devoted to Roman Catholic theology which is open to diversity of positions, it seems, at least on the level of theological discussion. His recent definitive work on the theology of Christian faith, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, yields several examples of this multivalency. In the first place, Father Dulles is understandably sensitive to what he sees are limitations to propositionalism. These limitations are apparent in view of latent and mystical dimensions of knowledge, when, through symbols and metaphors the mind often attains to truth that eludes direct declarative statement. Yet he seems to qualify his judgments in

⁹ Commenting on his publication in two editions, *The Craft of Theology*, Father Dulles states clearly his intentions to remain current while abiding loyal to the Catholic faith. He states, "My objective was to show how the conclusions of my theology of revelation and of Church could serve to ground a theological method that was loyally Catholic and at the same time open to development." Avery Dulles, *A Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 130.

this regard when he asserts that religious faith must have at least implicit cognitive content, for biblical faith has never been without doctrinal content. It may be assumed in this context that he has reference to content expressed in propositional terms.¹⁰ Again, Father Dulles judges dogmatic formulations to be seriously limited in their attempts to express a wealth of mystery which defies containment within human affirmations culturally and historically conditioned, even those that rest on revelation.¹¹ Still, he can laud the doctrines of revealed religion as bearers, not only of words, but meanings conveyed by human statements.¹² One additional reference will suffice. On the one hand, Father Dulles affirms the notion advanced by John Henry Newman that the truths of faith could not be established by formal demonstration, that the way to faith could be opened by tacit or implicit reasoning under the guidance of antecedent desires and expectations. On the other hand, he asserts that antecedent prescriptions arising from interior needs must be supplemented by a posteriori indications, e.g., in the case of a historical revelation such as Christianity. He states that it will be normal for believers to seek some historical evidence that the reported revelation is from God, presumably signs such as miracles and fulfilled prophecies.¹³ These examples suffice to illustrate how Father Dulles now and then expresses second thoughts on various subjects. Yet hardly are these second thoughts a distraction from his clearly defined primary assertions and positions.

¹⁰ Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 172.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹² *Ibid.*, 276.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

Acknowledgments

Undertaking this study, I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. John F. Johnson, who pressed for accuracy in research, depth of content, and clarity of expression. Dr. James W. Voelz first called my attention to the possibility of a dissertation on the work of Father Dulles. Dr. Paul R. Raabe and Dr. Won Yong Ji gave much encouragement. Dr. Charles P. Arand provided helpful insights, and Dr. Andrew H. Bartelt generously made time available to pursue the study. Father Lawrence C. Brennan, S.T.D., Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology at Kenrick School of Theology in St. Louis, contributed numerous suggestions. The personnel of Pius XII Library at St. Louis University together with Prof. David Berger and his staff of Ludwig F. Fuerbringer Library at Concordia Seminary were special beneficiaries. My wife, Marlene, has been both supportive and patient throughout the pursuit of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

MODERNIZATION: THE PRESS FOR REFORMULATION OF DOGMA

Father Dulles approaches the development of dogma within the specific ecclesiastical situation defined by Vatican Council II. In his recent work, *Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II*, Dulles remarks how the Holy Father had played a significant role in supporting the major renewal of Catholic doctrine effected by the council.¹ The council's movement toward doctrinal renewal was a timely response to a changing world. Vatican II, says Dulles, welcomed the idea of reform, even in areas of structure and doctrinal formulation.² Influenced by the council's expressed interest in reform, Dulles directed serious attention to the status of church dogma in the late twentieth century.

A discussion of the council's influence on Dulles with respect to doctrinal renewal may well begin with his understanding of church dogma. Antecedent to the 19th century term "dogma", are the teachings of the Bible and the articles of the creed—especially those basic articles dealing with the triune God, the Incarnation, the death and resurrection of

¹ Avery Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 1. The pope participated in the Second Council as auxiliary bishop of Krakow. Prior to the close of the council, he was appointed archbishop on January 16, 1964. *Ibid.*, 5.

² Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 30, 43.

Jesus. Dulles perceives these teachings as dogmas. In addition, he names as dogmas specific teachings which the Catholic Church cherishes as non-negotiables. He explains:

Since the nineteenth century, the term “dogma” has functioned as a code word to signify certain specific and precisely formulated teachings so important and so evidently contained in revelation that the Church can never cease to teach them confidently in the name of the revealing God. Dogma, understood in this sense, provides a kind of limiting case or negative instance of reform. It has been claimed to be irreformable.³

Respectful as he is of traditional notions of dogma, Dulles saw in the decades following the Second Council that it was necessary to entertain notions of reformability. In an age of rapid and radical change marked by burgeoning pluralism, he observed that the received concept of dogma, with its note of irreformability, had become problematic.⁴ Dulles himself was open to abandon irreformability as it applied both to doctrines handed down from the past and to ongoing new formulations of church teaching.

Avery Dulles lives with the tension between received dogma and reformability of dogma. The tension is illustrated in numerous passages. Honoring the status of received dogma, Dulles speaks of the grace of Christ which comes through Scriptures and dogmas which are abidingly valid.⁵ He cites Vatican I to the effect that for centuries the Catholic Church has taught that articles of the creed and dogmas of the Church are “revealed

³ Ibid., 45.

⁴ Ibid. The problem was apparent in that some Christians no longer believed that it was necessary to affirm personally all that is “on the books” as a dogma or defined truth. The failure to accept some canonized formulations of faith was viewed no longer to be incompatible with the acceptance of faith itself. See Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 45, 51-52.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

truths,” and that their contents are accepted on the motive of divine and Catholic faith.⁶

Vatican II taught that dogmatic definitions of bishops in ecumenical councils are to be adhered to with the submission (*obsequium*) of faith.⁷ Affirming these conciliar positions, Dulles asserts that God’s revelation has a content that can be spelled out to a certain extent in propositions that capture its true meaning. “The doctrines of revealed religion are not just words, but are meanings conveyed by human statements.”⁸

In spite of this apparent attachment to the received dogmas and traditional formulations, Dulles is quick to project a dynamic view of dogma reformable in the light of further manifestations of God.⁹ This is the other side of the tension over dogma. According to Dulles, dogmatic formulations always point beyond themselves to a wealth of mystery that eludes precise articulation. He comments:

The dogmas make sense to those socialized into the community of faith. By means of the living magisterium, which does not cease to instruct the community in the name of Christ, believers are able to go beyond what the first disciples heard expressly from the lips of Jesus (Jn. 16:12-13). In the age of the Church, discipleship involves continually new discoveries, growing out of the foundational

⁶ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 195. The reference from Vatican I is *Dei Filius*, chapter 3. *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. H. Denzinger, rev. A. Schoenmetzer, 36th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 3011. Hereafter, DS.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 276.

⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 226-227.

patrimony.¹⁰

Dogmas possess a certain flexibility. Dulles says, “Dogmas should never be allowed to become objects in which the understanding comes to rest. They must function disclosively.”¹¹ Dogmas are symbolic in the sense that they communicate more than can be contained in clear concepts. Dulles explains:

With Thomas Torrance, one may say that dogmas are “fluid axioms” – fluid not in the sense that they can be made to mean anything, but in being ever open to greater refinement, enrichment, and renewal in the light of the further manifestations of God. Forged under the impact of revelation, they are structures through which God’s truth can disclose itself in new and surprising ways.¹²

Dulles’s understanding of church dogma was influenced significantly by *Mysterium ecclesiae*, the 1973 Declaration issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This Declaration recognized two crucial limiting factors: the transcendency of divine revelation and the historicity of human formulations.¹³ Regarding the former, Dulles asserts:

It must be recognized that the categories used in ecclesiastical definitions are human and that the definitions therefore fall short of adequately expressing the content of revelation itself. Dogmas must be seen as human formulations of the word of God, not undialectically identified with the revelation they transmit.¹⁴

¹⁰ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 15.

¹¹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 226.

¹² *Ibid.*, 226-227.

¹³ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 142. Dulles expands this discussion of limiting factors in *The Resilient Church*, 52f.

¹⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 52. In its Constitution on the Catholic Faith (*Dei Filius*, chapter 4, DS 3016), Vatican I affirmed that the hidden mysteries of God “by their

Interpreting the latter limiting factor, Dulles states, “Dogmas are *culturally conditioned* expressions of revelation.”¹⁵ He explains, “Almost any dogmatic formulation bears the signature of the time and culture from which it emanates. . . . Historical situationism calls attention to this culturally conditioned character of statements of faith. . . .”¹⁶ The implication is clear to Dulles. He concludes, “It may well be necessary, as the generations pass, to reinterpret the defined dogmas in accordance with the presuppositions, thought categories, concerns, and vocabulary of a later age.”¹⁷

The tension over dogma, received or reformable, surfaces in other passages. Dulles affirms on the one hand, “When we assent to a dogma we are not merely accepting a human opinion that is subjective and hypothetical, we are submitting to a divinely revealed objective, irreversible truth.”¹⁸ On the other hand he asserts, “There is no need to deny the culturally and historically conditioned character of human affirmations, even those that rest on revelation.”¹⁹ The dogmatic teachings of the Church, he says, are

very nature so far transcend the human intellect that even after they are revealed to us and accepted by faith, they remain concealed by the veil of faith itself and are as it were wrapped in darkness.” Similarly, Vatican II pointed out that the pilgrim Church is able to show forth the mystery of the Lord “in a faithful though shadowed way, until at last it will be revealed in total splendor.” *Lumen gentium*, 8, in William M. Abbott, ed. *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 24. Hereafter, simply Abbott. These conciliar quotations are cited in Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 52.

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸ Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 195.

¹⁹ Ibid.

divinely revealed truths refracted through human minds. Regarding these teachings he adds, “While they are true and irreversible in their substantive content, they may undergo reconceptualization so as better to convey the revealed truth to new generations.”²⁰

Two factors are apparent from these preliminary remarks about Dulles’s understanding of dogma. First, the tension is very apparent between his recognition of the received dogma and his projections of dogma as dynamic, fluid, adaptable, and most important, reformable. Second, the obvious tension between contrasting themes of dogmatic formulation has a setting, an ecclesiastical and historical situation. All happens within the larger influence of Vatican Council II, with its new sensitivity to the changing world. Noteworthy is a turning away from the Counter Reformation era and neo-Scholasticism which dominated far into the twentieth century. Vatican II took a different tack. Open to the Church’s need to interface with the rapidly changing world and liberated from the longstanding mindset of the traditional church, the council embarked upon a program of demonstrable modernization. Father Dulles chronicles these historical developments. In so doing, he demonstrates how these developments contribute to a proper understanding of his exploration of dogmatic reformulation.

The Genesis of Modernization

Modernization was a mid-twentieth century movement within the Roman Catholic Church. This movement yielded the powerful suggestion that the Church’s dogma should undergo reformulation if the Church was to reach a civilization caught up in epochal

²⁰ Ibid.

change. As a capital gesture toward modernization, Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council in 1962. The Holy Father intended modernization not simply of the Church's law and administrative machinery but also of its manner of understanding and presenting the faith.²¹ In his allocution opening the sessions of the council, the pope urged that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously. The Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers. "But at the same time," stated Pope John, "she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate."²² He went on to explain that the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expected from the bishops assembled for this Second Vatican Council a step forward toward a "doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought."²³ The pope's sentiments

²¹Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 63.

²² "Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council." An address delivered in St. Peter's Basilica on the first day of the Council, October 11, 1962. Abbott, 714.

²³ Ibid., 715. In his treatment of the origin of the text of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [*Gaudium et spes*], Charles Moeller quotes from several speeches made by Pope John XXIII. Moeller recounts, "From the beginning John XXIII strove for the Council to be open to the world. As early as his Whitsun sermon on 5 June 1960 he said that 'each believer . . . as far as he is Catholic, is a citizen of the whole world, just as Christ is the adored redeemer of the whole world.'" In the allocution of September 11, 1962, the Holy Father mentions the distinction between the Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*: "The Church must be sought as it is both in its internal structure – its vitality *ad intra* – in the act of representing, above all to its sons, the treasures of illuminating faith and of sanctifying grace . . . Regarded in relation to its vitality *ad extra*,

of *aggiornamento* or modernization, found their way into the discussions, and more important, the decisions made by Vatican Council II.²⁴

Papal intentions and Council initiatives toward *aggiornamento*, moreover, fulfilled the hopes of Catholic theologians who for decades prior to the council had desired to reinterpret the message and the tasks of the Church in relation to the times. A knowledgeable and astute post-conciliar theologian himself, Dulles shared with his peers vigor for modernization. Furthermore, he links this movement to notions of reformability and development of church dogma. The connection involves a clear distinction between *aggiornamento* and earlier reform movements such as the Reformation and Counter Reformation which happened internally within the institution of the Church. By contrast, modernization was driven by circumstances external to the church, with consequences for the status of dogma. It was not internal machinations such as careful review of doctrine

that is to say the Church in face of the demands and needs of the nations . . . feels it must honour its responsibilities by its teaching: *sic transire per bona terrena ut non amittamus aeterna.*” Charles Moeller, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: History of the Constitution,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 5:7-8.

²⁴ Avery Dulles observes that the fathers at Vatican II, who accepted the program of *aggiornamento* popularized by Pope John XXIII, were critical of the former hostility and suspicion toward the modern world that had characterized the Catholicism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, Dulles documents this acceptance of *aggiornamento*. The council declared its great respect for the truth and goodness that had been brought into the world through modernization (*Gaudium et spes*, 42; Abbott, 241-242). The faithful, said the council, must “live in close union with their contemporaries.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 62; Abbott, 268-270) More significantly, Catholics must, “blend modern science and its theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and doctrine.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 62) See Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). 20-21.

and reaffirmation of historic teachings; nor was it in-depth Biblical studies and historical-critical assessments of Scripture which rocked conservative Protestantism the first half of the twentieth century that impelled modernization within the Catholic church. Rather a single impulse to modernize was the mid-twentieth century discovery of a growing distance between the Church's thinking and the developing mindset of the secular world. Expanding the distance and exacerbating the deteriorating relationship between the Church and the world was a pronounced difference between the Church's static dogma, standards, and forms and the secular outlook that interprets reality in terms of movement and unrelenting change. Such a discovery might have led to deeper suspicion and resentment of the world on the part of church leaders. Instead, the very opposite result occurred. Inspired by the genial outlook of John XXIII, Vatican Council II abandoned isolation for a new attitude of openness to the surrounding culture.

Static Views of Church Dogma and the Late Twentieth Century Mindset

Contemporary theologians like Avery Dulles were painfully aware that modernization could apply to essential dogma only when the Church recognized candidly the incongruities between nineteenth century static dogmatic expression and the current dynamic views of reality. Taking the first step in dealing with this situation, the bishops and their *periti* attempted to comprehend and articulate the thinking of the secular mind especially relating to matters of faith. According to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the human race was passing through a new state of its

history, “from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic evolutionary one.”²⁵

This new dynamic perception of reality is manifest in three circumstances which collectively, says Dulles, give rise to a vast increase of doubt in the contemporary world.

Dulles elaborates on each of these circumstances. The first is the persistent use of deliberate and methodic doubt. In the eyes of scientists, all laws and theories are regarded as merely tentative and as subject to continual testing and modification in the light of further evidence. The second circumstance is a climate of ever-accelerating change. Partly as a result of scientific progress, everything is in a dizzying state of flux. We seem to have no abiding principles upon which to base our thoughts. Needless to say, in this time of rapid change, the world views of ancient and medieval man are all but obsolete. A third circumstance contributing to skepticism and doubt is a time of unprecedented pluralism when we are exposed to the clash of mutually conflicting ideologies and religions. Pluralism makes it difficult for the individual to claim that his point of view or that of his religious group is certainly right and that the rest are certainly wrong. The use of methodic doubt, the prevalence of change, and pervasive pluralism are three circumstances which collectively dismantle any static perception of Bible teaching or church dogma. Such a static perception, according to Dulles, is out of touch with the late twentieth century outlook.²⁶

Moreover, Dulles relates how mid-twentieth century man has moved into an era of

²⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, 5; Abbott, 204.

²⁶ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 151.

technology from an age of science, dominant since the seventeenth century. By his technology, man has increased his ability to control, not only his environment, but his own biological make-up and even, through psychedelic manipulations, his own religious experience.²⁷ Possessing such new capabilities in a time of variableness and change, contemporary man deems modes of thinking handed down from the past unsuitable.²⁸ For example, demanding from contemporary man blind subscription to revelation as data, i.e., propositional statements of facts given once for all time, or requiring compliance with church pronouncements made centuries ago definitely runs counter to the present dynamic evolutionary outlook.

The Marks of Absolutism: Isolation, Institutionalism, and Extrinsic Authoritarianism

Catholic theologians and intellectuals sensed the widening gap, old thinking in the Church versus new thought patterns in the world. They began to question the status quo within the Church. Dulles saw the Church gripped by isolationism. Clinging to medieval forms, the Church at the turn of the last century seemed to prefer isolation and aloofness over interaction with the world. Dulles pinpoints the attitude of aloofness when he writes, “For some centuries, the Church had adopted a position of increasing isolation from the modern world. Admitting no criticism from within its ranks, and refusing to make any significant concessions to the spirit of the age, it presented an appearance of strength and

²⁷ Ibid., 27.

²⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 110. In this connection, Dulles observes that people find it necessary to distinguish true religion from a magical or superstitious view of the world. See *Gaudium et spes*, 7; Abbott, 205.

dignity.”²⁹ Dulles and others were convinced, if the Church continued on such a course in the twentieth century, it would eventually reach a state of obsolescence. But, refreshed and inspired by the leadership of Pope John XXIII, Vatican Council II set the Church on a new course. “Instead of condemning the world from lofty eminence, and denouncing all innovations as defections from the truth, the Church acknowledged its own shortcomings, its sinfulness, and its need for drastic updating.”³⁰ Pursuing the new course outlined by the pope and implemented by the Second Council, the Church turned toward dialogue with, and involvement in, the modern world. For Dulles, the important general principle derived from Vatican II is that the Church stands in solidarity with all mankind and must be ready to enter into respectful dialogue at every level.³¹ He himself acted upon the new direction by encouraging updating as a complement to openness. Writing and speaking during the decade following Vatican II, he urged the Church’s theologians to recognize the necessity of reform in every area including that of doctrinal statement. He wrote:

The mission of the Church cannot effectively be carried out if the doctrinal standards, forms of worship, and the governmental structures of the Christian community are obsolete. . . . Vatican II clearly set forth the need for updating in all

²⁹ Avery Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology Compiled at Canisium, Innsbruck* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1968), 15. Dulles judges that the Church’s self-determined isolation from modern secularity reached its apex in Proposition 80 of the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), which condemned the view that the Roman pontiff can and should reconcile and adapt himself to progress, liberalism, and recent civilization. Isolation and the attitude of aloofness extended after Vatican Council I into the twentieth century.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹ Avery Dulles, *The Dimensions of the Church: A Postconciliar Reflection* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1967), 114.

of these areas, so that the Church would no longer be tied to past cultural forms.³²

If isolation were not enough, Dulles extends his assessment of the late nineteenth century Church to include an indictment of rigid institutionalism, a condition which prevailed up to Vatican Council II. In fact, according to Dulles, a highly institutionalized concept of the Church dominated from the fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century. This was the age of the monolithic Church which aspired to a single universal language (Latin), a single theological system (Neo-Scholasticism), a single system of worship (the Roman rite), and a single system of government (the Code of Canon Law).³³ With hard hitting language, Dulles chides the monolithic Church's institutionalism and preferred isolation resulting in progressive alienation from the modern world—secular society which became self-critical, relativist, concrete, and future-oriented while the magisterium from the nineteenth century unto the mid-twentieth century was becoming more authoritarian, absolutist, abstractionist, and backward looking.³⁴

³² Dulles, *Resilient Church*, 43.

³³ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 121.

³⁴ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 116. Dulles's open chiding of institutionalism is from the summary of his four-part discussion of the contrast between post-Tridentine Catholicism and the modern world. First he observes, while society as a whole was becoming democratic and self-critical, the Church became progressively more oligarchic and authoritarian. A second trend was the swing toward absolutism, meaning that the Church gave unprecedented emphasis to the absolute value of its solemn pronouncements at a time when all human statements were deemed profoundly conditioned by historical, cultural, sociological, and psychological factors. In the third place, the abstract, metaphysical, propositional view of truth commonly communicated in some utterances of the magisterium was out of harmony with the new philosophies, e.g., dialectical materialism, pragmatism, and instrumentalism. Dulles the teacher of philosophy expresses some discomfort when he tells how Catholics were lone defenders of Aristotle's syllogistic

The isolated monolithic church also exercised extrinsic authority in a manner which widened the gap between the church and the world. Dulles states his own assessment of the situation when he fixes the date of the present era of American Catholicism, post-Vatican II, from John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII. Each of these leaders, in his own way, summoned Catholics to abandon the alienation of a pretended superiority and to take upon themselves what the Second Vatican Council was to call “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age.”³⁵ Extrinsic authority was particularly heavy handed when the Church reacted to the influence of Modernism. A pressing challenge put to Catholicism was Modernism’s assumptions that Christianity could not be defined in terms of any definite message or stable structure, that it was essentially a protean religious movement incapable of accommodating itself to the trends of the times. Dulles states that at this point Rome failed to give recognition to what was legitimate in the Modernist program. In this instance, official Catholicism seemed to endorse what Blondel labeled “Veterism”-- the canonization of the authoritarian extrinsicist theology that had prevailed in Catholic circles since the mid-nineteenth century.³⁶ Extrinsic authoritarianism exhibited against Modernism was noticeable to Dulles who saw in the movement at least one redeeming factor. “Modernism,” he said, “had correctly identified

logic in an age immersed in the ambiguities of dialectical thinking. And the fourth point was the Church’s conservative hard and fast preoccupation with the past, i.e., the deposit of revealed truth from apostolic times when Western culture was coming to look at the past as a mere departure for progress toward the future. See the extended discussion of these four points in *Survival of Dogma*, 114-116.

³⁵ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 15.

³⁶ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 64.

the most pressing issue facing the Church: how to reconcile the Catholic understanding of revelation with openness to the modern world?"³⁷ To his satisfaction, Vatican II initiatives made a necessary correction.

The Vulnerability of Church Pronouncements

Reaction among sensitive Catholic theologians and intellectuals to the excesses of the monolithic, isolated, and extrinsic authoritarian church of the late nineteenth century is described by Dulles in terms of three crises: the crisis of religion in society, the crisis of faith in the face of surmounting doubt, and the crisis of statically conceived dogma at a time when doctrinal expression was expected to be fluid and essentially accommodational. A brief comment on each of these crises is germane to the present discussion.

The conflict between modern consciousness and Catholic theology may be called a crisis in religion. In his monograph *The Dimensions of the Church: A Postconciliar Reflection*, Dulles summarizes Dietrich Bonhoeffer's articulation of this crisis in terms of a cleavage between religion as salvation or deliverance from this world, and reinterpreted religion as hope which sends a Christian back to his life in a wholly new way.³⁸ On one count particularly, Dulles expresses indebtedness to Bonhoeffer. In his *Prison Letters*, the German theologian perceived with prophetic clarity the increasing difficulty of communicating the Christian message to contemporary man, who is for the most part nonreligious. If the Church continues to insist on its own individualized and traditional

³⁷ Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1969), 136.

³⁸ Dulles, *The Dimensions of the Church*, 99f.

language, it will appear to be hiding and retreating from the world. Bonhoeffer has called attention to this inadequacy. Therefore, Dulles suggests that Bonhoeffer would have been encouraged to hear Pope John XXIII in 1962 calling for a restatement of the Christian message in “the literary forms of modern thought.” Such a restatement, says Dulles, evidently demands a careful reinterpretation of the biblical terms and concepts. Bonhoeffer’s efforts, he adds, provide at least a helpful stimulus in this direction.³⁹

Related at least indirectly to the conflict between modern consciousness and Catholic theology is a second critical situation, the crisis of faith. It also raises questions about the Church’s pronouncements understood as communication of the faith. At issue is the conflict between belief and doubt. Dulles brings to this discussion the reflections of Karl Rahner who claimed that today faith itself is called into doubt. Questioned is one’s capacity to believe, an ability to commit oneself completely to a single, unambiguous, demanding conviction. The capacity to believe is challenged when a person is unable to keep up with a rapidly changing world in which new discoveries are constantly upsetting the world-view he has grown used to.⁴⁰ Dulles recognizes that the more we acknowledge the normative value of modern patterns of thought, including critical scientific method, the more exposed and vulnerable our faith seems to become.⁴¹ Not only faith, but also the traditional moorings are vulnerable, especially when the Church’s solemn doctrinal

³⁹ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁰ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 11-12. See Karl Rahner, “The Faith of the Priest Today,” *Woodstock Letters* 93 (1964): 3-10, p. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 16.

pronouncements are viewed as historically conditioned.

The crisis of religion and the crisis of faith mirror a third factor, the crisis of dogma. At the point of its confession, its doctrinal expression, the Church felt severe pressure from Modernist forces. Catholic Modernists tended to look upon revelation as an immediate datum of experience. They sought to develop an apologetics that would foster the experience of faith, i.e., to induce an experience of the Catholic religion which was intended to serve as the sole foundation of faith.⁴² The *Oath Against Modernism* of 1910 was the official rejoinder. Dulles summarizes:

This document taught that faith is an intellectual assent to truth acquired extrinsically, by hearing, and that faith accepts as true those things said, testified, and revealed (*dicta, testata, revelata*) by a personal God, crediting them on the authority of the One who can never deceive or be deceived.⁴³

Since 1910, the *Oath Against Modernism* doubtlessly had waning influence. By the nineteen-sixties, Dulles saw many of the classical positions challenged. He noted contemporaries who find difficulty in the idea of supposedly infallible, sacred sources. Many were unwilling to be tied to a body of beliefs which allegedly reached completion in the first century of the Christian era. Others no longer appreciated the meaning or importance of many doctrines which their fathers and forefathers accepted as matters of faith.⁴⁴

These three crises: religion, faith, and dogma are self-fulfilling in terms of Leslie

⁴² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 254.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁴ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 176.

Dewart's analysis—the widening gap between verbal orthodoxy and contemporary forms of experience. From Dewart's popular work, *The Future of Belief*, in which he argues that Christianity must be de-hellenized and de-ontologized in order to align itself with the experience of contemporary man, it would seem apparent that doctrinal expression should undergo reconfiguration especially in the light of the fact that theology of the future may be even more critical of past tradition and present doctrinal standards.⁴⁵ Dewart's analysis may be interpreted as a vestige of the lingering modernist outlook troubling the church. Though condemned by the Encyclical of 1907 and the *Oath Against Modernism* in 1910, Modernism, says Dulles, continued to haunt the Catholic theological consciousness for the next fifty years and longer. Indeed, Modernism successfully questioned the stability of dogma and doctrinal statement in the Roman Catholic Church. The implication is that the enduring and extensive influence of Modernism presented a challenge which called for a much needed correction in doctrinal formulation. Dulles addresses that need in his quest for new and meaningful doctrinal expression in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The Quest for Revitalized Dogmatic Expression

A Quest with Historical Precedent

The Church had become defensive in its conflict with Modernism, so much so, that it ceased to be a progressive force. It was emphatically protective of the past. But Vatican Council II recognized that if faith was to have a future, it must not cling timidly to

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

its own past forms.⁴⁶ Retreating to a mode of conserving and defending the ancient deposit as a reaction to threats of heresy would be a stance quite deficient and inadequate in the late twentieth century. Besides, Dulles recalls that to some extent the Church's teaching in successive ages had consistently kept the faith of Christians abreast of man's expanding scientific and philosophical knowledge—the early Church translating Christianity from the Semitic thought-forms of the Bible to those of the Hellenistic world, and medieval theology restating the faith as the progress of knowledge required.⁴⁷ Can the Church do less in the present era? Not at all, and therein Dulles saw the uniqueness of the Second Vatican Council! The Council uniquely advanced both the necessity and the prospect of change in dogmatic expression vital to updating and modernization.

New Directions from Vatican II

The outlook of openness fostered by the Council proved in many ways to be an effective antidote to the Church's earlier posture of isolation and introspection. To repeat what can hardly be overstated, acting on positive direction from Pope John XXIII, the Church shifted course in a radically new direction, toward dialogue with, and involvement in, the modern world.⁴⁸ Opening the windows of the Church and pursuing new directions,

⁴⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 153.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 116-117. According to Dulles, flexibility, modernization and dialogue became major themes of the Council. He expresses gratitude for Vatican II in that the Church took on new aspects suited to new times and cultures without loss of its identity. He highlights the Church's new outlook when he comments on the possibility of Catholic vision shared with society. He writes, "Catholicism can bring depth and integrity to human understanding and communication. By upholding a qualitatively diversified

Vatican II sparked renewed interest and vitality among its leading theologians.⁴⁹

Furthermore, no longer would the Church find itself, as Charles David had noted,

“culturally estranged from the modern world.”⁵⁰ Documents from the Council, writes

Dulles, project a new image of the Church as a society of men fully involved in a

diversified and changing world.⁵¹ Dulles gives this assessment:

Essentially, the Council had two foci: the inner renewal of the Roman Catholic Church, and the fostering of more positive and fruitful relationships between the Church and other communities—the other Christian churches, the other religions, and the secular culture of our age.⁵²

Abandoning medieval forms to which the Church had clung, the Council displayed an openness to secular thinking and to the prevailing mentality of the day and began to accept their consequences for the life of faith.⁵³

universe of symbol, sacrament, and mystery, it can combat the superficial reductionism of a purely quantified perspective.” *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 18. Vatican II, he says, is chiefly remembered for its insistence on flexibility, modernization, and dialogue. He urges Catholics to appreciate how the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, found ways of safeguarding the permanence and universality of God’s gift in Christ while at the same time allowing for great fluidity in the formulations, customs, and practices by which that gift is communicated. *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 92.

⁴⁹ In his assessment of the Council, journalist Paul Blanshard observed that the American Jesuits at Vatican II stood out as pioneers in that they asked their Church to face boldly its new responsibilities in the modern world. Paul Blanshard, *Paul Blanshard on Vatican II* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 15,

⁵⁰ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 114.

⁵¹ Dulles, *Dimensions of the Church*, vii.

⁵² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 1.

⁵³ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 16.

The Church and the Culture

The actions of Vatican Council II provided the impetus for the Church to overcome its previous estrangement from contemporary thought and culture. Dulles relates how the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World advanced a completely new understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world. Against the medieval formula of unilateral subordination of the secular to the sacred, the Council unhesitatingly acknowledged that the secular disciplines have their inalienable autonomy and that human life can be sanctified without being removed from the world and transplanted into a special sphere of the sacred.⁵⁴

The Church Interacts with the Culture: Adaptation and Absorption

The dialogue initiated by the Church with the culture was two dimensional: adaptation to the human family as a whole, and absorption of a contemporary outlook. This interaction with the culture is far more substantive than some vague gesture to be contemporary. The Church, says Dulles, saw a real need to participate more fully in the struggles and experiences of the whole human family and to assimilate into its thinking and practice whatever was healthy in the modern mentality.⁵⁵ Modernization, then, has

⁵⁴ Dulles, *Dimensions of the Church*, 85. The Council was careful to maintain the prerogatives of the sacred. Dulles writes, "Sacred doctrine, sacred rites, and a consecrated hierarchical priesthood, according to the institution of Christ, are essential features of Christianity. Without them the Church could not retain its full sacramental visibility or adequately sustain the eschatological hope of God's people throughout their earthly pilgrimage." Ibid., 85-86.

⁵⁵ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 114. Adaptation became the mark of the Pilgrim Church. The pilgrim metaphor is applied to the Church in *Lumen gentium*, 8; Abbott, 24, also *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3; Abbott, 346.

become empathy, identity, and then absorption. In the mid- nineteen sixties, the Church was a teacher preparing to teach; but more important, it was also a student preparing to be taught by the modern world, and that with striking implication for the Church's thinking, doctrinal formulation, and confessing.

Dulles eagerly documents this new relationship between the Church and the culture. First, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World recognized the legitimate autonomy "of human culture and especially of the sciences."⁵⁶ Second, the Council called upon the Church to update itself—including its doctrine and institutional structures—so as to appropriate the best achievements of modern secular life.⁵⁷ Third, the Pastoral Constitution affirms that the Church must respect the accomplishments of the world, lest it fall behind the times and become incapable of effectively heralding the gospel.⁵⁸

With these encouragements from Vatican Council II in hand, Dulles was prepared to advocate his own formula for outreach to the world which he names, "secular-dialogic"-- secular because the Church takes the world as a proper theological locus, and seeks to discern the signs of the times; dialogic, because the Church seeks to operate on the frontier between the contemporary world and the Christian tradition (including the

⁵⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, 59; Abbott, 265. Cited in, Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 85.

⁵⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 44; Abbott, 245-247. Cited in, Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 85.

⁵⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, 62; Abbott, 268-270. Cited in, Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 85. This passage clearly encourages adaptation for the sake of communicating doctrine, making appropriate use of the sciences and the arts, yet without doing violence to the meaning and significance of doctrine.

Bible), rather than simply apply the latter as a measure of the former.⁵⁹ Dulles emphasizes, only when the Church has interacted empathically with the culture, only when the Church looks to the secular domain for thought forms and new language options with a view to updating or modernizing the Church's doctrinal formulations, only then will the Church define adequately the Christian message for contemporaries!

Summary

Avery Dulles has documented the efforts of Pope John XXIII and Vatican Council II leading the Church toward modernization. His early writings are vibrant with the story related here in general form. It is a story of the pilgrim church, moving from its centuries long mode of preservation into a new and vital mode of active interfacing and interaction with the world. In this regard, Dulles somewhat tempers his own enthusiasm with something of a caveat. He has known zealous progressives who carried Vatican Council II initiatives to a point of distortion. Vigorously advocating modernization, Dulles is keenly aware that adaptation and absorption, those two dynamics of interface and interaction with the culture, must be kept within bounds. Modernization that is ambitious, forward looking, and hopeful, can hardly mean an uncritical adoption of the latest fruits of Western civilization. "Rather," says Dulles, "it must mean a more serious effort to address the modern world in language that will be understood and to speak to the concerns of people involved in contemporary secular life, with all its accompanying temptations,

⁵⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 86.

anxieties, hopes, and opportunities.”⁶⁰ Modernization received its primary impetus at the highest levels of the Roman Catholic Church. Dulles was an active participant in that movement. The chapters that follow will consider the diligent thought and expression Dulles gives to responsible modernization of the Church’s message for the contemporary world.

⁶⁰ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 64.

CHAPTER TWO

PROLEGOMENA TO DULLES'S CONCEPT OF REFORMULATION

Father Avery Dulles became a visible and vocal exponent of modernization energized by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.¹ Obviously, the press for modernization evident at the Council influenced Dulles significantly. Yet, his thinking about *aggiornamento* was driven principally by his own orientation and posture as a theologian and teacher of philosophy. Moreover, his advocacy of reformulation and dogmatic development was rooted in his theology, informed as it was by elements of epistemology which found their way into his methodology for doing the task of theology. These three, epistemology, methodology, and theology serve as prolegomena to a range of subjects: Dulles's estimate of the questioned state of dogma in the mid-twentieth century, his revelation theory and its implications for dogma, and his approach to doctrinal development after Vatican II.

The prolegomena raise pointed questions. In what manner is tacit knowing distinct

¹ Father Dulles was teaching at Woodstock College when the Council was convened. His colleague and mentor, Father Gustave Weigel, would likely assume leadership introducing the Council on the American Scene. Father Weigel had been one of the *periti* at the Council. Upon Weigel's untimely death in 1964, Father Dulles was commissioned by his superior, Father John Courtney Murray, to become an interpreter of the Council for the benefit of Catholics in the United States. Avery Dulles, *A Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 109.

from neo-Scholastic principles for epistemology? How significant is tacit knowledge for an appropriate methodology serving the task of theology? What devices may a theologian employ when he works from a base of tacit knowledge? What will be the outcome for dogmatic expression when the task of theology is pursued with a postcritical methodology such as that used by Dulles?² If theology is less than hardbound to the sources, Scripture, tradition, and the life of the Church, how does such flexibility affect the Church's dogma? How do creativity and innovation in doing theology affect formulation of the Church's message for teaching and proclamation? The aim of this chapter is to provide helpful background for adequate treatment of these questions.

² George Lindbeck's ideas help to frame an understanding of Dulles's postcritical posture. Lindbeck speaks of a postcritical age characterized by increased awareness of the tacit dimension of rationality and of the cultural-linguistic conditioning of all that we believe and are. Paracriticism and countercriticism typify modern blindness to the enabling role in all behavior, belief, and knowledge (including critical knowledge) of the tacit dimension, of fiduciary frameworks, and of cultural-linguistic communicative contexts, or in Dulles's preferred theological terminology, "ecclesiastical transformative" ones. See George Lindbeck, "Dulles on Method," *Pro Ecclesia* 1, no. 1 (Fall, 1992): 55-56. Dulles does not identify himself as a postcritical theologian, but his methodology is highly dependent upon tacit knowledge and the use of clues which may not be specified, certainly not defended by formal argument. He shares with postcritical theology what he calls the passionate quest to articulate tacitly held truth that defies adequate formulation inasmuch as postcritical theology is not a strictly deductive or empirical science, yet deeply concerned with truth. And he sees this advantage in postcritical theology: the ability to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between continuity and innovation. Looking on tradition as the bearer of tacit knowledge, postcritical theology recognizes that fidelity to the tradition may be consonant with certain innovations in the formulation of doctrine. Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 5, 14-15. For a helpful overview of postliberal theology with references to major sources on the subject, see Joel Okamoto, "Postliberal Approaches to the Theology of Religions: Presentation, Assessment, and Critical Appropriation" (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1997), 14-35.

Epistemology

A Personalist Base for Tacit Knowing

Fundamental for Avery Dulles's epistemology is the notion that absolute reason is not indispensable for knowing. To consider the possibility that knowledge may be acquired through means other than rational discernment was surely a fresh insight for one who was rigorously trained in scholastic philosophy and theology. The immediate implications of this possibility for expression of doctrine are apparent. Apprehending certain realities extra rationally, one may set forth such knowledge in a medium other than closely knit rational demonstration, especially when it comes to expressing the things of faith. So, there are realities which are known in a supra-noetic manner. In turn, the tacit knowing of such realities need not be articulated in the precise language of the proposition that stands all the tests of rational scrutiny and analysis. Arguing that some concepts have an authentically cognitive role, Dulles adds, ". . . concepts are not our only means of knowledge."³ In the instance of transcendent realities, concepts may be late in coming. "They express and elaborate, to some degree," says Dulles, "what we have already come to know, in a vital but inarticulate way. In religious knowledge man's preconceptual awareness of God is a factor of immense importance."⁴

How does Dulles argue the case for supra-noetic knowing? Essential to his

³ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1971), 201.

⁴ Ibid.

argument are distinctive nuances of reason. Dulles points to Wolfhart Pannenberg's particular notion of reason. Pannenberg states that "reason" which can establish the fact of revelation is not autonomous or syllogistic reason. Instead, it is interpretive or historical reason, operating in a climate of revelation under the healing influence of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Dulles applies this principle of interpretive reasoning to the Incarnation and the divinity of Christ. He appeals to the infinity of God's love for us, His boundless mercy and condescension, the charity of Calvary and similar related infinities. These infinities exhibit aspects of the credibility of the Christian dogma of the Incarnation. But Dulles notes, while such a cumulative argument of this kind is fully rational, it does not lend itself to propositional statement. Neither is the propositional expression essential. The credibility of the Incarnation exists quite apart from purely rational explication. Dulles underscores the dynamism of supra-noetic tacit knowledge when he summarizes,

There can be no question of framing arguments, whether deductive or inductive, which rigorously prove the divinity of Christ. Syllogisms can have rhetorical and expository value, but they do not really recapture the dynamism by which the mind arrives at the recognition of Christ's godhead.⁶

According to Dulles, the credibility of the divinity of Christ eludes both rational argument and expression of the truth in rationally tested propositional statements. But this divine reality does not, for that reason, elude the possibility of knowing in a supra-noetic manner and expressing such knowledge in a medium other than the tightly formed

⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶ Avery Dulles, *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ*. Woodstock Papers No. 6 (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1963), 72.

propositional statement.⁷ The theologian should not feel compelled to offer a deductive or inductive argument, or some other rhetorical device, to prove and establish realities such as Christ's divinity. Indeed, such a truth can be known only by "transcendental experience," i.e., by the Holy Spirit's interior working of grace without resorting to neo-Scholastic argumentation for assurances. Dulles takes a position which he develops extensively in his discussion of revelation, the view that dogma as language and statement cannot hope to contain the transcendencies of the faith. Such dogmatic statements, therefore, cannot in any sense be absolute. Articulating and expressing transcendencies of the faith, dogmatic statements must remain expectantly flexible and even tentative, subject certainly to change and reformulation. Tacit knowledge, then, holds crucial implications for the status of church dogma.

Dulles finds support in unusual places for his judgment that propositional statements are notably deficient as bearers of transcendent realities. He refers to the Latin teaching manuals used in Catholic seminaries since the nineteenth century. How do these teaching manuals stand up alongside the biblical faith? He cites the manuals of Herman Dieckmann and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. As Werner Bulst, S.J., observed, these

⁷ Dulles notes the speculations by Mouroux, Marechal, and others who assert that affirmations of faith have meaning that transcends the objective significance of mental concepts and verbal formulations. Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 196. Therefore, he takes issue with contemporary Catholics such as Germaine Grisez and William Marshner who hold that assent to propositions is an essential ingredient of faith. Thinkers of this school, Dulles judges, neglect the latent and mystical dimensions of human knowledge. By means of symbols and metaphors the mind often attains to truth that eludes direct declarative statement. A true affirmation, consequently, may be made without clear concepts or propositions. *Ibid.*, 172.

manuals are frequently abstract, static and formalistic in their presentations. For example, they present an exclusively rational analysis of the concept of revelation. By contrast, analysis of the biblical testimonies gives a far more dynamic, concrete, and personal notion of revelation, thus doing justice to the role of the events of salvation history in manifesting the powerful mercies of God.⁸ In the same era that these teaching manuals were used in the seminaries, the Catholic laity generally looked upon faith as a submission of the mind to the teaching of the Church. Dulles states that this also compares unfavorably to the biblical view of faith. He comments, "In biblical times faith did not mean the acceptance of a collection of dogmatic formulas on the authority of an institutional Church, but rather the liberating recognition that the God of love was present and active in the ongoing life of his people."⁹ Faith elicited in terms of rational agreement as well as the cold rational arguments advanced in the Latin teaching manuals tended to obscure the lively power of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church.

Closely related to tacit knowing and most important to Dulles is the interior working of the Holy Spirit, the working of grace. The Holy Spirit's working, as stated above, negates the notion that the assent of faith is a purely rational exercise. Even more critical for the present argument, interior grace is the manner in which God communicates to man apart from "Word" as language and statement. It is apparent, then, that Dulles engages a personalistic epistemology. He adapts insights from the work of the French

⁸ Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1969), 138-39.

⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 153.

Jesuit, Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) and that of his Belgian confrere, Joseph Marechal (1878-1944). Relying on St. Thomas Aquinas—but also exploiting certain insights of Kant, Newman, and Blondel—they stressed the subjectivity of the human spirit in the process of knowing. This is to say, truth is not passively imposed on the intellect from the outside. The absolute value of human knowledge for these philosophers is attributable to the dynamic thrust of the mind toward the Infinite. The active affirmation of the intellect in faith never stops at propositions, but passes through them and ultimately terminates in God himself as Being than in mere statements about God.¹⁰ Dulles's close attention to the insights advanced by Rousselot and Marechal discloses his deep interest in epistemology liberated from dependence upon absolute reason. The propositional statement is at best marginal. These factors will figure prominently in his positioning of dogmatic formulation for the late twentieth century.

The Existential Use of Reason

The movement from Word to Being and from extrinsic reliance on objective propositional revelation to intrinsic subjective perceptions of the transcendent mystery is a shift of monumental proportions. Historically, the shift is a move away from neo-Scholasticism and the manualist theology dominant in Catholic theological education in the nineteenth century. From the standpoint of epistemology, it is a telling shift in the use of reason itself. One radical exponent of the shift was L. Charlier, a Dominican who distanced himself from the conceptual altogether. Dulles extracts from Charlier's work,

¹⁰ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 142-143.

Essai sur le probleme theologique this significant paragraph:

Our divine faith is not a mere adherence to some kind of external divine testimony, a word guaranteed by God. The analogy drawn from human faith is on this point very deficient. Faith is assimilation to the first Truth (*veritas prima in dicendo*). To adhere to the first Truth in itself and for itself is to adhere to God in his mystery, to attain him directly, and to grasp him in his intimate being and life.¹¹

The first principle is adherence to the transcendent God versus first response to statements about God. Divine interior working is the critical factor. From M. D. Chenu, a contemporary of Charlier, Dulles learned that in faith matters we adhere not simply to God's message, but to God as he makes himself present and bears witness to himself by his gracious indwelling.¹² These new perceptions of both revelation and faith surfaced in the early twentieth century as Catholic theologians like Charlier, Chenu, and others such as the Saulchoir Dominicans struggled for new approaches to Modernism. The new perceptions are witness to a shift in epistemology from the use of absolute reason to confidence in the existential internal response to God's interior working.¹³

A similar variation in the use of reason was both apparent and ostensible in the discipline of apologetics. Dulles relates that in the age of Rationalism, apologetics was

¹¹ Ibid., 141-142. It should be noted that Charlier's work was placed on the Index in 1942.

¹² Ibid., 140-141. Dulles cites Chenu's work, *La Foi dans l'intelligence* (Paris, 1964), 250, a reprint of his earlier book, *La theologie au Saulchoir* (Paris, 1937). Chenu frames the issue more clearly and conclusively: "The act of the believer terminates, truthfully speaking, not in the dogmatic statement, but in the divine reality itself, which the proposition expresses in human terms. Its object, then, is not a concept, formula, or system of thought, but the Person in whom I recognize the All of my life, the satisfying object of my blessedness."

¹³ Dulles attests how the school of Le Saulchoir offered a more dynamic and authentic Thomism, capable of entering into dialogue with modern thought. Ibid., 142.

understood as the process by which pure reason, without benefit of grace or faith, argued to the divine authority of Christ and the Church. Heavy emphasis was placed upon the supposed historical evidences of miracles and prophecies by which the divinity of Christ was established. The conclusions from such apologetic effort were intended to be definitive. An attempt was made to show by historical evidences that Christ founded a Church and empowered it to be his “legate,” teaching with his authority, and that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ. To be sure, not everyone agreed with the argument advanced by this apologetic. Some found it to be either too rationalistic or too authoritarian. Certainly, many disagreed with the conclusions.¹⁴

Twentieth century apologetics, by contrast, operates with a more concrete conception of reason. This has been the dominant tendency. No longer is reason taken singularly in the abstract as a power of deduction common to all human beings, but existentially as the reflective power of an individual person to discern the truth with the help of all the hints and anticipations afforded by experience.¹⁵ Presumably, the latter is a veiled reference to “transcendental experiences” at the impulse of the Holy Spirit’s working of interior grace. Convinced that the standard apologetic relied too much on proof and argument, as though faith could ever be the achievement of technical reason, Dulles sought to show that faith has a logic of its own. He reminds his readers of Pascal’s “reason of the heart,” and more importantly, Newman’s term, “illative sense,” and then

¹⁴ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 41-42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42. Among Catholic thinkers, John Henry Newman and Maurice Blondel figured prominently as contributors to the development of the new apologetics.

Michael Polanyi who wrote of “tacit knowing.”¹⁶ From Polanyi, Dulles engaged a logic of discovery which begins, not with formal inference, but with openness and the asking of existential questions. The inquiry moves on to a phase of contemplation when man considers the vast spectrum of human experience and looks, not for proofs, but for signs or sign-events disclosing the true meaning of life and death. These signs point the Christian to Jesus Christ in whom the believer feels that he has encountered the truth. This is the ultimate discernment for which no further apology is needed, certainly not the enforcement of a rational system of proofs and assurances.¹⁷

The New Understanding of Faith and Reason

Dulles employs what may be termed the existential use of reason. From the viewpoint of rational thinking, one may legitimately question where reason ends and faith begins, or again, where faith ends and reason begins. These old questions are about cognition and its function relative to reason and faith. Dulles’s epistemology breaks into the discussion with facile use of symbol and tacit knowledge. Nevertheless, his use of

¹⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 58. Marjorie Grene has assembled four of Polanyi’s essays on the subject of tacit knowing. See *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 123ff. The titles of these essays are: “Knowing and Being,” 123-137; “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 138-158; “Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy,” 159-180; “Sense-Giving and Sense Reading,” 181-207. For a succinct treatment of Polanyi’s views on tacit knowing, see Michael Polanyi, “Faith and Reason,” *Journal of Religion* 41 (October, 1961): 237-247.

¹⁷ Ibid. A forthcoming section of this chapter will treat at length Dulles’s logic of discovery. He attributes the origin of his heuristic method to Michael Polanyi who situates religious conversion within the framework of a logic of discovery at work also in many other fields, including mathematics and the natural sciences. See, *A Church to Believe In*, 42f.

these entities should not be misunderstood as abandonment of cognitive processes. He does consistently argue that some concepts have an authentically cognitive role. And he flatly rejects what he sees as conceptual agnosticism in Leslie Dewart. Certainly, he concurs with Dewart's insistence that concepts and propositions expressing the Church's faith should be constantly updated to keep pace with the growth of human consciousness. But he questions Dewart's notion that all concepts are merely pragmatic instruments, enabling the believer to deal effectively with successive situations and to intensify his faith experience.¹⁸ Dulles finds that concepts are concrete and useful. Concepts enable one to achieve noetic insight into realities to which they refer; they mediate a contemplative union between the knower and the known.¹⁹ Therefore, any discussion of Dulles's existential use of reason must include his views on the proper exercise and use of cognitive concepts.

Nonetheless, what may be termed an existential use of reason suggests reconstruction of an ancient paradigm, the Augustinian-Anselmian formula, "faith seeking understanding." Dulles is quick to distance himself from the scholastic use of this formula as well as from distinctively modern notions of faith and reason bifurcated.²⁰ He engages

¹⁸ Dulles notes Dewart's assertion that, God reveals himself in and through human concepts whose truth is ever inconclusive, ever growing, ever involving, since these concepts share in the nature of all human conscious life. Such tentativity, yes, relativity of concepts leads to unrealistic diminution of their proper cognitive role. *Survival of Dogma*, 200. The reference is, Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 464.

¹⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 200-201.

²⁰ For Dulles, the Augustinian-Anselmian formula, "faith seeking understanding," has many advantages over the modern two-level theories which would depict faith as the acceptance of a body of truths simply beyond the scope of reason. "These theories, which owe something to Thomas Aquinas," observes Dulles, "were carried to inordinate lengths

the formula by yet another label, that of informal inference. So he directs attention to what Newman calls the “illative sense,” which operates not with rational processes alone, but engages the whole person. The “illative sense” described by Newman is a latent spontaneous power of inference, not dependent upon rules, but making use of probabilities.²¹ Even more useful to Dulles is Michael Polanyi’s paradigm for religious discovery. Again, informal inference is at work when we recognize comprehensive entities in the objects of our experience. Such epistemology, says Dulles, leads to intelligibility that points to a divinely given meaning. Seeing some resemblance to Augustine, Dulles comments:

The restlessness of heart (which Augustine in his *Confessions* described as *cor inquietum*) is interpreted by theologians as the effect of God’s grace calling us to communion with himself. But it resembles Polanyi’s tacit knowledge, insofar as in the hunger of the spirit the good news of the gospel is anticipated by our inarticulate spiritual longing.²²

The new ingredient in the old formula, “faith seeking understanding,” is the intuitive faculty peculiar to discovery. It surfaces in Dulles’s three dimensions of faith. First, faith is antecedent to reason, an orientation born of the implicit supposition that there is total meaningfulness to life and the universe. Second, faith is viewed as a sense of anticipation directing one’s process of inquiry and enabling one at times to discern the

in some modern authoritarian systems of theology, resulting in what Blondel identified as an extrinsicist and alienated view of revelation.” *Survival of Dogma*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

²² Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 43.

divine, “thanks to the signs that have been given.”²³ Third, faith means trusting acceptance of the tradition of the community to which one adheres, for it is within the community where religious conviction occurs never without the mediation of some created agency— the humanity of Christ, the Church, the Scripture, the sacraments, or whatever.²⁴ Reason in this framework, concludes Dulles, means the process of verifying whether the anticipations set up by faith are or are not an adequate guide for the interpretation of other data. The second point above, faith viewed as a sense of anticipation, involves intuition which is integral to Dulles’s logic of discovery.

The Logic of Discovery

The intuitive faculty is something other than subjective aspiration or initiative. It is stimulated by grace, the working of the Holy Spirit, within a process which Dulles names, the logic of discovery. Polanyi observes a heuristic tension wherever the logic of discovery is operative. This occurs in an early phase of discovery in which one is passionately concerned and intensely preoccupied with a problem, convinced that a hidden solution exists, waiting to be found. One is encouraged to look, not at what is known, but to that which is unknown, the conclusion, to focus one’s gaze in the direction indicated by hidden clues or hunches, perceived for the most part by what Polanyi calls “tacit knowledge.” Driven by such inarticulate anticipations, eventually one arrives at the point

²³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 42.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

where he can stop and claim discovery.²⁵

Dulles applies the logic of discovery to conversion. Man does not arrive at faith by adherence to authority and a tradition that produced logical arguments of a syllogistic nature for the existence of God. Those arguments may have been helpful in a former age. But today, it is not argument, but discovery that is crucial! Dulles is convinced that the logic of discovery is man's normal approach to faith. Within man's restless heart (*cor inquietum*), God gives grace whereby he anticipates finding God, an inchoate faith which serves to direct reason in its quest.²⁶ By the use of informal inference, man proceeds with radical openness. He begins, not with premises, but with existential questions which are religious in that they touch on the ultimate meaning of man's life. Reason proceeds from this point, but not by the logic of formal inference with its carefully articulated rules. Instead, reason proceeds by informal inference, a kind of spontaneous and natural logic

²⁵ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 42-43. Polanyi engages heuristic maxims made by the mathematician G. Pólya, *How to Solve It* (Princeton, 1945) and *Mathematics and Plausible Reasoning*, 2 vols. (1954). Polanyi has developed a theory of non-explicit thought. The starting point for this theory is a supposition that the pursuit of science is determined at every stage by unspecifiable powers of thought. Logical positivism intended to establish all knowledge in terms of explicit relations between sensory data. But this programme has been gradually relaxed by admitting more complex data and making allowance for "open textures" and "flexibilities" of framework. Polanyi asserts that tacit knowing is the fundamental power of the mind, which creates explicit knowing, lends meaning to it and controls its uses. Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," in *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 155-156. For a discussion of the dominant and decisive intuitive function in mathematical heuristics, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 124-131, 260. For a succinct treatment of tacit knowledge, see Michael Polanyi, "Faith and Reason," *Journal of Religion* 41 (October, 1961): 237-247.

²⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 50.

better adapted to the real situations in life, in which the evidences are too complex to be methodically analyzed.²⁷

Following close on the inchoate faith, informal inference prompts one to look, not for proofs, but for signs or sign events. Dulles turns to Newman's logic of convergence, in which certitude depends not simply on objective evidence, but on all the presumptions and concerns of the inquiring subject. The act of faith for Newman was a concrete choice involving the "illative sense"—a personal power to discern and assess the force of multiple convergent signs that could not be turned into logical premises. Informal inference, then, is not an exercise of pure reason in the sense understood by the rationalist philosophers. It is the work of the whole person, and might well rest on a certain incipient faith. Dulles adds: "Newman is the spiritual ancestor of all those twentieth-century theologians who interpret conversion not as a movement from reason to faith but as an intellectual movement from faith to faith."²⁸

Inchoate faith and certitude attained through a process of informal inference and by working of the Holy Spirit is a personalistic and existentialist faith. The Christian is directed not to a statement but to a person, Jesus Christ, the man of sorrows and the exalted one. In Christ, the believer feels that he has encountered truth, which in the last analysis is mystery. "In union with God, as he appears in the form of Jesus, the Christian is convinced that he has come into contact with ultimate reality."²⁹ To penetrate the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁸ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 42.

²⁹ Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma*, 60.

mystery of Jesus' person, says Dulles, is never described as though it were the end product of human reasoning. "Flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but my Father in heaven (Mt. 16:17)."³⁰ In other words, to recognize the divinity of Jesus is primarily a matter of grace which orders a proper relationship between the convert and Jesus Christ. This is quite distinct from giving to the convert a statement containing revealed truth about Christ and then expecting from him intellectual assent. Dulles comments, "Faith is in the first instance a response to God's interior self-communication in grace. Only secondarily and derivatively does it involve an assent to determinate truths that are seen by the light of grace."³¹ The logic of discovery, according to Dulles, essentially abandons earlier notions of movement from reason to faith or from faith to reason. It passes over questions surrounding this movement. In fact, questions arising from inchoate faith need not have answers at all. What is important is that the believer has encountered truth.

Summary: A New Paradigm

The discussion of Dulles's epistemology leads to the striking realization that a framework for knowing in use for the better part of the past millenium is displaced by another with its themes of tacit knowledge and existential personalistic faith. Dulles cites

³⁰ Dulles, *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ*, 68-69.

³¹ Avery Dulles. "The Modern Dilemma of Faith." In *Toward a theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology Compiled at the Canisianum, Innsbruck* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1968), 23. Vatican Council II, Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, Art. 2, reads: "The invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends." See Abbott, 112. Dulles notes how the Council looks upon faith as personal engagement, involving loyalty and self-commitment, an act of the whole man whereby he entrusts his whole self freely to God.

Bernard Lonergan who observes that contemporary theology has ceased to be the kind of deductive science that it was thought to be in the age of high scholasticism. Lonergan writes, "It has become an empirical science in the sense that Scripture and Tradition now supply not premises, but data. The data has to be viewed in its historical perspective. It has to be interpreted in the light of contemporary techniques and procedures."³²

In a former age, rational premises were foundational for knowledge communicated in propositions or statements demonstrating by formal inference conclusions and their supporting evidence. The entire process was extrinsic and to a large extent objective. Today, a different paradigm comes of age. The once-for-all inalterable truth arrived at by deduction is effectively dismantled. Truth is no longer apprehended only by the mind engaging the faculty of reason, but by man as person in his situation, existentially. The use of informal inference has taken on respectability. Repeating an earlier comment, we note how Lindbeck marks these and other changes when he summarizes, "Specifically, we are entering a postcritical age characterized by increased awareness of the tacit dimension of rationality and of cultural-linguistic conditioning of all that we believe and are."³³

Highlighted are such factors: human beings change from past to present; their knowing is not limited to the reach of reason, but is expanded to extra-noetic dimensions; and with changes in self and discernment, human expression is tentative and flexible as well. These are accents gained from an overview of the essentials of Dulles's epistemology.

³² Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma*, 36. The citation is from Bernard J. Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," In *Theology of Renewal* ed. L. K. Shook, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 37-38.

³³Lindbeck, "Dulles on Method," 55-56.

What does this mean for faith and dogma? It means, because a person is situated existentially in his present time and circumstance, his comprehension of the importance and significance of the faith will be contextualized. As Dulles himself always insists, one will affirm intentionally the “deposit.”³⁴ Yet, in this new paradigm, confession and proclamation of the faith will be as flexible and different as man himself is different from generation to generation. The themes of existential knowing and personalistic faith, then, become tools for forming expressions of Christian faith suitable to man and his circumstances today.³⁵ In the process, the insights of the interpreter and the participation of the individual are elevated to a status of undeniable importance. It is necessary to append here the caveat which Dulles repeats frequently, namely, the faith of the individual shall be nothing less than the faith confessed by the Church as the community of faithful under the authority, tutelage and guidance of the magisterium.

³⁴ The “deposit” is defined by the Councils. Vatican I spoke of revelation as a “divine deposit delivered to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared.” *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitio et Declaratio de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. H. Denzinger, rev. A. Schoenmetzer, 36th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 3020. (Hereafter, *DS*) Cf. 3070 where the deposit of faith is the revelation delivered through the apostles. Cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, 10, “Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit, the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (cf. Acts 2, 42), Greek text), so that in holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, there results on the part of the bishops and faithful a remarkable common effort.” (Abbott, 117)

³⁵ Cited earlier, Dulles’s own articulate assessment of the new situation bears repeating here: “The modern theologian is not content to quote statements from Scripture or from the documents of tradition. He feels obliged to evaluate these, taking account of the historical stresses and strains that may have influenced the statements in question and asking to what extent the statements would have to be reformulated in order to be suitable expressions of Christian faith in the circumstances of our day.” *Survival of Dogma*, 36.

Methodology

A Postcritical Approach to Theology

Avery Dulles outlines his approach to the task of doing theology in *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*.³⁶ The first printing in 1992 was followed by a second expanded edition published in 1996. In *The Craft of Theology*, Dulles observes that members in other professions--History, Medicine work with a prevalent and normative methodology, i.e., they share a common vision of what they are about.³⁷ According to Dulles, theology is a methodical effort to articulate the truth implied in Christian faith, the faith of the Church.³⁸ Probably by intention, Dulles elects to use the term *methodology* instead of *prolegomena*, a term employed frequently by Lutheran theologians and dogmaticians.³⁹ Though not outside the realm of possibility, Dulles has no intention of

³⁶ Limited by the boundaries of the study, we cannot hope to do justice to a topic on which Dulles has written so extensively. We shall confine ourselves to major themes of his methodology. Central to Dulles's methodology is symbolic communication, a subject treated more extensively in chapter four of this paper, "Revelation: Matrix for Doctrinal Reformulation."

³⁷ Avery Dulles, introduction to the first edition *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), x.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8. Challenging the notion that there ever was a precritical era in theology, Dulles describes theological method with this statement: "Theology is by its very nature a disciplined reflection of faith, one that attempts to distinguish methodically between truth and illusion and to ground its affirmations on principles rather than on blind impulses." *Craft of theology*, 3-4.

³⁹ When he addresses theological method, Dulles addresses subjects such as the sources for theology, authority, faith of the Church and the theologian, subjects which Lutherans place under the category of prolegomena. Robert Preus presents the Lutheran understanding of prolegomena when he comments, "In prolegomena the theologian looks

setting forth principles for a dogmatic theology. On the contrary, he questions the adequacy of most theological systems, except that some few serve to make the faith intelligible to a given cultural group at a given period in history. His preoccupation with tacit knowledge precludes interest in developing a comprehensive systematic theology. He writes, "Systematization in theology can never be complete, for the true object of theology is the unfathomable mystery of God, attained by tacit rather than explicit awareness."⁴⁰ He comes closest to a statement of prolegomena loosely understood in these words from his proposal for *The Craft of Theology*:

Theology needs to nourish itself by a continual return to the sources of faith and piety. If the theologian is in touch with the reality of God through prayer and worship, God will be tacitly perceived as infinitely greater than all our images or concepts.⁴¹

Even though *prolegomena* is not used extensively in his writings, Dulles articulates clearly his understanding of the setting for theology today. He places his own work as a theologian within that setting. He believes that a new era, which he calls "postcritical,"

at himself and his work. Prolegomena seek to set the stage for the theological task. They do not merely outline what the theologian intends to do; but they set the tone for all that will follow, and above all, they lay the ground rules for the theologian in constructing a Christian dogmatics. Prolegomena are the attempt to establish a substructure and starting point for the work of presenting Christian doctrine in the church." Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study in Theological Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 73. In subsequent paragraphs, Preus refers to underlying axioms and assumptions and principles and attitudes fundamental to theologians and their task, also to that which pertains to the introduction of theology. 73-75.

⁴⁰ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 10.

⁴¹ Avery Dulles, "From Symbol to System: A Proposal for Theological Method," *Pro Ecclesia* 1 (Fall, 1992), 43.

has been ushered in with the decline of neo-Scholasticism. He emphasizes, postcritical theology is not uncritical, but it insists on the need to recognize the inherent limitations of the critical program, thus applying criticism to criticism itself. Furthermore, postcritical theology is more trusting. It is liberated from the tyranny of doubt. An ecclesial discipline, Christian theology depends upon a trusting acceptance of revelation and a trusting affiliation with the church, the community of faith. Professing identity as a member of this faith community, Dulles goes on to identify his theology as postcritical in the sense that Polanyi uses the term.⁴²

Dulles situates postcritical theology within the history of theology which over the centuries can be interpreted according to successive attitudes toward criticism: for example, the *precritical*—everything measured against divine revelation, care exercised that criticism was not leveled at the canonical sources themselves, a privileged position given to authoritative statements of the word of God; the *critical*—verification by self-evident facts and principles established by close observation, and rejection of anything not meeting these criteria under the scrutiny of questioning; and the *postcritical*—critical in a positive sense, not objecting to criticism, but carrying criticism to new heights, scrutinizing the

⁴² Ibid., 47. Dulles acknowledges Michael Polanyi's influence on the writing of the first chapter to *Craft of Theology*. He comments, "A glimmer of light came to me when I was able to see, with Michael Polanyi's help, the distinction between tacit and explicit knowing." *Craft of Theology*, 5; See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), xviii. Polanyi's influence is documented extensively in numerous passages by Ross A. Shecterle, *The Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles 1980-1994: Symbolic Mediation*. Roman Catholic Studies, No. 8 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 71, 63 n. 80, 72 n. 92; 83 n.106. For the influence of Polanyi and others on the thought of Dulles, see Piet Fransen, *The New Life of Grace*, trans. George DuPont (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969). Cited in Shecterle, *The Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles*, 64 n. 83.

presuppositions and methods of the critical program itself, recognizing and favoring the cognitive value in tacit knowledge, something criticism previously had failed to do.⁴³

Dulles seems to prefer a centrist role. Sensitive to both extremes, static maintenance and unbridled exploration, Dulles sees a distinctive advantage in postcritical theology which has this merit, the ability to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between continuity and innovation.⁴⁴ Moreover, he does not want to speak for other theologians. He adopts his own nuances of “postcritical.”⁴⁵ They surface in at least two emphases.

The first emphasis is the ecclesial dimension of a proper methodology. The theologian operates within the Church as one who shares a commitment of faith with the community of faith. Dulles says, “Postcritical theology, as I use the term, begins with a

⁴³ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 3-7. In this historical discussion, Dulles mentions five weaknesses of the critical program as he elaborates on the advantages of postcritical theology. He also cites the presence of a *paracritical* approach which reacted to the critical program by sheltering theology from critical doubt and rational testing ordinarily reserved for the sphere of science and speculative knowledge. A *countercritical* movement insisted strongly on miracles as evidential signs in an effort to vindicate the truth of Christianity by engaging criticism’s own rigorous approach to the sources and employing exact syllogistic logic. 4-5.

⁴⁴ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 14.

⁴⁵ This study attempts to monitor closely Dulles’s own initiatives and application of postcritical principles in a method of his own devising. In his review of, *The Craft of Theology*, Peter J. Casarella of the Catholic University of America emphasizes the catholicity of Avery Dulles’s method as best demonstrated by the broad compass of his self-chosen label “postcritical theology.” Casarella grants Dulles a certain amount of originality and individuality even though he notes that Dulles’s postcritical theology takes cues from a variety of sources: Polanyi’s attention to the tacit dimensions of knowing, Lonergan’s understanding of the dynamics of conversion, the “sense of the faithful” in Johann Adam Mohler, the recovery of the tradition in John Henry Newman and Maurice Blondel, and the postliberal theology of Albert Outler and George Lindbeck. Peter J. Casarella, review of *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, by Avery Dulles, *Thomist* 58 (July, 1994): 513-517.

presupposition or prejudice in favor of faith.”⁴⁶ The theologian’s work has an ecclesial foundation in one’s being a baptized, believing member of the Church.⁴⁷ And theology as an ecclesial discipline is done in the Church because the Church is the primary bearer of faith.⁴⁸ The playing field is well marked and defined. Dulles summarizes:

Christ delivered his revelation to a community of disciples; the Holy Spirit descended upon a gathering community. The Church, then, is a stable constant and abiding context for doing theology, i.e., the Church has the promise of indefectibility because Christ has promised to be with it through His Spirit to the end of the age.⁴⁹

Because of its ecclesial and faith dimensions, the theological method discussed here cannot be pursued by the techniques of mathematics or syllogistic logic. Dulles acknowledges certain limitations. Postcritical theology rooted in faith convictions cannot present conclusive arguments to thinkers who do not have the same faith-commitment. The method of postcritical theology depends, “on a kind of connoisseurship derived from personal appropriation of the living faith of the Church,” enabling one to judge what is or

⁴⁶ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 14.

⁴⁷ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8. When Dulles speaks about the Church as the bearer of faith, he means the Roman Catholic Church. In his review of *The Craft of Theology*, Maurice Wiles positions Dulles’s postcritical approach between reactionary conservatism on the one hand and revisionism on the other. But the essence of “postcritical” theology, says Wiles, turns out to be theology done from within the horizon of faith; and “faith” here means Roman Catholic faith with a highly deferential attitude to the role of the magisterium. Maurice Wiles, review of *The Craft of Theology*, by Avery Dulles, *Theology* 96 (Sept.-Oct., 1993): 402-404.

⁴⁹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 8.

what is not consonant with revelation.⁵⁰ At this point, Dulles is convinced that postcritical theology, the bearer of tacit knowledge, is quite compatible with Catholic tradition. And certain innovations in doctrinal formulation suggested by tacit knowledge may also be consonant with fidelity to the tradition. He says, "Postcritical theology has its home within the Church as a community of faith, but it dares on occasion to break through the accepted frameworks in its passionate exploration of the mystery to which the Church bears witness."⁵¹

The second emphasis is his employment of sources for theology in a manner quite distinct from neo-Scholastic perceptions and usage. The sources serve principally as clues of a transcendental reality beyond verbal or written expression. Reckoned among the sources of theology, tradition is not merely a static reserve of the past. Tradition consists predominantly of tacit knowledge and perpetuates itself not primarily as explicit statement but rather by gesture, deed, and example, including ritual actions, "the unspecifiable lore that it transmits."⁵² Also, Dulles views Scripture as symbolic communication. Instead of viewing the Bible merely as a written repository of historical information or a collection of divine oracles, postcritical theology treats the Bible in its totality, "a set of clues that serve to focus the Christian vision of reality from manifold perspectives."⁵³ Symbols provide the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14. Carrying out these initiatives, postcritical theology seeks to reunite the creative with the cognitive, and the beautiful with the true. 15.

⁵² Ibid., 9.

⁵³ Ibid., 11.

clues. And Dulles refers to the Incarnation as the supreme symbol. He writes, "Within the Bible the figure of Jesus Christ stands out as God's supreme disclosure. Any viable theological proposal must be seen as consistent with the biblical clues and as carrying forward the intentions imbedded in them."⁵⁴

Dulles believes that postcritical theology gives new vitality to classical theological *loci*. He is certain that he may espouse the method of postcritical theology and work faithfully within the community of faith as a theologian of the Church. He has great confidence in the Holy Spirit who gives to the Church a certain "sense" that leads into all truth. And this occurs where the Spirit is within the Church's communal life, i.e., liturgy, prayer and worship.

Symbolic Communication

The epistemology of Avery Dulles with its primary components of tacit knowledge and personalistic faith is evident in his methodology which uses symbolic discourse extensively. Two aspects of symbolic mediation, communication and apprehension, influence substantially dogmatic formulation. This basic assertion raises the question, what new possibilities does symbolic communication hold for either formulation of church doctrine or reformulation of the same, possibilities that were nonexistent under neo-Scholasticism's doctrine of irreformability? A definitive answer to this question must be deferred until the discussion of Dulles's views on development in chapter five. But the basis for that discussion rests on the particulars of symbolic communication, i.e., the uses

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

Dulles makes of image and symbol, and to some extent also his use of models. In the background is Dulles's revelation theology. Clearly his views on reformulation and development of dogma are closely related to his notion of revelation as symbolic mediation.

In the larger picture is the legacy of Avery Dulles. He perceives his foremost contribution to be the discovery of a methodology acceptable to a wide spectrum of theologians, one which will make possible a common vision and identity for future generations to come.⁵⁵ In search of "common language," also "common goals and norms," Dulles offers his paradigm of symbolic communication. Shecterle has caught both the gravity and significance of these intentions. With accurate and pointed words, he summarizes, "Symbolic communication, and, by extension, the perception and understanding of revelation as symbolically mediated, is the cornerstone, the foundational principle for the theological enterprise of Avery Dulles."⁵⁶

Symbolic Realism

Dulles's use of symbol builds on his notion of symbolic realism.⁵⁷ In a celebrated

⁵⁵ For Dulles, the solution to theological fragmentation and polarization in the Roman Catholic Church following Vatican Council II is an ecclesial framework that may accommodate a variety of theological positions. Bereft of personalist, symbolic and mystical dimensions of faith, neo-Scholasticism, in Dulles's opinion, could not provide such a canopy. These very elements must be part of any theology given to consensus-forming procedures. See, *Craft of Theology*, x-xi.

⁵⁶ Shecterle, *The Theology of Avery Dulles*, 81 n. 104.

⁵⁷ In his assessment of five models of revelation, Dulles selected a dialectical tool, the concept of symbolic mediation. He disclaimed the contention that revelation is the same as symbol. But he described revelation as the self-manifestation of God through a

essay titled, *The Communication of Faith and Its Content*, Dulles distinguished his own symbolic approach to religious content and communication from three other approaches which rely on the subject-object schematization.⁵⁸ The meaning of the term “content” is different in each of the approaches outlined by Dulles:

1. In Dogmatic Rationalism, content is a set of dogmas, which are regarded as divinely authoritative and divinely revealed truths.
2. Historical Positivism assigned the content of Christianity to historical facts, especially in the period of Christian origins.
3. In Mystical Empiricism, the content—if the term is still appropriate—is the ineffable divine transcendence, immediately experienced in grace.
4. Symbolic realism distinguished from the former asserts that the true content of Christianity is the joint meaning of the Christian symbols—a meaning that can never be adequately formulated in language, but is tacitly perceived through reliance on the symbols themselves.⁵⁹

Dulles claims ownership of the fourth approach. He explains that symbolic realism does not at all imply that nothing can be truly said about the meaning of religious symbols, but only that what can be said falls short of fully expressing what is tacitly known. The tacit component consists in what we know but cannot say. He continues, “Our deepest personal commitments, whether religious or secular, involve a surplus of meaning beyond

form of communication that could be termed, at least in a broad sense, symbolic. His use of symbol in this instance was anything but generic or arbitrary. It was symbol, as he states, shaped by Christian conviction and refined in dialogue with the five models. In light of this procedure, Dulles explains, he adopted a position that may be called symbolic realism. *Models of Revelation*, 266.

⁵⁸ Avery Dulles, *The Communication of Faith and Its Content* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Association, 1985), 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

what can be clearly stated. We often have recourse to symbols to suggest what cannot be described or articulated in precise terms.”⁶⁰

According to Dulles, the first three approaches above seemed to give insufficient emphasis to the capacity of Christianity to satisfy the deep aspirations of the human spirit. They overlooked the affective and imaginative factors in the transmission of faith.⁶¹

When Dulles introduces symbolic realism, he lists five important points regarding symbol that are consistent with these factors. First, revelatory symbols are not pure creations of the human imagination. They are persons, events, and other realities whereby God brings into existence the community of faith we call the Christian Church. Second, Christian revelation is more than human interpretation of the natural symbols. Rather, the universal symbolism of nature is taken up into the biblical and Christian tradition and thereby given added depth and significance. Third, symbols do not necessarily point to things strictly other than themselves. Although a formal distinction exists between the symbol and what it points to, there remains the possibility that the symbol and the symbolized are one. Dulles cites what he calls “realizing symbols” which contain and mediate the reality they signify. Fourth, Dulles contends that “revelatory symbols” do not simply arouse emotions, strivings, fantasies, and ideals. They provide insight and point to realities inaccessible to direct human experience. They disclose what is ontologically real. Finally, concerning the inherent truth-categories involved in the symbols, Dulles holds that the symbols give rise, not merely to symbolic truth, but to true affirmations about what is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

antecedently real. Of course revelatory symbols may generate an inexhaustible brood of affirmations in the process. Yet the symbols are not indefinitely malleable. Some statements are grounded in the symbols, others are excluded by the symbols rightly understood. These five points comprise Dulles's own explication.⁶² There remains his application of symbolic realism to doctrinal formulation. In pursuit of this topic, we may be served by directing attention to Dulles's uses of image and symbol.

The Uses of Image and Symbol

A discussion of Dulles's use of symbolic language may properly begin with a brief summary of major ideas. According to Dulles, the divine mysteries are beyond the reach of rational extension. They are transcendent and incomprehensible. Yet they are not beyond tacit and even to some extent cognitive grasp by the whole person, the psyche, also the heart, as well as the mind. To arouse within the person such tacit knowledge of the divine mysteries, God reveals himself by means of self-communication.

Communicating himself to man, God employs abundant symbols which point to meaning beyond themselves, in this instance divine meaning. This plenitude of symbols is found within the community of faith where Jesus Christ is present as the supreme symbol. The symbols are energized by images from the sources of symbolic materials in the religious traditions of ancient Israel and in the religious heritage and tradition of the Church.

When a member of the community of faith submits to the symbols, they evoke

⁶² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 266-267. Shecterle expounds further these five characteristics of symbolic realism in Dulles's thought and points to parallel references in the larger corpus of Dulles's work. See Shecterle, *Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles*, 103f.

within that person tacit powers of recognition and knowledge of the divine mysteries. Or consider an inquirer, a prospective convert who elects to participate in the community of Christians. Surrounded by symbols of the faith, this person begins to recognize and affirm the mysteries of God. By symbolic communication, God reveals himself, not to the mind or intellect alone, but to the whole person participating in the community and submitting to the symbols of the faith which point to meaning beyond themselves. When both communication by symbols and apprehension of meaning intended by the symbols take place, God is revealing, communicating himself to man.

This summary serves our discussion of the particulars of symbolic communication, image, symbol, and model. Both communication and apprehension are facilitated by the use of image and symbol. Images have helped theologians communicate the mysteries of the faith. "Mysteries," relates Dulles, "are realities of which we cannot speak directly."⁶³ In reference to the Church, the term mystery implies that the Church is not fully intelligible to the finite mind of man. The richness of the Church defies finite intelligibility. In order to comprehend the Church as mystery, theologians resort to the use of images because it is not possible to proceed from clear and univocal concepts, or from definitions of the Church in the usual sense of the word.⁶⁴ Dulles observes that Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, pointed the way and directed attention to the use of images. In this connection, Dulles cites his mentor and colleague, Gustave Weigel.

⁶³ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Father Weigel observed that the debate on the schema *De Ecclesia* at the first session of the Council yielded the profound realization that the Church has been described, in its two thousand years, not so much by verbal definitions as in the light of images, albeit principally biblical images.⁶⁵ The notion that one must begin with an Aristotelian definition of the Church was simply bypassed. Furthermore, in his opening address at the second session of the Council, Pope Paul VI declared, “The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.”⁶⁶ Then he spoke about the Church seeking self-understanding by meditation on the “revealing images” of Scripture: “the building raised up by Christ, the house of God, the temple and tabernacle of God, his people, his flock, his vine, his field, his city, the pillar of truth, and finally, the Bride of Christ, his Mystical Body.”⁶⁷

Revelatory images abound, not only in Scripture, but also within the *locus*, the Church itself. When a person participates in the life and worship of the Church, the images peculiar to the Church speak to him or her existentially and communicate through their evocative power.⁶⁸ To illustrate, images in the secular sphere possess cognitive value

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17. See H. Kung, Y. Congar, and D. O’Hanlon, eds., *Council Speeches of Vatican II* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1964), 25.

⁶⁸ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 18. Dulles describes such participation in the Church with a statement from Lindbeck. To become religious, says Lindbeck, “is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition, that is, in its inner structure, far richer and more subtle than can be explicitly articulated.” George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 35.

even though they are apprehended by means other than the rational process of the mind. Such images as the bald eagle, black panther, the *fluer-de-lis* respectively arouse courage, militancy, and purity. Likewise, the biblical images of the Church as the flock of Christ, the Bride, the Temple, or whatever, suggest attitudes and courses of action; they intensify confidence and devotion. Dulles deduces, to some extent they are self-fulfilling; they make the Church become what they suggest the Church is.⁶⁹

Such imagery empowers symbolic communication! Finding an echo in the inarticulate depths of man's psyche, images convey latent meaning. In turn, this meaning is apprehended in a nonconceptual, even a subliminal way. For example, religious images found in the Bible and used in Christian preaching have aesthetic appeal and are apprehended not simply by the mind but by the imagination, the heart, or more properly the whole man.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church as a subjective principle of apprehension and understanding. In his comments on the secret and hidden wisdom of God, 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16, Dulles says that the Holy Spirit functions for St. Paul as constituting a new horizon whereby reason is enabled to transcend itself and achieve a discovery beyond its normal capacity.⁷¹

With regard to Christology, the Church, conversion, faith, and especially revelation, symbolic language and communication are pivotal for Dulles. He states, "I

⁶⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Avery Dulles. "Revelation and Discovery." In *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner, S.J.*, ed. William J. Kelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 17.

know God in a new way through dwelling in the community of faith, in which my mind is shaped by the Christian symbols.”⁷² The originating events and language of religious communication are essentially symbolic. Dulles distinguished three styles of communication, analogous to George Lindbeck’s three uses of doctrine—the “propositional-cognitive,” the “experience-expressive,” and the “cultural-linguistic.” The latter, which he renames, “ecclesial-transformative,” is of interest to Dulles because it corresponds to what he calls the postcritical turn. He is speaking about the use of symbols in communication which arouse and direct the believers’ tacit powers of apprehension and thereby equips them better to take in the real content of the mysteries of faith.⁷³ Symbols are projections or constructions that express the immediate action of God on the human spirit. He writes:

They are signs imbued with a plenitude or depth of meaning that surpasses the capacities of conceptual thinking and propositional speech. A symbol, in this perspective, is a perceptible sign that evokes a realization of that which surpasses ordinary objective cognition.⁷⁴

Furthermore, symbolic knowledge is self-involving. According to Dulles, this involvement

⁷² Avery Dulles, “From Symbol to System: A Proposal for Theological Method,” *Pro Ecclesia* 1, no. 1 (Fall, 1992): 44-45.

⁷³ Dulles, “From Symbol to System,” 48. See *Craft of Theology*, 18. Dulles explains how the role of symbolic communication is differently conceived in each of Lindbeck’s three approaches. In the first, the “propositional-cognitive,” symbol is subordinate to propositional speech; it is intended to illustrate for the senses and imagination what can be clearly understood only by discursive reason. In the second approach, “experience-expressive,” doctrines are seen, according to Lindbeck, as “noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.” In the third approach, “cultural-linguistic,” symbols have greater cognitive importance. See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 16. 15-18.

⁷⁴ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 18.

means that the symbol “speaks to us only insofar as it lures us to situate ourselves mentally within the universe of meaning and value which it opens up to us.”⁷⁵

Dulles’s ecclesial-transformative theology rests on a kind of symbolic realism in which reality is held to have symbolic structure.⁷⁶ In his discussion of symbolic realism, Dulles acknowledges dependence on Karl Rahner’s ontology of the symbol which is built on the assumption that all beings are by their nature symbolic. Rahner’s ontology of symbol is expressed in what has become a familiar and succinct definition, “the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence.”⁷⁷ The Thomistic notion of “resultance” of a faculty, a power, an accident is for Rahner the starting-point for his theory of the symbol. According to St. Thomas, the quantity which is frequently called the given is to be taken as the ‘species’, the outward form, aspect and figure, which the basic substance provides for itself, to fulfil itself, to “express” itself and to manifest itself thus.⁷⁸ Rahner explains:

The “species” of the material thing is undoubtedly the symbol – brought about by the essence, retained with the efficient cause in a differentiated unity, constituting the necessary “communication” of the self-realization – in which the material being possesses itself and presents itself to view, in the varying forms proper to its being.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 136.

⁷⁶ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 20.

⁷⁷ Karl Rahner, “The Theology of Symbol,” *Theological Investigations IV: More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1959), 234.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

In the strictest sense “symbol” is what Rahner calls “real symbol” or “symbolic reality” (in German, *Realsymbol*) that is to say, a sign whereby something realizes itself as other.⁸⁰ Furthermore, symbol is a particular type of sign: a sensible reality (word, gesture, artifact, etc) that betokens that which cannot be directly perceived, properly described, or adequately defined by abstract concepts. The symbol, by its suggestive capacity, thus discloses something that man could not otherwise know, at least with the same richness and power.⁸¹

Dulles sees such richness in the wide variety of symbols interacting with each other within the life and worship of the community of faith. These many and varied symbols direct the worshiper’s tacit powers of apprehension so as to instill a personal familiarity with the Christian mysteries.⁸² Dulles shows how the salvation history that forms the

⁸⁰ Dulles, “From Symbol to System,” 44. Rahner articulates the “task” of symbol in terms of looking for the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality can represent another—considering the matter primarily from the formal ontological point of view. Rahner calls this supreme and primal representation, in which one reality renders another present (primarily ‘for itself’ [*für sich*] and only secondarily for others), a symbol: the representation which allows the other ‘to be there [*da sein*].’ See Rahner, “The Theology of Symbol,” 225. Cited by Ross Shecterle, *Theology of Revelation in Avery Dulles*, footnote 62, 50f. For illustration of the ontology of symbol, see Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 20f.

⁸¹ Avery Dulles, “Symbol in Revelation.” In *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. The Catholic University of America. vol. 13 (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1967), 861-862. Dulles calls attention to Philip Wheelright’s distinction between “tensive symbols” and “steno-symbols.” The latter possess an “exact identity of reference” and are perceived to be what most people understand as “signs.” The former are seen as symbols which “draw life from a multiplicity of association, subtly and for the most part subconsciously interrelated,” and which thereby derive the power to tap a vast potential of semantic energy. Dulles also found helpful Michael Polanyi’s distinction between symbol and indicators. See, *Models of Revelation*, 132.

⁸² Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 19.

principal theme of the Old and the New Testaments consists of the great symbolic deeds by which God manifests His power and mercy. Miracle, according to the Biblical conception, is a particularly striking deed of God. Events such as the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna in the desert, the entry into the Promised Land, and the dedication of the Temple, viewed in the perspectives of salvation history, according to Dulles, are charged with symbolic overtones that give them undying significance.⁸³ Some biblical images are taken from cosmic realities—fire, water, rock, etc. Others are borrowed from the social life of Israel, e.g., God as father, king, judge, shepherd, vinedresser, and spouse. In the New Testament the Incarnate Word is the absolute, unsurpassable earthly embodiment of God, and hence the supreme religious symbol. Dulles emphasizes, “By his personal presence in the symbolic events of the crucifixion and resurrection, the Son of God restores authentic communication.”⁸⁴ Christ Himself described His status in terms of the Old Testament figures and He preached to the people in the form of parables. The Gospel of John, the most symbolic of the four, is built around dominant images such as the good shepherd, the true vine, the living water, and the light of the world. Christ’s miraculous deeds, His ritual actions (e.g., the Last Supper), His sacrifice on Calvary, and God’s acceptance of that sacrifice in the Resurrection and Ascension, symbolically disclose His mission and Person. In Christ and the Church, says Dulles, all the symbolism of the Old Testament is recapitulated and fulfilled.⁸⁵

⁸³ Dulles, “Symbol and Revelation,” 862.

⁸⁴ Dulles, “From Symbol to System,” 48.

⁸⁵ Dulles, “Symbol in Revelation,” 862.

Apprehension

Symbolic communication, according to Dulles, involves the activity of man in apprehension of both symbol and the meaning to which it points.⁸⁶ The Church has received the foundational Christian symbols as an objective deposit, and the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church as a subjective principle of apprehension. Therefore, Dulles can speak of symbol as communication, something which evokes recognition of meaning. He asserts the necessity for the subject to submit to the power of symbol.

The symbols by which God discloses himself have a significance that can be perceived only by a person who submits to their power. They work on the affections and imagination in such a way as to evoke a meaning that can be perceived only by those who undergo a subjective transformation. This is notably the case in the sphere of revealed religion. . . . For those who submit to them, the Christian symbols impart a sense of the God who lives and acts in Jesus Christ.⁸⁷

Here Dulles affirms that God's self-revelation in Jesus comes to fulfillment only in the human discovery whereby it is received. He adds, the discovery cannot come to those who simply look at the facts as disinterested persons. To be involved in the divinization process as it radiates from Jesus, requires an existential affinity with the meaning of the

⁸⁶ God's self-communication is directed to man. There is, then, an anthropological side to symbolic communication. Dulles relates how God frames the act of self-communication within the parameters of the human condition. He states, "God cannot manifest Himself to us except by making signs that are perceptible in the created order." Avery Dulles, "The Symbolic Structure of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980), 60. Cited by Shecterle, *Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles*, 69. In a chapter addressing anthropology and symbol, Shecterle discusses language and communication, two significant elements of Dulles's anthropology. 41-84.

⁸⁷ Dulles, "From Symbol to System," 44-45.

events themselves.⁸⁸ In biblical terminology, no one comes to Jesus without being drawn by the grace of the Father (cf. John 6:44).⁸⁹ Upon such attraction, apprehension is intentional submission to the power of symbol.

Symbolic Communication and Church Doctrine

Both parts of symbolic discourse, the communication and the apprehension, are significant for the status of church doctrine. In this regard, Dulles recognizes two important factors. First, he acknowledges that formulation of church teaching is more than reproducing the symbols of primary religious discourse. He asserts that theology has to grapple with questions about the revealed datum. Just what is affirmed in revelation? How do we ascertain its content? Why do we believe it? What logically follows from the data of revelation? These questions, says Dulles, call for reasoned answers in the cognitive-propositional mode. Indeed, theology is a methodical reflection that aims at a coherent body of articulated statements grounded in revelation.⁹⁰

Second, Dulles reaffirms his penchant for symbolic discourse. In answering each of the questions above, the theologian must attend not simply to explicit statements, or propositions of Scripture and tradition, but also to the latent meaning conveyed by the

⁸⁸ The divinization of the human person involving the self-communication of the Holy Spirit occurs either in this life through grace or in the life to come through what is called the light of glory. Divinization is the third of three great mysteries with which theology concerns itself. The first is the Holy Trinity which is the inner self-communication of divine life within the godhead. The second is the Incarnation which refers to the self-communication of the divine Word to a particular human nature. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 21.

⁸⁹ Dulles, "Revelation and Discovery," 23-24.

⁹⁰ Dulles, "From Symbol to System," 45-46.

symbolic actions, figures, and stories contained in the Bible and prolonged in the proclamation and ritual actions of the Church. He asserts, “In order to reflect rightly on the faith, the theologian must submit to the power of Christian symbols, as experienced within the community of faith.”⁹¹ Within symbolic discourse, communication and apprehension, the task of theology is hermeneutical. The theologian must assess the symbols and their use in the present historical and cultural situation. But his objective is to ascertain the intended meaning beyond symbol, i.e., meaning which transcends normal human discourse, meaning disclosed and illuminated by the category of symbol. To repeat, symbols frequently arouse tacit awareness of things too vast, subtle, or complex to be grasped in an explicit way or expressed extrinsically in explicit language. Symbols require interpretation if one is to arrive at the meaning they intend to disclose.

Symbolic communication with accompanying hermeneutical efforts have implications for the stability of church doctrine. Dulles recognizes these implications quite clearly. Although symbolic communication occurs within the community of faith where the Holy Spirit is the steadying influence, the plenitude of the symbols, their multivalent character, the attendant possibility of varied apprehension, also a multiplicity of interpretations demonstrate that theological formulations cannot be honed and framed only within the narrow confines of objective univocal rational expression.⁹² The symbols and

⁹¹ Ibid., 49.

⁹² For these same reasons, Shecterle points out that some may suggest that the symbol cannot be the articulation of *any* possible truth claims. We concur with Shecterle’s assessment that Dulles would clearly reject this suggestion. Shecterle explains, “It is *because* of their multifarious nature that symbols are capable of expressing that which is true concerning revelation. He [Dulles] cautions, however, that all affirmations

their apprehension reflect not only rational activity, but the contents of the heart as well, yes, the whole man. This suggests some amount of flexibility and even toleration when it comes to articulating individual faith, even if that faith is essentially the faith of the Church.

Moreover, since the context for apprehension is necessarily both Church and culture, it would seem that doctrinal formulation must account for the local experience of symbols at any place or time in history. Add to this factor of contextualization the continuous outpouring of a variety of symbols, in Dulles's words, the fecundity of the Biblical symbols from which the Church continually brings forth her treasure, "things new and old" (cf. Mt. 13:52).⁹³ Clearly there is the possibility of discovering and using new symbols which may yield new and expanding meanings. Will altered or new or fresh theological formulations follow? It is our judgment that Dulles answers this question in the affirmative. These are some implications for dogmatic formulation resulting from symbolic communication.

The Use of Models in Theological Systems

A third component of methodology employed by Avery Dulles is the use of models. Models have been used successfully in numerous fields, notably in science. The

or statements that claim to possess truth are conditioned by the very symbol itself and the history of the community of faith. These statements must be concomitant with the community's history of experience of the divine. The interpretation of the symbol is not without limits—limits that find articulation within the very life of faith through which the symbol finds expression." Shecterle, *Theology of Revelation of Avery Dulles*, 107-108.

⁹³ Dulles, "Symbol in Revelation," 863.

application of models to theological systems is somewhat original with Dulles. He refers to schools, frequently competing schools formed on the basis of differing foundational metaphors. Because each school develops its own preferred terminology, its own favorite questions, and its own method of resolving questions, disagreements emerge between the schools. These disagreements are frequently so deep-seated that they cannot be settled by debate. Therefore, Dulles attempted to establish some kind of communication between partisans of different schools. He assumes that theologians in all schools or systems have, or should have, some common orientations, based on the nature of revelation itself. The communication between schools is enhanced by viewing the various systems in terms of model. Dulles hoped that theologians advancing one model would be open to other models, i.e., seeing and not overlooking elements of truth or value that are more evident from a perspective other than their own.⁹⁴ Using models, Dulles intends to dismantle radical polarity which prevents communication between theological systems.

Models Explained

In two of his foremost works, Dulles illustrates how rival systems in theology take their departure from different root metaphors. *Models of the Church* demonstrates how different ecclesiologies rely on different key concepts or analogies such as institution, living body, sacrament, herald, and servant. In *Models of Revelation*, Dulles argues that comparable metaphorical divergencies underlie different theological orientations.

⁹⁴ Dulles, "From Symbol to System," 42-43. For Catholic theological education, Dulles searched for a substitute to replace the manualist form of scholastic theology. He believes that a method of models, based on a recognition of the role of mystery and symbol in revelation, can furnish a new style. 50.

Revelation is variously depicted as propositional teaching, historical event, mystical experience, kerygmatic proclamation, and new awareness.⁹⁵ Among the two groupings, models of the Church and models of revelation, Dulles sees divergent perspectives. However, within a grouping he relates models to each other in a constructive manner so that each may profit from the others, but without the constraint to affirm agreement or discover unity. At this point, we ask an elementary question, “What are models?” Our purpose in asking this question is to ascertain from Dulles how models contribute to the task of theology. In his view, how are models essential to theological proclamation and doctrinal formulation?

About the nature of models, Dulles states, “When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a ‘model’.”⁹⁶ Consider the use of models in the examination of any object. Models are realities having a sufficient functional correspondence with the object under study so that they provide conceptual tools and vocabulary the better to comprehend the object; they hold together facts that otherwise seem unrelated, and they support consequences that may subsequently be verified by experience.⁹⁷ Consider models used in the social and physical sciences. I. T. Ramsey relates that when a physicist is investigating something that lies beyond his direct experience, he ordinarily uses as a crutch some more familiar object sufficiently similar to provide him with reference

⁹⁵ Ibid., 42. See *The Craft of Theology*, 49-50.

⁹⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 21.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

points.⁹⁸ Some models are scale reproductions of the reality under consideration. This is frequently the case in a field like architecture. But Ramsey's analysis shows, the term "model," as employed in modern physics, is practically synonymous with analogy.⁹⁹

Now transfer the method of models from science to theology. Dulles explains that models used in theology are not scale reproductions. They are what Max Black calls "analogue models" or what Ian Ramsey calls "disclosure models."¹⁰⁰ Ewert Cousins observed that theology is concerned with the ultimate level of religious mystery, which is even less accessible than the mystery of the physical universe is for science. Hence our religious language and symbols should be looked upon as models because, even more than the concepts of science, they only approximate the object they are reflecting. Cousins suggests, when theology uses models, there must be some limitation to doctrinal statements, seeing that models themselves only hope to partially re-present the truths they are reflecting. Cousins writes,

To use the concept of model in theology, then, breaks the illusion that we are actually encompassing the infinite within our finite structures of language. It prevents concepts and symbols from becoming idols and opens theology to variety

⁹⁸ Ibid. Dulles cites, I. T. Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). On the use of images and cognate realities such as symbols, models, and paradigms as positive tools that have been used to illuminate the mysteries of faith, he refers the reader to I.T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1963) and Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962).

⁹⁹ Ibid. We may comprehend models as synonymous with analogy, says Dulles, only if the latter term is shorn of some of the metaphysical implications it has in neo-Scholastic theology.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

and development just as the model method had done for science.¹⁰¹

A Multiplicity of Models

Dulles stresses the necessity of a multiplicity of models in the explication of a given reality. This applies to theological realities as well. Ideally all data of Scripture and tradition, and all the experience of the faithful could be united by a single model. Such an all embracing model would essentially rise to the status of a paradigm proving to be successful in solving a great variety of problems and becoming an appropriate tool for unraveling anomalies as yet unsolved.¹⁰² But the capabilities of the individual model seldom rise to such heights. More frequently, observes Dulles, the individual model illumines certain phenomena and not others. The mystery of the Church, for example, is only partially reflected by the individual model. A single model may exhibit what is seen by comparison in our human experience world, e.g., the relationship of a vine to its branches, or a head to a body, or of a bride to a husband.¹⁰³ But, the attempt to explain the mystery of the Church on the basis of any single model to the neglect of other equally

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 22. See Ewert Cousins, "Models and the Future of Theology." *Continuum*, 7 (1969): 78-91. Dulles provides additional references to discussions which treat models in the service of theology. See John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology* (London: SCM, 1966), 54-81; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 284-285.

¹⁰² Ibid., 26. Dulles employs the term paradigm in approximately the meaning given to it by Thomas S. Kuhn who speaks of "concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 175.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 26.

illuminating models, may lead to distortions. No single model, therefore, should be interpreted in an exclusive sense, so as to ignore or negate what other approved models have to teach us. Because the individual model is limited by virtue of its particular referent in the world of human experience, and because the breadth and depth of the mysteries of the faith, in this instance the mystery of the Church, defy total analogical correspondence, multiple models are necessary.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, several models make use of different yet complementary images given to us by Scripture and tradition. This advantage outweighs any negative factors due to possible conflicts among models. Dulles is convinced that his five models of the Church are most appropriate and also quite adequate for ecclesiology today.¹⁰⁵

The Explanatory and Exploratory Uses of Models

In *Models of the Church*, Dulles names two uses of models, the one explanatory, the other exploratory. As explanation, models serve to synthesize and apply images in constructive ways that lead to both new understandings and action. Dulles considers the

¹⁰⁴ Dulles recalls, in the Scholasticism of the Counter Reformation period, the Church was presented exclusively on the analogy of the secular state and was regarded as the *societas perfecta*. Many Catholics were comfortable with this one societal model of the Church. But this model could not prove to be all sufficient when new situations arose and different needs became apparent. Since 1940, other models of the Church came to the fore, e.g., the image of the Mystical Body of Christ popularized by Pius XII in 1943, the Body of Christ and the Sacrament, and most prominent, the People of God, models advanced by Vatican Council II in its Constitution on the Church. In the postconciliar period, the model of the Church as Servant or Healer helped to project a sense of solidarity with the whole human race in its struggle for peace, justice, and prosperity. *Models of the Church*, 27-28.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Gospel parables of growth to be explanatory. They communicate intelligibility about phenomena regarding Christian origins, the community's capacity for rapid expansion, the opposition it encounters, the presence of evil in its midst, etc.¹⁰⁶

The other use of models is exploratory or heuristic. In this capacity, models possess the capability to lead to new theological insights. The assumption here is that no single generation of Christians can claim to be in full possession of clear and final perceptions. A second and somewhat complementary assumption is that God is ever alive and giving Himself to mankind in Jesus Christ. He is doing this in the present. Hence, there are new insights to be discovered. And it is the present experience of grace in any generation that enters intrinsically into the method of theology. Therefore, Dulles concludes, "Thanks to the ongoing experience of the Christian community, theology can discover aspects of the gospel of which Christians were not previously conscious."¹⁰⁷

The heuristic possibilities of models are illumined further by Dulles when he considers models as types. In *Models of Revelation*, Dulles refers to Niebuhr's perception of types as free theological constructs. Dulles explains that the type is a theoretical model. It is "a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated."¹⁰⁸ His earlier description in *Models of the Church* may lead to the perception that models are little more than a collage of images. But his typological use of models advanced in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 30.

Models of Revelation, published almost a decade later, provides clarification. He writes,

What is constitutive of the models, therefore, is not the imagery but the structural relationships represented as obtained between the revealer, the recipient, and the means of revelation. These structural relationships constitute what Stephen Pepper has called a “root metaphor.” By this term he means a basic analogy chosen as a clue for thinking about a complex unfamiliar reality.¹⁰⁹

Again, what is constitutive of models, of revelation in this instance, is not the imagery but the structural relationships, which may be called a “root metaphor.” Presumably, with respect to models of revelation Dulles is speaking about authority (propositional model), divine revelatory events (historical model), mystical experience (experiential model), event of proclamation (dialectical model), and human consciousness (awareness model). Each model has its own structure which depicts revelation in its own way. Each functions heuristically in the unveiling of insights peculiar to its own special structure.

The Pluralism of Models

Dulles recommends for theology something similar to pluralism in models advanced by Stephen Pepper in metaphysics and Niels Bohr in physics. The pluralism of models advocated here should not be confused with our previous depiction of multiple complementary models. In this instance, plurality embraces also uncomplementary features, i.e., images of one model that may be incompatible with the imagery projected by other models. Though uncomplementary to one another, these very models collectively provide insight into the reality which they represent.¹¹⁰ This is true of models of the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 33-34.

¹¹⁰ Dulles’s five models of revelation are uncomplementary in the sense that they present metaphorical divergency in the way that they variously depict revelation. By an

Church or revelation as surely as it is true of the particle theory of light and the wave theory of light. Niels Bohr showed that these two viable models of the same reality could not be systematically reconciled. Yet each of them contribute to the scientific understanding of light.¹¹¹ This example and others provided by Ian Barbour and Stephen Pepper prompt Dulles to make an observation and an application. If theological systems with the help of theoretical models illuminate certain aspects of a reality too complex and exalted for comprehension—in this instance transcendent reality—a pluralism of such models, though diverse and even uncomplementary of each other, will be needed in order for theology to fulfill its function to gain some limited understanding of the mysteries of the faith.¹¹² Dulles states, “If all theological models are deficient representations of limited aspects of the mysteries of faith, a variety of models might well prove the best route to theological understanding.”¹¹³

The pluralism of models is a principle which Dulles applies to revelation, the Church, and also to hermeneutical approaches to Christology most evident in

approach which he names “dialectical retrieval”, Dulles attempts to draw maximum value from each of the models and to harmonize them critically. Using symbolic mediation as a dialectical tool, he sees a unifying factor in that revelatory symbols peculiar to each model communicate ways in which God chooses to bring people into living relationship with himself, especially through the incarnate Word. See *Craft of Theology*, 48-52, especially 52. Cf. *Models of Revelation*, 127-128.

¹¹¹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 34.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

contemporary theology.¹¹⁴ The latter range from the classic doctrinal approach to liberation hermeneutics and many divergent styles between these two poles. Dulles asserts that these divergent approaches would defy incorporation into a single unified methodology. The same is true for his models of revelation. That there is no apparent unifying methodology in these schemata is of little concern to Dulles. To repeat, though various models are in many ways uncomplementary and even incompatible, Dulles finds the coexistence of different styles or models healthy and desirable. According to Dulles, each of the approaches may be valued in their own way as a tool of investigation in the hands of the theologians.¹¹⁵

The Validation of Models and Church Dogma

Dulles considers the diversity of models advantageous to understanding a given reality. But that very diversity also calls for assessment and evaluation of the models for their value to the Church's theology. And such evaluation will necessarily be in terms of theology. Models illuminating theological constructs are themselves more theologically substantive than we realize. This is apparent as Dulles expresses his own leanings toward a method which makes use of historical-critical studies. Such a method would combine scientific and spiritual exegesis, a combination which, in his opinion, does better justice to

¹¹⁴ Dulles describes ten hermeneutical approaches in a manner similar to the presentation in *Scripture and Christology*, a statement issued in 1984 by the Biblical Commission which surveyed eleven contemporary approaches to Christology, pointing out respective assets and limitations, taking a basic positive attitude, accepting what is sound in each methodology. *Craft of Theology*, 69-85.

¹¹⁵ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 85.

Catholic tradition and the directives of Vatican II.¹¹⁶ Evaluation is going on when Dulles discovers what is useable in this or that hermeneutical approach. He encourages similar selectivity on the part of theologians and the magisterium when they evaluate one or more models of either the Church or revelation.

It would seem that much more than models is at stake in this discussion. When Dulles speaks about using models to sharpen the issues between different tendencies in the theology of revelation, he is not speaking about divergent theologies themselves. He commends the method of types pursued by Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. This method, says Dulles, is extremely valuable for pointing out issues and choices to be made and the theoretical implications of pure positions.¹¹⁷ Yet, he seems to indicate that the theologian is dealing not with the genre of models or even types, but with theologies. Furthermore, he asserts that theologians are free to make an informed decision whether to locate themselves in any specific theological tradition. He adds, "So, too, the student of revelation may wish to make a considered choice between alternative theological positions."¹¹⁸ Then it is not the choice of models or the selection of useable parts of models that is the key issue. It becomes apparent, the choice is among theologies.

This conclusion is supported when differences in the models do in some respects, at least, reflect divergent theologies. When the scholar-theologian selects a model, he has

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

affirmed a theology. And that theology will form and shape a theologian's doctrine. Raise the discussion to another level. Choices of models may ultimately form and shape the theology and the teaching of the Church. Thus, we find Dulles quite focused when it comes to evaluating models for their usefulness to theologians and especially to the Church. Noteworthy are his three criteria: the gospel, loosely understood as the "deposit;" the experience of the religious community; and, closely related, connatural comprehension. So, when it comes to evaluation of models, Dulles uses theological and ecclesiastical criteria because essentially he is not dealing with models, but with theologies. This at least is apparent to us when we consider his description of the three criteria:

1. *The Gospel*: Heuristic models which possess a capacity to lead to new theological insights have an abiding objective norm in the revelation that was given once for all in Jesus Christ. There can be no other "gospel" (cf. Gal. 1:8).¹¹⁹
2. *The Experience of the Religious Community*: Only as one shares in the Church's life and possesses the inner familiarity given by faith, only then can one be competent to judge the value of models and their heuristic capacities. In the midst of the religious community, God is still giving himself to mankind in Jesus Christ, an experience of grace by the interior presence of the Holy Spirit. The Christian community's present experience of grace enters intrinsically into the method of theology. Theology as a present task can discover aspects of the gospel of which Christians were not previously conscious.¹²⁰
3. *The Connatural Comprehension*: The corporate discernment of spirits, a type of spiritual perception closely connected with "connaturality." Connatural comprehension is essentially an inner and supernatural dimension of theological epistemology. Dulles says, "Because the mystery of the Church is at work in the hearts of committed Christians, as something in which they vitally participate, they can assess the adequacy and limits of various models by consulting their own

¹¹⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 23.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

experience.”¹²¹

The application of these criteria to heuristic models raises a question concerning the use of Scripture and tradition. On the one hand, Dulles says that every discovery is ultimately validated in what has been given in Scripture and tradition.¹²² On the other hand, in relation to the sources Dulles encourages flexibility. About the use of tradition, he comments, “But in reaffirming the tradition we always develop and modify it. Tradition cannot be simply a static collection of answers handed down from the past.”¹²³ If the interpretation and application of tradition is flexible as tradition itself is essentially dynamic, then any evaluation of models may consider favorably variation and diverse teaching represented by these same models. This would be expected. If updated flexible and non-static tradition serves to assess and evaluate heuristic models, then the useable material from the models for doctrine and dogmatic expression will reflect this very flexibility and fluidity. It is no great leap from models to dogma. And the vehicle for the

¹²¹ Ibid. Dulles cites John Powell who defines connaturality as something like a natural instinct or intuition, yet not natural at all since it results from the supernatural realities of the Divine Indwelling and the impulse of grace. *Models of the Church*, 24. See John Powell, *The Mystery of the Church* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967), 8. In support of connaturality, Dulles appeals to Pope Paul VI, his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*: “The mystery of the Church is not a mere object of theological knowledge: it is something to be lived, something that the faithful soul can have a kind of connatural experience of, even before arriving at a clear notion of it.” Interpreting these words of the Holy Father in the present context, one might say, because the mystery of the Church is at work in the hearts of committed Christians, as something in which they vitally participate, they can assess the adequacy and limits of various models by consulting their own experience. *Models of the Church*, 25. See *Ecclesiam suam*, No. 39 (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1964), 31.

¹²² Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 23.

¹²³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 42.

validation of models is favorable to reformability.

Theology

As a theologian, Avery Dulles is not associated with a particular branch or discipline of theology. He is not known as an exegete, nor is he a systematician. Systematic theology, in his opinion, suffers from a peculiar frustration. It remains ever incomplete because the true object of theology is the unfathomable mystery of God, attained by tacit rather than explicit awareness.¹²⁴

Dulles has written a historical overview of Christian apologetics, and he has authored an exhaustive history of the theology of faith.¹²⁵ But he is not a church historian. He has participated vigorously in ecumenical dialogue, but not as one given to the speciality of an ecumenist.¹²⁶ How, then, shall we identify Avery Dulles among contemporary theologians? Several factors are helpful. We may best understand his theological activity and contributions from his notion of revelation, the starting point for theology, and its

¹²⁴ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 10.

¹²⁵ See Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). *A History of Apologetics* (New York: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1971).

¹²⁶ Dulles was a participant in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX* which addressed the subject, Scripture and Tradition. He contributed papers to *Dialogue VI and VIII*. See Avery Dulles, "Infallibility: The Terminology," and "Moderate Infallibilism," in *Teaching Authority & Infallibility in the Church: Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, ed. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 69-80, 81-100. Avery Dulles, "The Dogma of the Assumption," in *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary: Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 279-294.

fiduciary framework. We gain additional understanding from his articulation of the task of theology. Especially helpful is his treatment of theological method which includes the use of philosophical constructs. These topics yield a portrait of Dulles the theologian.

Revelation, the Starting Point for Theology

The theology of Avery Dulles develops from the base of divine revelation. Dulles affirms that God's self-communication, to which the Church bears witness, is of constitutive importance for theology and for the whole Christian life. "While revelation is not the sum and substance of Christianity," says Dulles, "it has a certain logical priority in the Christian scheme of things."¹²⁷ We saw how symbolic communication is foundational for his methodology. For his theology, revelation is pivotal. As the joint meaning of all the clues and symbols whereby God communicates himself, revelation is the source and center, the beginning and the end, of the theological enterprise.¹²⁸ The singular way in which God has made Himself known through the prophets, Christ, and the Church is the highest priority for doing theology.¹²⁹ One additional observation is important. Dulles perceives revelation to be both current and dynamic, something other than static disclosure. The theologian confronts revelation, not as an abstract concept in isolation from the rest of reality, but in the concrete shapes and circumstances in which it comes to man. Revelation is related to the totality of that which a theologian knows. This is why

¹²⁷ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 135.

¹²⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 283.

¹²⁹ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 135.

Dulles speaks about revelation theology, though he resists any attempt to define theology as a specialty such as the science of revelation.¹³⁰ This dynamic character of revelation will permeate our later discussion of revelation as the matrix for the reformulation of dogma.

The Fiduciary Reference for Theology

If theology is understood as “faith seeking understanding,”¹³¹ the theologian must necessarily be a believer. Contrary to attempts by fundamental theology to demonstrate the credibility of the Christian message and of the Church’s claims by the unaided light of reason, Dulles maintains that reason in the service of theology does not operate as an independent rationalistic faculty. He asserts that reason always operates within a fiduciary framework.¹³² Furthermore, theology involves a measure of reflective understanding of the Christian message, i.e., a systematic, even scholarly reflection upon “the faith,” authoritatively set forth in normative documents. Given a measure of competence, those who practice theology do so with the conviction that revealed truth exists and is reliably

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹³¹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 279; *Revelation Theology*, 10; et. al.

¹³² Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 55, 59-60. It is unrealistic, Dulles says, for fundamental theology to demand that proofs be constructed by the light of reason alone, without the illumination of divine grace. If it is to consider what human reason actually does in reflecting on religious questions, fundamental theology cannot avoid investigation of the dynamics of a power that is open to the attraction and illumination of divine grace. Furthermore, Dulles postulates that every intellectual stance, including all religions and all secular ideologies, rests upon a multitude of unspecifiable and unverifiable assumptions, and in that sense may be called “faith.” Here, Dulles appeals to Polanyi’s view, no intelligence can operate outside a fiduciary framework.

transmitted by authoritative sources, namely, through Scripture, tradition, and the hierarchical magisterium.¹³³ Theology, then, is a reflection upon the faith from within the commitment of faith.

Dulles does set forth tenets of the faith which the serious theologian believes. He comments, "To do Christian theology at all one has to acknowledge the existence of God, the fact of revelation, the centrality of Christ in God's saving plan, and the reliable transmission of the gospel through Scripture and the Church."¹³⁴ And within this fiduciary framework, certain obligations are placed upon the Catholic theologian. These obligations pertain to academic freedom for Catholic theologians and intellectuals. The Church respects the academic freedom of a scholar within a context of values, principally the integrity of Catholic theology as a meditation on the shared faith of the whole Church. To the theologian who may fashion himself as an individualist, Dulles says, "Whoever substitutes a purely individual or deviant faith forfeits any title to be called a Catholic theologian."¹³⁵

A related value is the maintenance of sound doctrine even in matters that are not

¹³³ Ibid., 168-169; 177.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 168. In answer to the question whether or not an unbeliever may do theology, Dulles is not only skeptical, he is entirely negative. It is illogical to expect that a non-believer could explore the implications of faith that he did not accept. To underscore the essential Christian faith of the theologian, Dulles reminds the reader that Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, made it clear that the theological interpretation of Scripture requires faith since, "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was written." *Craft of Theology*, 71. See Vatican II, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, nos. 24, 12; Abbott, 127, 120-121.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 175.

strictly of faith. Sound doctrine is a particular responsibility of the hierarchical magisterium, one that is of crucial importance for theology itself. We may ask, what is essential for the Catholic theologian in this regard? Dulles is forthright when he comments:

In addition, Catholic theology is predicated upon the validity of the Catholic tradition and upon the guidance offered by the hierarchical magisterium. The Catholic theologian who wishes to remain a Catholic is bound to accept the definitive (“irreformable”) teaching of the magisterium and must be favorably disposed to accept whatever the magisterium puts forth as obligatory doctrine.¹³⁶

Dulles firmly upholds the foundations of the Catholic faith which, in his perception, place clear and unmistakable restraints upon the Church’s theologians. He writes:

As a human being the theologian remains free to become an unbeliever even an atheist, if so prompted by conscience. But in so doing one automatically ceases to be a theologian. Let it not be said, therefore, that the theologian, as theologian, can reject revelation or that the Catholic theologian can reject the canonical Scriptures and dogmas of the Church. To accept these things is not a limitation but rather the charter of its existence and freedom to be itself.¹³⁷

To this defining statement, Dulles adds a final comment on the important fiduciary character of theology and its task. “The more firmly theology is grounded in faith,” he says, “the more capable, generally speaking, will it be of understanding the nature and contents of its faith.”¹³⁸

The Ecclesial Context for Doing Theology

Theology as a discipline of inquiry (“faith seeking understanding”), is exercised

¹³⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

properly within a religious context, meaning within the Church. Theology, therefore, is also an ecclesial discipline, one that is done in the Church because the Church is the primary bearer of the faith. Dulles explains:

Christ delivered his revelation to a community of disciples, the Holy Spirit descended upon a gathered community. Any individual can lose or betray the faith, but the Church as a whole has the promise of indefectibility because Christ has promised to be with it through His Spirit to the end of the age.¹³⁹

Because theology is an essentially ecclesial discipline, Dulles can without hesitation support delimiting the theologian's academic freedom within the Church. "The rights of the theologian as an academician," says Dulles, "become real only when situated in the ecclesial framework."¹⁴⁰ Aware of the distance that at times separates between the hierarchical magisterium and the Church's theologians, Dulles encourages theologians to discover academic freedom as servants of the Church. He urges them to support the magisterium who have the oversight over theological education. And he raises serious issues for theologians when he questions whether seminary faculties could claim to teach theology at all if they did not take the gospel, worship, and sound doctrine seriously.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 176-177. The work of a theologian has an ecclesial foundation in one's being a baptized, believing member of the Church. Dulles exhorts theologians as servants of the Church. Theologians do not receive a "canonical mission," but they are members of the Church's theological magisterium which is ecclesially grounded in faith, baptism, and sacramental communion with the Church. Dulles uses the term, theological magisterium, to distinguish theologians from the hierarchical magisterium. The former, however, work within the Church and profess the Church's faith. Conducting explorations and arriving at conclusions, the theologians are accountable to the hierarchical magisterium. See Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 120-122.

¹⁴¹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 156, 175-176.

The Task of Theology

Dulles sets the task of theology within his perception of the nature of theology. He speaks of theology as a systematic reflection upon the faith.¹⁴² He expands this concept practically when he writes, “In modern times, the term ‘theology’ is usually restricted to scholarly reflection upon the faith by persons who have attained a high degree of competence, normally certified by advanced degrees or noteworthy publications.”¹⁴³ Elsewhere, he says that theology aims to achieve by methodical investigation a more exact and sophisticated understanding of the Christian faith. He distinguishes four major areas of theology:

1. *Fundamental theology* concerns itself with the theological explanation of how faith arises, how it is founded in its own sources, and how it is justified before the bar of reason.
2. *Biblical and historical theology* concern themselves with the past expressions of the Church’s faith and with the continuing claims of such expressions on the believer today.
3. *Systematic theology* seeks to grasp the inner unity and coherence of the Christian message, to see how it harmonizes with contemporary secular knowledge, and what light it casts on the human problems of the day.
4. *Pastoral theology* (including moral and spiritual theology) investigates, methodically and critically, what imperatives for Christian action arise from Christian faith.¹⁴⁴

In the pursuit of these topics, theology functions as an academic discipline which

¹⁴² Ibid., 173.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁴ Dulles, *Church to Believe In*, 125.

gathers evidence, sifts it, frames and tests hypotheses.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, theology is a fruitful endeavor for the Church when theologians operate in dialogue with other academic disciplines. Only then can there be a vital and stimulating interchange between faith and reason with reciprocal benefits for both theology and science. Dulles adds, "Theology can be invigorated and purified by interaction with the human and natural sciences. The scientific community can profit from the comprehensive vision of theology and from theology's integration of truth with values."¹⁴⁶ A related point is that theology in dialogue is also a maieutic process. The creative theologian is not content either to ignore others or to repeat verbatim what they have said. Rather, he seeks to sift out what seems valid and relevant, and to develop, in the light of his own problems and perspectives, the ideas which he sees struggling to be born in the words of others. Thus, the task of theology is to interact with a wide spectrum of disciplines.

Openness and the Sources for Catholic Theology

Avery Dulles's use of the sources for Catholic theology is important for both his methodology and theology. Moreover, his use of these sources is significant for understanding his views on doctrinal reformulation. Making a case for the logic of faith essential for the theologian and the ecclesial setting for theology as a discipline, Dulles

¹⁴⁵ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 158.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 159. In correspondence with George Coyne, S.J., Pope John Paul II illustrated this interaction with regard to anthropology, Christology, eschatology, and cosmology. Without such exchange, he suggests, theology can profess a pseudoscience or science can become an unconscious theology. See "A Dynamic Relationship of Theology and Science," *Origins* 18 (November 17, 1988): 375-378.

himself appears to stand squarely within the camp of traditional Catholic theology. But his writings compel the observation made by Jerry K. Robbins, that in spite of his tight grip on dogma, Dulles affirms much that is going on in secular thought and contemporary theology.¹⁴⁷ Robbins' comment prompts a suggestion that Dulles's affirmation of the sources of Catholic theology should be viewed in the light of the uses to which he puts those sources as he addresses the contemporary scene.

Indeed, Dulles stands firm upon a base consisting of Scripture, tradition, and interpretation by the magisterium. Yet he embraces openness and discourages narrowness especially with respect to ecumenical discussions. For example, Dulles approves of communities that hold fast to their own heritage of faith. Such communities, he says, are good participants in fruitful ecumenical dialogue. But he adds this caveat:

All good theology, I have contended, must take its stand in a given confessional tradition and must at the same time be eager to escape from unconscious narrowness. Christian theology must always keep its primary focus on God and on Jesus Christ as the great revelation of God. It must be biblically rooted, ecclesially responsible, open to criticism and sensitive to the present leading of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, Dulles frequently speaks about the Holy Spirit's interior leading which is immediate in this sense, beyond the sources themselves. This raises a question about the sufficiency of the sources themselves for the task of theology. Obviously, Dulles himself seeks to use the sources faithfully, but avoiding any narrow interpretation. He explains that theology as a discipline does not simply repeat what is in the sources—Scripture,

¹⁴⁷ Jerry K. Robbins, review of *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, by Avery Dulles, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30 (Summer-Fall, 1993): 443.

¹⁴⁸ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 195.

tradition and the dogmas pronounced by the magisterium. Instead, theology reflects on the sources with a view to answering contemporary questions not explicitly answered in the sources themselves.¹⁴⁹ The question, therefore, remains. Is Dulles's outlook of openness consistent with his strong affirmation of the sources of Catholic theology? Is it consistent with his exhortation to fellow theologians to submit to the Church's theology as the Church's servants?

Openness serves the notion that theology is something of shared reflection, from different perspectives, on life and reality in light of the all-embracing transcendent mystery—a mystery that Christians identify with the God who has revealed himself definitively in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁰ The perception of theology as shared reflection sets the stage for interreligious dialogue in which adherents of different religions, confessions, and ideologies can fruitfully collaborate. Dulles argues that all who find themselves caught up in the quest for transcendence could profitably meditate together on what is implied in phenomena such as petitionary prayer, worship, thanksgiving, repentance, atonement, self-sacrifice for ideals, altruistic love, obedience to conscience, and hope in the face of inevitable death.¹⁵¹ Heretofore, Dulles observes, Christian theologians have addressed these questions within the narrow confines of their own traditions. But the new outlook of openness suggests, “If we wish to take advantage of the theological resources that are available in our day, we shall be well advised to widen our horizons so as to approach

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

universal human questions within horizons that are equally universal.”¹⁵²

What happens to the sources of Catholic theology in such broad-based interreligious dialogue? Does the shared reflection envisioned by Dulles indirectly, even unwittingly, ignore the sources, add to the sources, and in other ways diminish the sources and their usefulness? Or, consistent with a strong positive stance, does such shared reflection result in a use that affirms the sources as normative and final in their teaching and judgment? Whatever the answers may be, this discussion leads to another issue framed by yet another question. Is it possible that in the process of shared reflection the sources may be altered in such a manner that necessitates the reformulation of dogmas drawn from these very sources that are normative for Catholic theology? From a Lutheran perspective, at least, one cannot have it both ways. Theology cannot be committed to normative sources and at the same time participate freely in an arena where universal options are the agenda.

But Dulles will not be pressed on this point. Essential as they are in Christian history and experience,¹⁵³ the sources are not the organizing principle for shared reflection among participants in inter-religious dialogue. Dulles believes that theology may be

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Dulles asserts that for Catholics, and most Protestants, faith continues to have a definite content. He writes, “In The Christian act of faith Jesus Christ plays an indispensable role. Jesus, moreover, is believed and confessed to be the Son of God, the risen Savior, according to the Scriptures and the creeds. This doctrinal content, inseparable from Christian faith, cannot be subsumed or left behind in some new ‘world theology.’” *Craft of Theology*, 182.

judged to exist wherever faith is found, even without Christian or biblical revelation.¹⁵⁴ In some respects the theological enterprise is open to all who wish to converse seriously about questions of ultimate truth and meaning on the basis of existential concern. Such conversation does not necessarily presuppose a common creed, common scriptures, or the common ecclesiastical authorities. Insisting upon such foundations may be putting the cart before the horse. “Rather,” says Dulles, “the articulation of creeds, the canonization of scriptures, and recognition of magisterial authorities result, in part, from theological reflection on the historic experiences of people.”¹⁵⁵ In terms of different species of faith, Dulles affirms the presence in many peoples of an implicit orthodox faith confessed by the fathers, and simultaneously he upholds the sources which explicate the formal object of theology. He writes:

Pastristic and medieval theologians tended to hold that all faith is implicitly Trinitarian and Christological insofar as it is directed to the God who is in fact triune and who redeems humanity through the incarnation of the Son. But faith develops as this content is clarified by progressive revelation. Explicitly Christian faith differs qualitatively from faith that does not rest on Christ and the gospel. Its formal object is God as revealed in Christ and attested by Scripture and the Church.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 179. Dulles recalls that Vatican Council II has given impetus to the recognition by Catholics that divine and salvific faith exists among members of other Christian communities, among adherents of non-Christian religions, and even among people who are not formally religious. See: *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3, Abbott, 345-346; *Ad gentes*, no. 7, Abbott, 593-594; Cf. *Dei Verbum*, no. 3, Abbott, 112-113; *Lumen gentium*, no. 16, Abbott, 34-35; *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22, Abbott, 221-222; and *Nostra aetate*, no. 2, Abbott, 661-663.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 179-80.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 182-183. Dulles refers the reader to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2-2.5.3c: “Formale autem objectum fidei est veritas prima secundum quod manifestatur in scripturis sacris et doctrina Ecclesiae quae procedit ex veritate prima.” See *Craft of*

The tension between openness and the use of the sources in Dulles's theology indirectly has implications for the reformulation of doctrine. Openness may inadvertently challenge the status of the sources in Catholic theology, reducing them to something less than final authority. In a personalistic approach, authority shifts to the immediate interior working of the Holy Spirit. This may affect the influence of the sources, especially with respect to dogmatic formulation. When theology viewed as faith seeking understanding becomes a discipline of reflection *on* rather than adherence *to* the sources, the outcome can be a flexible expression of dogma in terms of change and development even though the sources continue to be regarded as the bearer of the essential content of faith, the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Philosophical Constructs for Theology

Catholic theology has traditionally made constructive use of philosophy. Dulles asserts that philosophies other than the constructs of scholasticism offer equal or greater resources for the theological task in the late twentieth century. He makes this assertion because he understood Pope John XXIII and the fathers at Vatican Council II to infer that Catholic theology would be revitalized by contact with new and modern philosophical sources. Dulles saw the Church's theology making greater use of such sources since the late nineteenth century. In its effort to break out of the mold of neo-Scholasticism, Catholic theology has been seeking to enter into fruitful contact with other philosophical traditions such as pragmatism, existentialism, and process thought. Dulles believes that

Theology, Chapter 12: "Method in Ecumenical Theology." 244 n. 13.

Catholic theology stands to gain from dialogue with idealism, dialectical materialism, process philosophy and linguistic analysis.¹⁵⁷ The apparent need to answer new questions turned the attention of theologians and intellectuals to new and modern philosophical sources.¹⁵⁸ Translating ancient doctrines into new terms and concepts so that they would be intelligible in new frameworks also was perceived as a priority.

The inclination to use new philosophical constructs should not be construed as a rash initiative in the Church to relinquish the perennially valid philosophical heritage that comes down through Thomas Aquinas.¹⁵⁹ Vatican II reiterated the validity of this heritage because the basic principles for theological reasoning over the centuries still hold good. Dulles himself looks to scholasticism for those very principles even though theology today

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁵⁸ Vatican II stressed that the Church relies on theologians for help in discerning the many voices of our age, in grappling with new questions of a technical or scientific character, and in finding more appropriate ways of communicating Christian doctrine. Against the restricting authority of the magisterium, Dulles recalls that the Council likewise emphasized the freedom of scholars “to express their minds humbly and sincerely about those matters in which they enjoy competence.” Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 117. See, *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 44, 62; Abbott, 245-247; 268-270.

¹⁵⁹ With an eye toward benefits for theology, Dulles calls the attention of the Catholic philosopher to three reasons for cherishing the classical philosophical tradition as it survives in patristic and medieval thought: (1) Certain longstanding philosophical categories do serve as vehicles for specifying the contents of revelation, (2) The Catholic philosopher is not at liberty to adopt any system which would challenge what the Church through its magisterium has pronounced on certain philosophical questions that are intimately connected with faith—the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, the falsity of pantheism and emanationism, the knowability of God’s existence, and the omnipotence and immutability of God, (3) For the sake of progress, the Church needs a rather stable philosophical tradition. For Catholic theology to grow in a healthy way, respect for the philosophical tradition is imperative. *Craft of Theology*, 127-128.

no longer relies entirely upon the theses method.¹⁶⁰ He emphasizes that in any profitable dialogue with new philosophies or schools of thought, Catholic theology must be mindful of its own philosophical heritage. He goes so far to say, in any future system the successful insights of the classical tradition must survive, or at least be subsumed in some recognizable form.¹⁶¹

Paying tribute to the Church's philosophical tradition, Dulles nonetheless presses for dialogue with modern philosophies. Such dialogue, he says, is not new for the Church. He argues that a great deal of Christian doctrine in the patristic era and in the Middle Ages is based on conceptual structures taken over from Greek philosophy. Christian theology refined the categories of Greek philosophy and did not essentially change them, e.g., continuing to presuppose the dichotomies of time and eternity, spirit and matter, substance and accident that had prevailed in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Therefore, Dulles reasons that in the present time, we should be prepared to be open to a theologian today who may accept a radically different philosophical system, such as one finds in modern personalistic phenomenology or process philosophy. He would have to transpose many of the Christian doctrines in a manner that might sound like rejection. This seems reasonable to Dulles because any other approach will present difficulties. He comments, "But to try to introduce these doctrines unchanged into a new philosophical framework would be

¹⁶⁰ Scholasticism deals with abstract concepts, propositions, and formal reasoning. Dulles expresses his own debt to scholasticism. See, *Craft of Theology*, 41-43.

¹⁶¹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 133.

impossible or would amount to an even greater deformation.”¹⁶² Understandably, Dulles urges that the magisterium be tolerant of the creative theologian who explores beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy and employs disciplines in his investigations which may be even antithetical to the Christian faith.¹⁶³

Such toleration may be viewed as radical. Addressing this view, Dulles offers an explanation. The creative theologian may be concerned not so much with ascertaining the unchanging and universal content of Christian faith as with exploring the nature and grounds of faith, the interrelationship of Christian beliefs, and the reinterpretation of traditional beliefs in a contemporary context. In order to achieve systematic understanding, the theologian adopts epistemological and philosophical postulates which are neither divinely revealed nor self-evident to all. In the realm of exploration, the conclusions of theology are not set forth as requiring assent in the name of Christian faith, but as aids for better understanding certain aspects of that faith.¹⁶⁴ Dulles believes that such theological exploration is consistent with the spirit of Vatican Council II which encourages appropriate use of modern philosophical constructs. He points to the fact that the council, for instance, used phenomenology as its dominant method.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 183.

¹⁶³ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 125.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 122. Dulles points out that many of the Council’s theological experts, such as Bernhard Haring, Karol Wojtyla, and Edward Schillebeeckx were thoroughly at home with phenomenological method. Dulles observes, in Germany many of the leading theologians were strongly influenced by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

Foremost in the consideration of new philosophies is communication of the faith to the people of today. If the Church's theology is to communicate in new frameworks, the old doctrines cannot remain unchanged. Furthermore, fidelity to the heritage of ancient and medieval philosophy does not require a spirit of antiquarianism. A living tradition, says Dulles, always renews itself. Contemporary thinkers cannot limit themselves to medieval, baroque, or nineteenth century scholasticism. Dulles encourages rereading of Plato and Aristotle, Origen and Augustine, Aquinas and Bonaventure, in the context of our own day.¹⁶⁶ Equally important is meaningful dialogue with other traditions of thought, such as pragmatism, existentialism, and process theology in order to learn the new and urgent questions of the day. This vital dialogue will demonstrate that, ". . . many of the ancient doctrines of the Church seem to demand translation into new terms and concepts if they are to retain their intelligibility in new frameworks."¹⁶⁷

Critical Approaches to Theology and the Reformulation of Doctrine

Dulles believes that theology has always made use of criticism. The history of theology over the centuries can be clarified, he submits, by the successive attitudes toward criticism: for example, the precritical, the critical, and the postcritical. By the term

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 130.

¹⁶⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 198. Dulles suggests, for instance, that the New Testament concept, "the first Adam" may no longer be adequate, nor even the term, "original sin." He offers the term "sin of the world" as a primary theological category to designate the corporate sinfulness of the race. He sees such a change as enrichment rather than impoverishment of the Church's dogmatic heritage. See *A Church to Believe In*, 198-199. Again, Dulles elaborates on the dispute about the term "transubstantiation" and concludes: "To find satisfactory equivalents in other philosophical systems is a task of creative theology." *Survival of Dogma*, 184.

criticism, Dulles means that by its very nature, theology is a disciplined reflection on faith, “one that attempts to distinguish methodically between truth and illusion and to ground its affirmations on principles rather than on blind impulses.”¹⁶⁸

According to Dulles, theology responsibly leads in criticism directed toward the Church and its theological pronouncements. In his work, *Models of Revelation*, Dulles shows the merits of “Model Two: Revelation as History” over “Model One: Revelation as Doctrine.” He views Model Two more plausible to contemporaries because believers are not told to submit uncritically to whatever statements appear in Scriptures, the creeds, and the dogmas of the Church. Rather, “They are invited to test the traditional doctrines against the events which these doctrines report and interpret. Hence the theory makes room for a moderately critical approach to the data of revelation.”¹⁶⁹

About the use and application of criticism to dogma, recall that Dulles follows

¹⁶⁸ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 3-4. Dulles’s discussion of a critical approach to theology should not be confused with his own views on critical scholarship. He celebrates Biblical criticism as a liberation from naive faith, i.e., the acceptance of every statement in the Bible as literally true. He views such literalism as a superstitious kind of faith, unworthy of adult and educated men in our time. “We are called to a faith,” says Dulles, “that is neither naive nor credulous, but severely critical of its own affirmations.” See *Survival of Dogma*, 152. Critical theology in this instance assumes that the theologian works within the two spheres discussed earlier, the commitment of faith and the faith community. Dulles notes in this regard that submission to the teaching and judgments of the hierarchical magisterium does not exclude appropriate and critical questioning. Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 62. In *The Craft of Theology*, the conclusion to chapter twelve, “Method in Ecumenical Theology,” Dulles suggests that the Church and its theology should be open to criticism. He writes, “Christian theology must always keep its primary focus on God and on Jesus Christ as the great revelation of God. It must be biblically rooted, ecclesially responsible, open to criticism, and sensitive to the present leading of the Holy Spirit.” 195.

Lonergan for whom theology has become an empirical science in the sense that Scripture and tradition now supply, not premises, but data which has to be viewed in its historical perspective and interpreted in the light of contemporary techniques and procedures.¹⁷⁰

Dulles extracts from Lonergan's principle the notion that the modern theologian cannot be content to quote statements from Scripture or from the documents of tradition, except by taking account of the historical stresses and strains that may have influenced the statements in question and asking to what extent the statements would have to be reformulated in order to be suitable expressions of Christian faith for the present day.¹⁷¹ Thus, the critical task of theology does not only affect dogma. It has a hand in shaping and reformulating dogmatic expression.

Innovation and Updating in Theology

At numerous points in this discussion, Dulles asserts that doctrinal statements cherished in the past must be reformulated and made compatible to new frameworks which are intelligible to contemporary audiences. Modern, urban, secularized man, says Dulles, cannot experience God in the same way that his ancestors did. Nor should he be forced to do so. Dulles feels so strongly about this matter that he hinges the survival of Christianity as a major religion on the encouragement of new forms of creedal statement, new styles of worship, and new ethical attitudes compatible with the gospel.¹⁷² One thing

¹⁷⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 58.

is certain. According to Dulles, we cannot expect contemporaries, at least in the late twentieth century, to give any credence to the biblical outlook.¹⁷³ When Dulles challenges Oscar Cullmann's assertion that philosophical reflection cannot possibly improve on the biblical outlook, we may assume that Dulles does indeed recommend such philosophical reflection in order to help the current generation toward its own outlook.¹⁷⁴ Cullmann appears to take for granted that the modern Christian is bound to accept the views of biblical writers regarding time and history. Dulles disagrees. He speaks for his contemporaries when he writes:

We cannot nourish them with the stale fragments of a meal prepared for believers of the fourth or the thirteenth or the sixteenth century. A theology adapted to the times must be based on a fully modern understanding of man and the world. It may be as different from the medieval systems as the computer is from the abacus.¹⁷⁵

With a fully modern understanding of the world and people today, creative and innovative theology will modify doctrinal formulation or even generate new formulations for this time. Citing Paul Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin as thinkers of stature who have pointed the way, Dulles concludes, "From such creative theology new doctrinal insights will emerge and they, in turn, may crystallize into new dogmas."¹⁷⁶ The Holy Spirit and the genius of the human mind working together will accomplish innovations needed to

¹⁷³ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 191.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

update theology for the times.¹⁷⁷

Summary

A portrait of Avery Dulles the theologian emerges from this overview of the chief components of his epistemology, methodology, and theology. Each of these disciplines has implications for Dulles's views of doctrinal reformulation. First, existential knowing and personalistic faith complement the interior working of the Holy Spirit who empowers tacit recognition and assent to the mysteries of faith. There is a correlation between tacit knowing and flexible expression. Within its own history and culture, the Church's existential experience of the mysteries may lead to non-static and flexible doctrinal expression.

Second, Dulles's methodology is best described as symbolic realism. It advances the notion that the sources—Scripture, tradition, and magisterial teaching—communicate symbolically. Images, symbols, and models are the components of such communication. Available within the worship life of the Church are the abundant symbols of Scripture which evoke tacit powers of recognition and knowledge of the divine mysteries. The Holy Spirit working interiorly is the subjective principle of apprehension and understanding. There is the distinct possibility of new spiritual insights into the divine mysteries which neither prophets, apostles, nor the fathers had gained. These new and varied insights may find their way into doctrinal formulation which is correspondingly new and varied.

¹⁷⁷ See *Models of Revelation*, 126.

Third, Dulles's theology is marked by openness. His faith commitment as a theologian and his stance within the community of faith are clearly evident. But his starting point is not the formal object of theology. It is revelation. Breaking out of neo-Scholastic categories, Dulles is open to using new philosophical constructs instead of the Aristotelian constructs of traditional Thomistic theology. Moreover, Dulles considers how creative theology, in its criticism exposing the relativity of historical foundations, may even advance new dogmas peculiarly befitting new frameworks. These initiatives sustain his consideration of dogmatic formulation for the Church's life and ministry in the postcritical era. It is apparent that Avery Dulles works principally as a postcritical theologian.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHANGING FACE OF CHURCH DOGMA

In the minds of many Roman Catholic theologians, clergy, and laity, the status of the dogma underwent change in the postconciliar years of the late twentieth century. In theory, at least, Church authority has remained constant. But the status of dogma was questioned when the formative influence of the sources—Scripture, tradition, and magisterial teaching—was viewed differently than in neo-Scholasticism of the nineteenth century. Since Vatican Council II, the conviction has been growing that unalterable irreformability of church dogma should give place to new notions of reformability in the light of historical and situational factors.

Among Catholic theologians, Avery Dulles does better than most at explicating this move away from neo-Scholasticism after Vatican II. This chapter will record some of these post-Vatican II changes, especially those related to the status of church dogma. The changing influence of the sources in the formulation of dogma, the radical shift from irreformability to reformability, and the implications of these changes are set forth in the following paragraphs. More important, the themes of dogmatic reformulation and development latent in Dulles's epistemology, methodology, and theology are seen maturing.

The Authority for the Formulation and Production of Dogma

The Base: Revelatory Authority and Christological Content

The vitality and preservation of any religious community, according to Dulles, depends largely on how a community confronts in all seriousness the question of authority. The religious authorities in the first instance are the God or gods recognized by the community. Secondly, they are the created agencies through which the divine is thought to manifest itself.¹ From the refrain in Is. 44:22 and similar expressions in the Old Testament, Dulles shows that Israel's faith and action as a religious people were totally determined by one authority, the word of God.² Characteristic of the New Testament is the fact that God was thought to have expressed himself in a revelatory manner, i.e., fully, definitively, and for all mankind in the life, teaching, death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—or, more briefly stated, the Christ event. "For Christians," says Dulles, "Jesus Christ is the living Word of God; and in his case it may be said unequivocally that 'the Word is God.'"³

¹ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971). 81.

² *Ibid.*, 81-82.

³ *Ibid.*, 82-83. There may be those who object that this symbol, the humanity of Jesus—insofar as God has uniquely expressed himself in that humanity which was personally united to himself, the eternal Logos—ceases to communicate anything to people who have been culturally conditioned in certain ways. This suggestion rests on the assumption that time has its own character, and that God, in entering time, must submit to its conditions. Dulles answers that revelation tells us that God is the lord of time and that, by entering time, he redeems it. Because Jesus is Alpha and Omega, he embraces all time and overcomes its relativity (cf. Heb. 13:8). Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 237.

Both primary and secondary authorities in Roman Catholicism have taken on distinctive nuances in the decades following Vatican Council II. The Council asserts that the Incarnation is the essential core truth of the “deposit” (primary authority).⁴ This represents not only a refinement, but also a revision of the neo-Scholastic perception. Neo-Scholasticism had a preference for propositional revelation. The “deposit” was viewed in terms of propositional truth contained in Scripture and the apostolic tradition. This understanding was so entrenched that supernatural revelation in the form of words and having clear propositional content was regarded necessary for salvation, since it enabled the Christian to know about God’s saving dispensation in Jesus Christ and thus to choose apt means to our last end. Objectively considered, the revelation was identical with the prophetic-apostolic deposit committed to the Church. This “deposit” represented primary authority in neo-Scholasticism.⁵

There are differences also with respect to secondary authority. For postconciliar theology, the *loci* for secondary authority are where the Gospel of Christ is to be authentically found. In neo-Scholasticism, these *loci* were understood to be where revelation is communicated as a body of propositional truth presenting the Gospel of

⁴ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, no. 4. See W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 113. (Hereafter, Abbott)

⁵ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 44. In neo-Scholasticism, the deposit is held to consist, at least partly, of the canonical scriptures which, as a collection of inspired and inerrant propositions, are to be accepted with implicit faith. To this doctrine of Scripture, which it shares with Evangelical Protestantism, Catholic neo-Scholasticism adds that there is a second apostolic source, namely, tradition, which both supplements and interprets the Bible. 45.

Christ. Later a shift takes place. In one discussion of secondary authority, Dulles cites numerous passages from the Barmen Declaration of 1934 to show that the lordship of Jesus Christ, even in this strongly “protestant” interpretation, includes the authority of the Holy Spirit, that of the Bible, Christian preaching, sacramental worship, and finally that of the gathered community. In postconciliar Catholic theology, these *loci* are authoritative, not as harbingers and exponents of propositional truth and statement, but insofar as they enable man to find the word of God in its fullness and purity.⁶

The Sources: Scripture, Tradition, the Magisterium

The positioning of the sources as secondary in the theology of Avery Dulles is crucial for comprehending his advocacy of doctrinal reformulation. In the previous chapter, we discussed his understanding of the sources and their usefulness for the task of theology. Our present interest is to investigate what ways the sources are authoritative for framing doctrine. At first we recognize that, in Dulles’s view, Scripture, tradition, and the teaching of the magisterium are secondary to the Incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ.⁷ The secondary status of the sources may not be so obvious in the documents of Vatican II.

⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 83.

⁷ Dulles highlights the primary source when he says that Christians are committed, in the final analysis, to one revelation and only one—the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Avery Dulles, “Revelation and Discovery,” in *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner, S.J.*, ed. William J. Kelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 23. Of the secondary sources, Dulles states that Christianity owes much of its peculiar genius in great part to its delicately balanced system of authorities. He observes that Christianity lives off a combination of irreducibly distinct but inseparably connected secondary authorities—Scripture, the monuments of tradition, the universal episcopate, and the living faith of the Church as a whole. See *Survival of Dogma*, 84-85.

But their secondary standing is unmistakably clear in the writings of Avery Dulles. This positioning of the sources as secondary has much to say about his view of their normative function in the framing of church dogma. More important, the secondary status of the sources poses the possibility of reformability of doctrine.

Scripture

The discussion of sources must begin with a reference to their relationship one to another in Catholic theology. The connections are not always clear. Dulles attempts to articulate relationships when he observes that neither the interpretation of Scripture nor the decisions of ecclesiastical authority are independent of tradition. He appeals to Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, nos. 8 and 10. From the latter article, he quotes:

It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.⁸

That the sources are indeed linked together is clear. But how they function in this close relationship may be further clarified by considering each one independently beginning with the Bible. Dulles espouses biblical authority in theology and states clearly his position on this point in these words:

From a Catholic point of view we may agree that the Bible, taken as a whole, is the word of God. It is the fundamental document of Israelite and Christian revelation. The Bible, we believe, is the fundamental touchstone to our faith. No teaching

⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 223-224. *Dei Verbum*, 8 and 10; Abbott, 115-117 and 117-118.

that contradicts the Bible, taken as a whole, could be true.⁹

Yet, saying that the Bible is the word of God and that doctrinal statements ought not contradict its teaching is not the same as asserting that the Bible is the *norma normans* for all theology, an assertion made by the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁰ In the larger context of the statement above, Dulles is frank to assert that Catholics have difficulty with the notion of biblical authority expressed by the phrase, "Scripture alone." On the one hand, Dulles goes so far to state that the Bible, though not simply a body of propositions, nevertheless is a fixed and permanently normative verbal deposit. On the other hand, he will have nothing to do with a *Sola Scriptura* principle so foundational to Lutheran theology. In *The Resilient Church*, Dulles states openly his rejection of any such principle. He argues

⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 95.

¹⁰ Those who framed and signed the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century appealed to Scripture as the *norming norm*. In the Preface to the Book of Concord, the signers asserted that they were certain of their Christian confession and faith on the basis of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 12-13. [Hereafter, Tappert.] More pointed are the words introducing the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. They read: "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119: 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, 'Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.'" *The Epitome to the Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm*, I, 1. Tappert, 464. Cf. *The Epitome, Rule and Norm*, I, 7. Tappert, 465. In the conclusion to the Augsburg Confession, the framers asserted that nothing had been introduced either in doctrine or ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church. *The Augsburg Confession*, Conclusion, 5, Tappert, 95. The Lutheran confessors speak of Scriptural proof or commands, *mandata Dei*. Cf. *Smalcald Articles*, II, II, 2; *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, XXIV, 89; XV, 30. Tappert, 293, 265, 219.

three points:

First, the canon [selection of Jewish and early Christian writings] was formed in the early centuries by the Church—and more specifically by the leaders of the local and regional churches, and ultimately by councils. To put one's trust in the Bible, therefore, inevitably implies a certain trust in the Church that gathered up these writings and declared them to be authoritative for Christians. Dulles comments, "One cannot drive a wedge between the authority of the Church which canonized the Scriptures and that of the Scriptures which it canonized."¹¹

Second, "the Bible is not self-interpreting."¹² All sorts of skills and funds of information contribute to the creative task of finding the meaning of Scripture as a whole. Its meaning must be mediated through other authorities—the exegete, the pastor, the believing community, or whatever.

Third, according to the New Testament, Jesus has promised to remain forever present with his Church. There is, therefore, living authority in the Church. The Holy Spirit who previously "spoke by the prophets," remains at work in the Christian community to the end of time. "Scripture alone," would be a principle contradicted by the fact that it may be presumed that Christians since biblical times have spoken with the special assistance of the Spirit. "We should therefore make an effort to identify the occasions on which God may be judged to be speaking through persons who have lived since Christ and the apostles."¹³

In the last assertion, Dulles hints at his perception of the human factor in the origin of the Bible and the doctrines of the Church. He refers to the Biblical revelation as the original message. But he specifies his view when he asserts that the Bible is essentially a human witness to the "deposit," the self-communication of God revealed in Jesus Christ who is

¹¹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 95-96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³ *Ibid.* Immediately following this point, Dulles comments: "Among Catholics it is undisputed that the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is also at work in the Church, and therefore that there is living authority in the Church. But there are differences of opinion regarding the loci in which the presence of the Spirit is to be found: pastoral office, people of God, or a variety of charismatic leaders."

the primary authority.¹⁴

Of interest to the Lutheran observer is the subtle inference that Scripture is the basic rudiment of tradition. For Dulles, the Bible is part of the corpus of historical witness to the Gospel events. In fact, he places the Bible within the genre of historical theology. When he distinguishes among four areas of theology, Dulles interestingly groups Biblical and historical theology together.¹⁵ He concurs with the view of Form Criticism that the oral Gospel preceded the written Gospel. He maintains that the biblical books themselves are products of a preexistent faith, many of them little more than a sedimentation of the holy traditions in which the convictions of the early community were expressed.¹⁶

However, the historical character of the Bible should not be equated with biblical

¹⁴ Addressing Temple and Tillich and a host of others who have asserted that there are no revealed doctrines, Dulles agrees that, "Quite evidently, the doctrines of the Church are produced by human reflection, but so was the Bible and so is revelation in any articulate form." He adds, ". . . one may hold that right doctrine, insofar as it accurately mirrors the meaning of the original message, is, in its content, revealed. God's revelation achieves itself through human concepts and words." *Models of Revelation*, 222-223.

In his autobiographical work, *Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey: 50th Anniversary Edition*, Dulles sets forth clearly his own view of the Bible as human reflection and testimony. He explains his publishing of lectures on apologetics in 1963 under the title, *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ*. His point in this work was that apologetics could not be content to rely on academic historical method and that it must build rather on the power of committed religious testimony. In this vein, he refers to Scripture and says: "Because the Bible is essentially a testimony to the faith of the authors and of the communities in which it was composed, rather than a work of dispassionate factual history, it lends itself to this apologetic approach." Avery Dulles, *A Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 108.

¹⁵ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 125.

¹⁶ Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Instrumentorum, Inc., 1968), 77.

authority. Dulles affirms the authority of Scripture. But that authority in his view is shared with other secondary sources. On one hand, Dulles affirms the Bible as the source in which the declarations of creeds and councils, popes and bishops, Fathers and theologians must have their ultimate foundation or else be judged to have no sufficient warrant in God's revealing word.¹⁷ On the other hand, Dulles asserts that Scripture alone was never intended to be, and has not proved to be, a self-sufficient rule of faith. From the early centuries, according to Dulles, Scripture has been supplemented by creeds and doctrinal formulations.¹⁸ He actually proposes a plurality of authoritative sources in the Church. Dulles maintains that the health and vigor of the Church depends on the coexistence of several distinct organs of authority. These standard *loci* include: the Bible, the pastoral office, the sense of the faithful, the judgment of theologians, and the testimony of prophetically gifted individuals.¹⁹ From this pluralism of *loci* come creeds and doctrinal formulations which are normed by Scripture in the sense that they may not in any respect contradict or contravene Scripture.²⁰ The canonical Scriptures, says Dulles, serve as the basis and reference point of all Christian teaching. But that reference point is a historical datum. It is not an affirmation of biblical authority normative for theology. Speaking

¹⁷ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 95.

¹⁸ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 106. In our opinion, such an assertion is stunning in this respect that it misses the whole point of historic creeds and doctrinal statements. Instead of supplementing Scripture, they attempted most carefully and faithfully to represent the clear teachings of Scripture!

¹⁹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

about the Church as recipient of the canonical books, Dulles comments,

In these books she [the Church] finds an original divinely guaranteed record of prophetic and apostolic tradition. . . . Because the Bible is the only original source we have, in which the prophetic and apostolic faith is embodied, the Church always looks to it in formulating her faith. She looks to tradition too, but not in the sense that it contains other truths in no way found in the Bible.²¹

Again, taking many of his discussions of Scripture into account, it appears that Dulles attaches importance to the Bible principally as a historical reference. And he would not want to be viewed as one who affirms categorically the absolute and final authority of the Scriptures.

When Holy Scripture is placed within a plurality of secondary sources, its status as a final authority for the determination of church dogma is questionable. Granted, Dulles affirms that the Church looks to Scripture when formulating faith statements, but in the end, Scripture does not define dogma. That authority rests with the Church led by the Holy Spirit. This is significantly different from the dual and parallel authority of Scripture and tradition in neo-Scholasticism! Surely the Holy Spirit by no means works independently of Scripture. But neither is the working of the Spirit confined to Scripture as a source. For dogma proceeds from a fountain of sources. At least it appears to. Moreover, historical and situational factors necessarily affect the use of the sources. Ultimately these very factors influence doctrinal formulation. Though Dulles does not say it in so many words, he implies that Scripture's own historical origin is a limitation when it comes to articulating doctrine for the present day. Reconfiguration for new frameworks and reformulation of doctrinal statement become an agenda in the hands of each new

²¹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 78.

generation. A tenet of Dulles emerges here. Scripture is a secondary source, and its non-final authority leaves open the possible use of other criteria when the Church determines dogma in any age.

Tradition

Another entity among the secondary sources is tradition. Chronologically, Scripture precedes tradition which activates following the early formative period. As he explains the origins of tradition, Dulles is more articulate about Scripture than in some other contexts. Scripture is the authentic literary objectification of the faith of the people of God during its formative period—from the earliest times until the end of the apostolic age, the period known as “canonical,” or normative, for the subsequent life of the Church.²² He says, “By ‘tradition’ we normally mean the authentic expressions of the life of the people of God in later generations.”²³ Again, tradition is the way in which the authority of Scripture becomes manifest and effective for generations who live in post-apostolic times. Tradition serves in a hermeneutical capacity. Dulles quips, “Tradition lives off Scripture and, at the same time, makes Scripture live.”²⁴ In another statement, Dulles affirms that the Church has received from apostolic times inspired Scriptures and

²² It was Karl Rahner, says Dulles, who convinced him that the Scriptures were the constitutive element of the early Church, expressing its faith in a “canonical” form that could be normative for posterity. See *Testimonial to Grace*, 107-108.

²³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

inspired traditions as expressions of its faith and guideposts for future development.²⁵

Having posited Scripture as the basis and reference point of all Christian teaching, Dulles refers to tradition as a second constitutive norm which Catholics place on par with the Bible. Tradition, he says, is known through various sedimentations, technically called the “monuments of tradition.” These include, most importantly, the decisions of ecumenical councils. Unlike the Scriptures, these expressions of tradition are not called the “word of God,” but they bear witness to the word of God. As such, they are authoritative.²⁶

Tradition arises from Scripture. Yet tradition is not in every instance normed by Scripture.²⁷ Rather, it shares with Scripture status and function as a norm. According to Dulles, one of the ways in which Catholic theology is distinct from most Protestant

²⁵ Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 97.

²⁶ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 100. In his review of *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, Gabriel Fackre notes that some of Dulles’s own premises about Scripture seem to lead to different professed conclusions. Dulles holds that tradition “falls short of Scripture insofar as it is not available in inspired and canonical texts” (104), that Scripture is “the only normative objectification of the faith of the foundational period to which we have access” (186), and that “no tradition can authentically be Christian unless it harmonizes with God’s word in Scripture” (186). Fackre inquires, how are these assertions reconciled with the contention that tradition is “on par with Scripture itself” (87) and of “equal dignity” (103)? See Gabriel Fackre, review of *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, by Avery Dulles, *Modern Theology* 9 (July, 1993):315-316.

²⁷ Dulles is critical of Oscar Cullmann on this point. In Dulles’s opinion, Cullmann tended to depreciate the continuing role of the Holy Spirit in the developing tradition, and thus depicted the Bible too much as an alien norm to be critically applied against ecclesiastical tradition. Dulles appeals to a corrective advanced by Danielou who protests that Cullmann was too archaic and failed to appreciate “the positive worth of current history, consisting of the growth of the mystical body through the work of the Spirit.” *Models of Revelation*, 224. See J. Danielou, *The Lord of History* (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), 10.

theology is its adherence to tradition as a divinely authoritative norm, on a par with Scripture itself.²⁸ This strong assertion by a postconciliar theologian like Dulles may come as a surprise. Yet for Dulles there can be no question of the Church carrying on without tradition. He says, “Neither the interpretation of Scripture nor the decisions of ecclesiastical authority are independent of tradition.”²⁹

It is true that Dulles relates tradition to Scripture not unlike the neo-Scholastics. However, he makes other statements which portray tradition somewhat differently. Compared to Scripture which is a fixed and permanently normative verbal deposit, tradition is fluid in form. It is primarily a process of transmission.³⁰ Significantly, it is not the transmission of the Church’s dogmatic heritage that Dulles has in mind. Currently tradition is viewed as transmission of the patrimony of *symbols and statements* so that the power of the original revelation may assert itself by the power of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church today. The view that tradition is a source of verbal doctrine handed down from apostolic times, a source parallel to Scripture, is one that is swiftly being abandoned. A new personalistic view is now in vogue. Dulles comments about tradition, “Today, it is more commonly perceived as a kind of atmosphere produced by the Holy Spirit in the Church, permitting it to understand the full biblical witness.”³¹

These numerous statements from Dulles fall short of providing a single meaning

²⁸ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 87.

²⁹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 223.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 89.

for the term, “tradition.” A more productive way to comprehend his understanding of the term is to discuss tradition within a dialectic: dynamic process versus objectivist authoritarianism. On several counts, the tension in this dialectic resulted in changed or developed perceptions of tradition. The view of tradition referenced above, a view decidedly objectivist and authoritarian, remained standard for neo-Scholasticism since the Council of Trent. According to this view, revelation is contained in two sources, the Bible and apostolic tradition—both of which are to be esteemed, in the phrase of Trent, “with the same sense of devotion and reverence.”³² Ordinarily, the objectivist view linked tradition with the verbal doctrine handed down from apostolic times. A second and different view evolved. At any point in history subsequent to the apostolic times, a consensus of the Church on a matter of faith was itself proof that the doctrine in question arose from divine revelation, and hence authoritative in an absolute sense. For Trent, it was not essential that the Church be in a position to furnish exegetical or historical proofs that the doctrine in question was taught by Jesus or the apostles.³³ On either count, whether emanating from the apostolic age or expressing the Church’s consensus on a matter of faith in a later age, tradition in this neo-Scholastic understanding was a given norm authoritative for all

³² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 45. Dulles cites G. van Noort, *Dogmatic Theology*, a typical manualist author who defines tradition as a collection of revealed truths which the Church has received through the apostles in addition to inspired Scripture and which it preserves by the uninterrupted continuity of the apostolic teaching office. Furthermore, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, leader of the traditionalist movement in the decade following Vatican II, perpetuated the view of tradition as a second source of revelation, parallel to Scripture. Since tradition in this sense comes from God through the apostles, it was considered equal in dignity to the Bible itself and thus exempt from criticism within the church. See Dulles, *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 79.

³³ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 85.

succeeding generations.

It was Vatican Council II, particularly the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, that initiated a change in the perception of tradition from static and binding statement to what Dulles names, a vital, realistic, and forward-looking concept. Dulles describes the Council's movement toward a new understanding of tradition as process:

Getting away from an excessively rigid, conceptual, and authoritarian view of tradition, the council emphasized that tradition arises through a real, living self-communication of God in grace and revelation, that it is rooted in the life of the community of faith, and that it adapts itself and develops in changing historical situations.³⁴

Dulles contrasts this new understanding, tradition as dynamic process, with the older objectivist view that it replaces. He cites Yves Congar responding to Archbishop Lefebvre. Congar pointed out that tradition is never a matter of slavishly repeating the formulas of the past without regard to the needs and opportunities of the present day. Not relics from the past, tradition is a living reality thanks to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the people of God.³⁵

It is quite possible that this new vital outlook should be attributed largely to the influence of the French lay philosopher and theologian, Maurice Blondel. In his work

³⁴ Dulles, *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 77. Dulles cites the American church historian, James Hennesey who applauds Vatican II for having described tradition as "the perpetuation, the constant continuation and making present of everything that the church is and believes." See James Hennesey, "All that the Church Is and Believes," *America* 147 (October 9, 1982): 193. The American priest and theology professor, Robert Imbelli, lauds Vatican II for recovering the notion that tradition is process as much as content (*traditio* as well as *tradita*), and that this process is living, creative, and community based. See Robert P. Imbelli, "Vatican II—Twenty Years Later," *Commonweal* 109 (October 8, 1982): 78.

³⁵ Dulles, *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 92.

History and Dogma, Blondel sets forth a dynamic, personalistic theory of tradition as the church's continuing capacity to interpret, to discern, and to penetrate.³⁶ The influence of Blondel's work at Vatican Council II came by way of such *periti* as the theologian and scholar just mentioned, Yves Congar. Though written sixty years in advance, *History and Dogma* is almost a commentary on the second chapter of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, notably no. 8. According to Dulles, three features of the council's chapter on tradition resonate closely with Blondel's theory:

1. In the first place, tradition is seen not as an end or object in itself, but as a means whereby the church and its members can enter into a living relationship with God.
2. Second, tradition is not seen primarily as a matter of word or propositional truth, but rather as something communicated through action, example, and worship. What the apostles received from Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they learned from the prompting of the Holy Spirit was tradition. Not a mere set of doctrines, tradition is everything that contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase of faith of the people of God. And the Church perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that the Church itself is, all that it believes.
3. Third, tradition is seen as progressive and dynamic rather than simply conservative and static. "This tradition which comes from the apostles," says the Constitution, "develops (*proficit*) in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit."³⁷

Several additional features of Blondel's influence are important. Crucial to Blondel's system, according to Dulles, is the comparison he makes of two kinds of knowledge recognized already by Aristotle: objective knowledge, which is derived by formal inference from looking at objects, and knowledge by instinct or connaturality,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90, 83-84. Dulles notes how Blondel's dynamic, personalistic theory of tradition was coolly received by both modernists and the scholastics of his day. But it came into favor in French Catholicism in the 1940s and 1950s.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

which is gained by consulting one's own inclinations or actions.³⁸ Using Blondel's distinctions, Dulles explains that faith knowledge is, in the first instance, tacit knowledge. The Church and its members know the God of Jesus Christ by a kind of personal familiarity, by dwelling in the faith. Blondel had said, only in the perfect obedience of love is the word of God preserved and transmitted in its integrity.³⁹ With this assertion in hand, Dulles frames a definition: "Christian tradition is in the first instance the handing on from generation to generation of what is tacitly known by the community."⁴⁰ For such communication symbol is essential. By shaping our powers of perception, tradition enables us to perceive in the Christian symbols what the Church itself perceives. Tradition is now something other than an objectivist authoritarian source. It is that which is tacitly known by the community of faith. More than doctrines taught, tradition consists of truths that are caught in a tacit manner—for instance, by the neophyte who grows in the tacit awareness of faith by participation in prayer, worship and the sacramental life. Tradition itself is grasped, not by objective knowledge—that is to say, by looking at it—but by participatory knowledge, that is, by dwelling in it. Dulles concludes:

³⁸ Ibid., 84-85. Dulles's undocumented reference to Aristotle doubtlessly emanates from his recollection of reading the Greek philosopher's works. See *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. I, chap. 33 where Aristotle distinguishes between scientific knowledge, rational intuition, and opinion. On scientific knowledge and demonstration, see *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. I, chap. 1 to 4. For the distinction between intuitive reason which grasps the first principles and practical wisdom, scientific knowledge, and philosophic wisdom, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VI, chap. 6. *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), 70, 9-19, 429-430.

³⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 86.

The essential and primary function of Christian tradition is not to transmit explicit knowledge, which can better be done by written documents, nor simply to provide a method of discovery, but to impart a tacit, lived awareness of the God to whom the Christian Scriptures and symbols point.⁴¹

Tradition viewed as dynamic process affords the opportunity for a personalistic faith relationship with God. Dulles asserts, when religious people “dwell in” tradition in order to achieve personal insight into the reality to which the tradition points, they will find God in it if the tradition functions properly. The content of Christian tradition is nothing other than Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). The tradition functions properly when it affords those participating in it a living personal encounter with him. The feedback from this encounter into the tradition will not be disruptive of its content. On the contrary, such return tends to both clarify and enrich the tradition which is always open to movement from the implicit to the explicit, from symbolic forms to personal experience, from lived commitment to reflective realization. Dulles summarizes, “Authentic innovations, since they arise out of an experience of the very reality carried by the tradition, do not erode the tradition but rather reinforce and revitalize it.”⁴² This is the end purpose as well as the function of tradition perceived in the new outlook. No longer is tradition perceived as static entrenchment of abiding concepts. Tradition now is viewed as process in which ongoing freshness of insight emerges from participation or dwelling in the lived experience of Christ in the community of the faithful. Tradition has taken on a lively dynamic cast.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 89-90.

The shift in tradition from an objectivist mode to dynamic process suggests a few striking implications. Instead of repristinating the ancient tradition of the apostles or justifying more recent added dogmas not contained in that ancient deposit, the Church may fashion doctrine out of its own present faith or awareness of the divine mystery. The new outlook on tradition seems to encourage such an initiative. If tradition is vivid process and transmission, wisdom dictates that the Church reconsider those dogmas which were products of tradition in an earlier time, dogmas which no longer edify, but even in some respects annoy or irritate or frustrate the contemporary Catholic Christian. Thus, the new turn in the perception of tradition plays well for reformability. This assertion may be somewhat conjectural. But if tradition as process has its way, then why not reconsider many of the teachings in the light of “tradition as the present” instead of “tradition as the past?” Such musings appear to be consistent with Dulles’s reflections. His views on tradition presented here will assist our understanding of his notions of reformulation and development treated in Chapter Five.

Magisterium

Recognizing that innovation might seem to threaten the substance of tradition itself, Dulles calls attention to the steady influence of the magisterium, that third source in Catholic theology.⁴³ Corresponding to the new outlook for tradition, perceptions of the magisterium have undergone changes which make for a more flexible role than previously

⁴³ Through the exercise of the hierarchical leadership the religious community is on guard against disruptive debilitating change. See Dulles, *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 89-90.

exercised in neo-Scholasticism. For centuries, and especially since eighteenth century neo-Scholasticism, the magisterium was known for its strict hierarchical relationship to the Church. That has changed since Vatican II. Now the magisterium finds itself in something of a collaborative relationship. What are the major themes of this relationship, and how does the new outlook affect the teaching of doctrine in the Catholic Church? The answers to these questions have some bearing on the status of dogma in Catholicism.

In the Catholic tradition, the magisterium is seen as the embodiment of the continuation of the presence of Christ. The Lord has promised to remain with the community and its official leaders. The hierarchy are considered to be included in the promises originally directed by Christ to the apostles, such as, “Whoever hears you, hears me” (Lk. 10:16) and “As the Father has sent me, I send you” (Jn. 20:21). This confidence in the continuing presence of Christ in the church and its hierarchy convinces many believing Catholics that in submitting to popes and bishops as teachers and rulers, they are submitting to Christ and to God.⁴⁴

This basic theological principle, the presence of Christ in the Church’s hierarchy, has empowered the magisterium with authority enhanced perceptibly since the Counter Reformation. Dulles observes, more definitely since the eighteenth century the Catholic emphasis has been upon the pastoral office, and more specifically, upon the papal and episcopal offices.⁴⁵ Virtual supreme authority was vested in the magisterium. In his

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 96. Dulles provides a brief description of the hierarchy. He explains, the term “magisterium” came to be used to designate the teaching authority of popes and bishops—and the tendency was to reduce every other kind of

review of *The Craft of Theology*, Robbins shows how Dulles constructs a case for that authority.⁴⁶ While the exercise of authority ought to be sensitive and reasonable, the magisterium need not submit to any higher council or give reasons for its declarations. Dulles is bold to assert that of the three sources of theology, the living magisterium has the final word over Scripture and tradition on matters of Catholic faith and practice.⁴⁷ He reaffirms the principle that preservation of the doctrinal heritage is the first and foremost task of the hierarchical leadership.⁴⁸ Theologians teach *in* the Church, but the teaching *of* the Church is that of the hierarchy. The bishop teaches with authority to bind in the name of Christ, while the theologians teach in an academic, non-authoritative way.⁴⁹

This high view of the magisterium prevails in Roman Catholicism. Yet the role of the magisterium in the Church is more collaborative since Vatican Council II. This is the perception of Avery Dulles. In *The Survival of Dogma*, a compilation of prime material from his essays and articles written and published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dulles moved toward a notion of collaboration between the magisterium and the Church. In this

theological authority to this one font. The bishops alone were successors of the apostles. Apostolic succession was conceived as giving the bishops a special “charism of truth” proper to themselves. The pope, as head of the whole Church, was thought to have in himself as much authority as the entire body of bishops. Thus he was the supreme and universal teacher of all Christians, equipped with that infallibility with which Christ had endowed his Church. 96-97.

⁴⁶ Jerry K. Robbins, review of *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, by Avery Dulles, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30 (Summer-Fall, 1993): 443.

⁴⁷ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 166, 174, 187.

⁴⁸ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 106-107.

⁴⁹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 171.

ecclesiastical model the community of the faithful are more visible than before. Dulles finds support for such visibility in the New Testament. He observes that Peter's Pentecost sermon reported in Acts 2 clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit has been poured forth upon the entire community of the new people of God. Several Johannine texts, he observes, insist that each and every one of the faithful is taught by God himself (Jn. 6:45) and is interiorly anointed by the Holy Spirit, so as to be no longer dependent in any fundamental way on human authorities (1 Jn. 2:20).⁵⁰ Dulles goes a step farther when he asserts that since the Holy Spirit inspires and directs the people of God, public opinion in the Church can be a true theological source.⁵¹

These assertions comprise an extended view of collaboration which in effect challenges the dominant role of the hierarchy. Indeed, Dulles openly challenges the absolute authority of the bishops, namely, that they, the bishops alone constitute the "teaching church." He shows how Vatican II recognized at many points that the bishops and other pastors in the Church are not omniscient and that they depend on the expertise of scholars and upon the discernment of charismatically gifted leaders. Furthermore, he opts for a notion of interdependence. The teaching and the learning Church are not two separable parts. The faithful as a whole, and especially those who have scholarly competence or charismatic insight essentially participate in the magisterium.⁵²

This new notion of collaboration extends even farther. It embraces the entire

⁵⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 117-118.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵² *Ibid.*

community of the faithful where the Holy Spirit has bestowed the gifts of comprehending divine mysteries, the revelation itself. When Dulles explains how Christianity articulates a specific historical revelation, he reverts to both the acknowledged leaders and the community of faith as interpreters of the unique, unrepeatably, past events surrounding that revelation.⁵³ The acknowledged leaders together with the community function in two ways: (1) They are bearers of the “facts” of God’s revelation; and (2) They are the interpreters of the same. The community actually fulfills a role in the Church’s hermeneutical task. Therefore, the Church as the community of the faithful interprets the Bible.

Dulles calls attention to the Catholic view that the Bible does not yield its full meaning unless it is read in the context of the life and experience of the Christian community, the Church.⁵⁴ The New Testament bears witness to Jesus Christ as the definitive disclosure of God, the “fullness of all revelation.” But the revelation is never contained in a book alone. Dulles insists that the Bible would not be rightly understood if it were separated from the living community of faith in and for which it was written. He disputes conversions which supposedly occur as isolated instances of an individual reading the Bible. Regarding interpretation, the Church collected and identified the books of Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Church, therefore, has the task of discerning their true meaning with the Spirit’s help and in the light of its own history and

⁵³ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 45.

⁵⁴ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 87.

experience.⁵⁵ It possesses a finely tuned hermeneutical sensitivity. Again Dulles avers that the Holy Spirit, animating the church, produces in faithful members an instinctive sense of what agrees and disagrees with revelation. He reverts to Vatican Council II. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, stated that by means of the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*), the faithful are able to recognize the word of God, to adhere to it unfailingly, to penetrate its true meaning, and to apply it in practice.⁵⁶

The Influence of the Holy Spirit

Throughout this overview of changes in the use and application of the sources of Catholic theology, one recurring theme has quietly dominated the discussion. That theme is the work of the Holy Spirit related to Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium. First, the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is the Spirit at work in the Church. Thus, Dulles points to a living authority in the Church which prevails even though there may be differences of opinion regarding the *loci* in which the presence of the Spirit is to be found: pastoral office, people of God, or a variety of charismatic leaders.⁵⁷ Second, it has been shown that the Holy Spirit transforms tradition from static reiteration of earlier church statements to a lively atmosphere within the community of faith where the gospel is shared by tacit awareness of God's revelation. Such tacit awareness may be called faith. Vatican

⁵⁵ Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 120.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123. See *Lumen gentium*, 12; Abbott, 29-30.

⁵⁷ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 96.

II, the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, states clearly that tradition develops (*proficit*) in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ Tradition is seen as progressive and dynamic rather than simply static and conservative. Tradition as process is dynamic and progressive, something more than perpetuation of static statements of the magisterium from the past. Third, because the Holy Spirit animates the Church, the magisterium must be perceived in new and different dimensions than merely structure or hierarchy. The magisterium essentially includes the community of faith whose discernment (*sensus fidelium*) is empowered by the Spirit who is continuously poured out on the People of God. Hence, tradition is an ongoing formation, the expression forthcoming and transmitted from the “teaching church” and the “learning church.” The Spirit assists the entire community, both the faithful and their acknowledged leaders, to interpret the gospel rightly. The Spirit helps all to comprehend changes in the perception of both tradition and the magisterium initiated by Vatican Council II and legitimized for Catholics in the late twentieth century.

The Questioned Status of Dogmatic Statements

The Irreformability of Church Dogma

Avery Dulles became an advocate of doctrinal reformulation, supported by the explicit and implicit directives of Vatican Council II. He also discovered historical and cultural reasons for such advocacy. Beginning his teaching and writing career shortly after the middle of the century, Dulles was keenly aware that statically conceived faith,

⁵⁸ Dulles, *Reshaping of Catholicism*, 91. See *Dei Verbum*, 8; Abbott, 115-117.

teaching, and church dogma were floundering in a world driven by change, process, and diversity. He became convinced that the church could no longer give absolutist value to its own pronouncements in an era when all human statements were viewed profoundly conditioned by historical, cultural, sociological, and psychological factors, and hence limited in their validity.⁵⁹ The reformability of dogma seemed only reasonable and appropriate.

But he arrived at this conviction only after thorough assessment of the longstanding notions of irreformability dating back to medieval times. He gives the usage of the term and he provides a chronological overview of the status of dogma up to the convening of Vatican Council II, when irreformability met significant challenges from scholars and theologians like himself. The term, “irreformable,” consecrated by the usage of Vatican I and Vatican II, means definitive, i.e., not subject to cancellation or reversal by any other body in the Church. As the reason for “irreformability,” Vatican I assigned the charism of infallibility.⁶⁰ In the Constitution on the Church, *Pastor aeternus*, the First

⁵⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 115. Dulles cites four points of contrast between the ecclesiastical and secular mentalities as commonly found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, while society as a whole was becoming more democratic and self-critical, the Church became more oligarchic and authoritarian. Second, there was a swing toward absolutism in the sense that the Church gave unprecedented emphasis to its solemn pronouncements at a time when all human statements were increasingly regarded as profoundly conditioned by numerous factors. Third, the concept of truth implicit in the Catholic teaching on the magisterium was antithetical to the increasingly concrete and contextual view in modern philosophy. Fourth, at a time when Western culture viewed the past as a mere point of departure for progress toward the future, the Catholic Church in its official teaching continued to assert that revealed truth was conceived to reside wholly in a deposit handed down from the apostolic age. See the larger discussion of these aspects of absolutism in *The Survival of Dogma*, 114-116.

⁶⁰ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 236, footnote 16.

Council declared that the definitions of the Roman pontiff are irreformable, not by reason of the consent of the Church, but “by their very nature.” Explicitly, the reference is to the source, the infallibility of the pope. What does this signify? Dulles answers, “Read against the background of the Gallican ‘Four Articles’ of 1682, from which the term comes, ‘irreformable’ may be taken to mean ‘not subject to review by any higher authority.’”⁶¹ From these statements, it is clear that the notions of unquestioned authority, infallibility, finality, and perpetuity are attached to the term “irreformable.”

Irreformability prior to the nineteenth century effectively precluded doctrinal reform in terms of progress or development. Up to that time the theologians had practically no awareness of real doctrinal change. “Popes and councils,” says Dulles, “did not look upon themselves as innovating but simply as reasserting the faith that had been given once for all to the saints of old (cf. Jude 3).”⁶² Even the decisions (*determinationes*) of great councils, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, do not really amplify the creeds; they simply declare, in opposition to heretical distortions, the real meaning of the previously known articles.⁶³ Any notion of improvement attached to a doctrinal statement or

⁶¹ Ibid., 193. Note, the Four Articles of the Gallican Clergy were condemned by Alexander VIII in 1690. Still, the meaning assigned to ‘irreformable’ at that time is helpful.

⁶² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 46.

⁶³ Ibid. Dulles relates that Thomas Aquinas tries to show that the Western addition to the creed of the statement that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Son” (*Filioque*) as well as from the Father asserts nothing that was not implicitly asserted by the original form of the creed. He avers that St. Thomas would not ascribe to the pope any power to impose as matters of faith any beliefs not already included in the creed itself, properly understood.

pronouncement was seen only in terms of a return to the pure and integral teaching of the apostolic church.⁶⁴ Later the theologians of the Reformation and Counter Reformation, both Protestants and Catholics alike, appealed to the criterion for irreformability that had been used by Vincent of Lerins against the disciples of Augustine: true Christianity is “what has been believed always, everywhere, and by all” (“quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est”).⁶⁵ In the seventeenth century, Catholic theologians continued to insist that the modern teachings of the Church went back to apostolic times.⁶⁶ Finally, the irreformable character of church dogma was reemphasized by Vatican I. Except for challenges from a minority of theologians, irreformability went unquestioned through the period of Modernism into the twentieth century right up to the Second Vatican Council. But passive acceptance of irreformability ended in the 1960s and 1970s when theologians like Dulles and others began to question whether irreformable dogma can and should survive. Dulles expressed his own concerns when he wrote, “But in an age of rapid and radical change, marked by burgeoning pluralism, the received concept of dogma, with its note of irreformability, has become problematic.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 47. Dulles cites the words of Jansenist Antoine Arnauld, “All the dogmas of the faith are as old as the Church; all of them were individually (*distinctement*) believed by the Apostles and have been preserved by an uninterrupted succession of tradition in the consciousness of at least a part of the pastors and the faithful.” See Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 130-131.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 45. See *The Resilient Church*, Chapter Two, titled, “Doctrinal Renewal: A Situationist View.” Dulles intended to shed some added light upon the question treated in his earlier work, whether dogma can and should survive. cf. *The Survival of Dogma*,

The problematic aspects of irreformability were intensified by several factors. Since Vatican I, the magisterium had insisted not only that the affirmations of dogmatic statements are to be retained for perpetuity, but also the very concepts and even the terms of such statements are to remain in force, when endorsed by the highest authority.⁶⁸ Furthermore, both the affirmations and their perpetuity were secured by the notion of infallibility.⁶⁹ The universal magisterium consisting of the pope and the bishops who teach in unison with him brought the weight of infallibility to bear on the perpetual status of dogma. Dulles explains that when the magisterium teaches something as a dogma, its teaching is infallible, since Christ has promised not to desert his followers in the exercise of their ministry. One must therefore receive the dogmas and believe them as though they were uttered by Christ himself.⁷⁰ Dulles is saying that dogmas in this sense were equated with divine revelation.

It was quite apparent to Dulles that neo-Scholasticism operated with a world view in which everything remained essentially the same as it was when it began, and in which origins are all-important. Some vital consequences for dogma follow quite logically. If institutional ecclesiology attached crucial importance to the action of Christ in establishing

c1971.

⁶⁸ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 196.

⁶⁹ Perpetuity signifies that once a dogma is defined, by its very nature it commits all future generations to conform to its teaching which may be something not previously seen as essential. From the time of its definition the dogma becomes binding under pain of heresy upon all Christians. See *The Resilient Church*, 50.

⁷⁰ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 44.

offices and sacraments that presently exist in the Church, cannot the same be said for the Church's dogmas? An affirmative answer was implicit in certain conciliar actions. Trent taught that the seven sacraments and a hierarchy of bishops, priests, and ministers were instituted by Christ.⁷¹ By the same logic, writes Dulles, the dogmas of the modern Church were affirmed to be part of the original deposit of faith, complete with the apostles.⁷² Thus, it should be apparent to any objective observer that infallibility and the sheer extrinsic authority of the institutional church with its static world view gave primary support to the notion of irreformability.

If such institutional enforcement was not enough, Dulles goes on to demonstrate how faith, authority, and dogma as well as other concepts such as revelation, tradition, doctrine, and law were much too statically conceived in neo-Scholasticism as a result of non-historical thinking of the Enlightenment at top echelons of the Church's leadership.⁷³ The result was an absolutistic view of dogma characteristic of Catholic theology in a rationalistic era. Such non-historical and juridical thinking is responsible for the notion that there could be doctrines immune to historical limitations and capable of being

⁷¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 36. See Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 32nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), nos. 1601 and 1775; NR, 413 and 637. Hereafter, abbreviated DS.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 36-37. Even the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are asserted to have been revealed by God. See DS, 3803, 3903; NR, 325, 334c.

⁷³ Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma*, 13. It was just such static conceptions that became occasion for the articles and essays written by Dulles from 1968 to 1970, materials that were compiled into this volume, *The Survival of Dogma*.

imposed by the sheer weight of extrinsic ecclesiastical authority.⁷⁴ Dulles describes what he calls the absolutism characteristic of theologians of the nineteenth century who employed and defended some theses of eighteenth century rationalism when they took the view that the truths of revelation were at least indubitable, universal, and immutable. Dulles adds, “They claimed unrestricted currency for that select body of axioms which, in the nineteenth century, came to be called ‘dogmas.’”⁷⁵

Recent Challenges to Irreformability

Adaptation

The perpetual static condition of church dogma did not go unchallenged. Dulles, for one, believed that the notion of irreformability could be challenged without violating loyalty to either the tradition or the exponents of that tradition, the members of the magisterium. Dulles would have nothing to do with protest or other radical actions. Instead, he urged the Church to pursue a course of self-adaptation to the mindset of the culture. He was encouraged by similar actions in former times. He was impressed when he saw how the Church of yesteryear had taken a discontinuous “quantum leap” as he calls

⁷⁴ Ibid., 158. It is interesting to observe how the absolutism driven by non-historical thinking in the Church was concurrent with an awakening historical consciousness breaking through in the secular disciplines, exposing the radical historicity of human thought.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 120. Dulles articulates the understanding of dogma in current Catholic usage as it was carried over from neo-Scholasticism of the nineteenth century. The term “dogma” means a divinely revealed truth, proclaimed as such by the infallible teaching authority of the Church, and hence binding on all the faithful without exception, now and forever. To doubt or even deny a dogma, knowing that it is a dogma, is heresy; it involves an implicit denial of the teaching authority of the Catholic Church and therefore automatically excludes one from the Church. *Survival of Dogma*, 156.

it each time that the culture in which Christianity is embedded passed into a new phase. Today the Church faces a similar challenge. In regard to the vital categories—faith, teaching authority, and dogma—the Church must undergo transformation in its self-understanding and structure, says Dulles, in order to correspond with the presuppositions, concerns, thought-forms, patterns of life, communications systems, and technical possibilities offered by the contemporary world.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the Church may no longer give absolutist value to its own pronouncements as rigidly defined propositions admitting of no further discussion or examination. Together with other classical concepts such as faith and authority, Church dogma must be reconsidered, perhaps even redefined, in the light of more flexible and progressive world views.⁷⁷ In order to meet this challenge and move beyond the unpalatable absolutist perpetuation of neo-Scholastic standards for dogma, Dulles proposed a program of adaptation.⁷⁸ And the initial step toward adaptation was the frank recognition and acceptance of the notion that dogma is to a large extent historically conditioned. According to Dulles, this principle helps theologians keep past doctrinal formulations in proper perspective. It also bodes well for initiatives toward the reformulation of doctrinal statement and expression in the present time.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁸ Dulles makes specific applications to dogma. But adaptation itself is much larger in scope. According to Dulles, it includes: (1) The Christian community is to “correspond” with the presuppositions, concerns, etc. offered by the contemporary world; (2) As the Christian community interacts with the contemporary world, it will rediscover the need for faith, authority, and dogma; (3) Upon rediscovery here defined, these Christian realities—faith, authority, and dogma—may once again “come alive.” See *Survival of Dogma*, 13.

Historical Conditioning of Dogmatic Statements

Adaptation envisioned by Dulles was more than merely the Church adjusting socially in a changing culture. In Dulles's view, adaptation occurs when the Church reconsiders its theology and expression in the present age. The specific assumption for such reconsideration is the historical relativity of all doctrinal statements.⁷⁹ Dulles views reconsideration initiatives more fruitful than weighing doctrinal statements in the balance of infallibility or fallibility. When taking such initiatives, it is important to assess both recent and ancient church pronouncements by distinguishing between what some would call "form" and "content" of a doctrinal statement. Moreover, it is possible to make this distinction only when we understand that the truth of revelation is never known in its naked absoluteness, but is grasped within the perspectives of a particular sociocultural situation.⁸⁰ Dulles argues that irreformability should therefore be reconsidered in light of the fact that the forms of Church life and organization, and even the *propositions expressing Christian faith* vary with the historical and cultural situation.⁸¹

Dulles is convinced that the whole dogmatic heritage of the Church should undergo critical review before it can be authoritatively stated for modern man. Only to her own peril can the Church cling to irreformable statements framed in pre-scientific

⁷⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 178.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 33. Emphasis ours.

categories all the while ignoring the critical gaze of the modern scientific world.⁸² In the decade following Vatican Council II, Dulles questioned whether the Church comprehended the present mindset. He saw that many Catholics were stirred by critical views of faith emanating particularly from the scientific community. Furthermore, he discovered that the explorations and discoveries of modern science appeared in many instances to be normative in the reshaping of faith perceptions.

These developments in the middle of the twentieth century did not escape the watchful eye of Pope John XXIII. And Vatican II was not oblivious to the new outlook of modern man. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, took serious notice of modern man—his adherence to scientific method, his confidence in technology, his sense of the growing unity of world history (sometimes called “planetization”), and his dynamic, evolutionary view of reality.⁸³ Dulles and other responsible theologians considered, not only the Church’s perception of the world, they also considered how the modern world perceived the Church’s mindset and thinking. They were sensitive to the image projected by the Church in today’s world. Surely in this world of modern patterns of thought, including critical scientific method, the Church and its solemn pronouncements are viewed by most as historically conditioned. The Church and her dogma viewed in this way from the world’s critical eye became a major impetus for Dulles to reconsider irreformability and to affirm the historical conditioning of

⁸² Avery Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology Compiled at Canisianum, Innsbruck* (New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1968), 27-28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 16.

doctrinal statements.

Dulles discovered precursors to these ideas in a number of sources. Notions of historical conditioning were advanced already by Roman Catholic Modernists, Alfred Loisy, George Tyrell. These modernists tended to view revelation as a quasi-mystical experience which they thought to occur in the consciousness of Jesus and in the lives of the apostles. They maintained that doctrine is a kind of sedimentation resulting when revelation is the object of human reflection. Dogma for the modernists was always historically and culturally conditioned by the situation in which it was formulated.⁸⁴

More influential than the Catholic Modernists and certainly figuring prominently in Dulles's thinking were the theories of historical and cultural conditioning expounded by the 1973 Declaration, *Myterium ecclesiae*. These theories and those advanced by exponents of the *nouvelle theologie*, especially its foremost representative, the French Jesuit, Henri Bouillard, influenced Dulles significantly. In *Mysterium ecclesiae*, the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith acknowledged a fourfold historical conditioning. Statements of faith are influenced by the presuppositions (i.e., the "context of faith and human knowledge"), the concerns (i.e., "the intention of solving certain questions"), the thought categories (i.e., "the changeable conceptions of a given epoch"), and the available vocabulary (i.e., "the expressive power of the language used at a certain point of time") of the culture in which they were composed.⁸⁵ In Dulles's view, these four categories are

⁸⁴ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 22.

⁸⁵ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 53. See *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, no. 5, Eng. trans., "Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church," *Catholic Mind* 71 (October, 1973): 58-60.

important because they demonstrate that almost any dogmatic formulation bears the signature of the time and culture from which it emanates.⁸⁶ As a result, doctrinal statements become problematic for Dulles when they use terminology that bears traces of what he calls “the changeable conceptions of the given epoch.” For example, terms such as *infallibility*, if they continue to be employed, should be carefully explained so as not to carry with them the world view (*Weltanschauung*) of an earlier time.⁸⁷

Dulles saw that Henri Bouillard dealt incisively with these problems of concepts and terminology. Bouillard attempted to do justice to the necessarily conditioned character of all human discourse and at the same time he sought to avoid the pitfalls of relativism. In his celebrated work, *Conversion et grace selon S. Thomas d’ Aquin*, Bouillard teaches that Christian truth never subsists in a pure state. It is most surely always imbedded in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure. It cannot be isolated from these. It can be liberated from one system of notions only by passing into another. Thus the divine truth is never accessible, according to Bouillard, prior to all contingent notions. Such is the law of incarnation. But instead of leading to relativism, history enables one to grasp, in the heart of the theological evolution, an absolute, i.e., an absolute affirmation. If the notions, methods, and systems change with time, the affirmations which they contain remain, even though they are expressed in

⁸⁶ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 53. Dulles empathizes with the contemporary Christian who experiences difficulty in accepting some ancient dogmas. The difficulty arises not simply because faith itself is a challenge to the mind. Rather, it stems, in part, from the fact that the formulations of faith are somewhat outdated.

⁸⁷ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 145-146.

different categories.⁸⁸ Dulles observes how Bouillard was able to safeguard the immutable truth of the affirmation while allowing for the contingency of notions. Every notion has its meaning within a context of notions. When an old truth is inserted into a new system, it cannot be affirmed by means of the old concept, but must be conceived in a new way proportioned to the new system.

Bouillard's exposition of historical conditioning and his application of its principles to concepts and terminology seemed especially suited for assessing the status of church dogma. Dulles saw two implications in the work of Bouillard. First, there is a recognition of contingent notions surrounding the affirmation, the "deposit," at any point in history. Second, the affirmation passes from one system of notions to another along the time line of history. But passing into one system, faithfulness to the affirmation dare not demand keeping foot within an earlier system and its notions. This would mean affirming, not only the constant truths of revelation, but a given historically conditioned system as well. This is what neo-Scholasticism attempted to do; and, the static dogmatic expression of this theological "system" is inadequate for the current scene. This is Dulles's assessment according to his own principle that every dogmatic statement in any age is necessarily historically conditioned.

The Dynamic Character of Dogma

Once Dulles arrived at the conclusion that dogmatic statements are historically conditioned, he widened his argument against irreformability on the grounds of the

⁸⁸ For Dulles's concise summary of Bouillard's views, see *The Survival of Dogma*, 194-195.

dynamic character of dogma. He considered church dogma from the vantage of three frameworks of dynamic movement. The first is evolutionary. In the nineteenth century, evolutionary thinking began to assert itself in many disciplines, not least of which was theology. Dulles notes in particular G. W. F. Hegel's all-embracing dialectical philosophy in which the Church and its doctrines were viewed as inextricably enmeshed in the universal process whereby the Absolute Spirit emerges.⁸⁹

In a time of widespread evolutionary thinking, it was inevitable that theologians should devise evolutionary theories of their own. Johann Adam Mohler of the Catholic Tübingen school proclaimed that Christianity, as a living faith, is subject to development and progress under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Another strong advocate of development was John Henry Newman who entered Catholicism as a former Anglican. Reacting to the static character of Anglicanism, Newman saw development as a continuous organic process whereby the Christian idea flowers in the consciousness of the

⁸⁹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 47. Dulles's assessment of Hegel's influence is grounded in Hegel's notion of *History*, a conscious self-mediating process – Spirit emptied out into Time. G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit* VIII Absolute Knowing, 808, trans. A. V. Miller with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 492-493. [Hereafter, Miller] Cf. VI, Spirit, 438-443, Miller, 263-266; VII, Religion, 675-677, 682-683, Miller, 411-412, 415-416; VII, c. The Revealed Religion, Miller, 453-478. Peter Fuss and John Dobbins suggest that the workings of Spirit underlying meaning and unity of seemingly inexhaustible finite manifestations, also the structure of its potential and modes of actualization, are essential themes of Hegel's, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, presented at Berlin, 1821-1831. G. F. W. Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793-1795: The Tuebingen Essays, Berne Fragments, The Life of Jesus*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 17.

Christian community under the irradiation of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ These ideas advanced by Mohler and Newman suggested to Dulles that dogma could no longer be perceived as static and unyielding to the changing scenes of advancing culture.

A second framework is dynamic progress. We have seen how irreformability was challenged by marked changes in the perception of tradition. In postconciliar Catholicism, tradition is perceived by some as process and dynamic progress which occurs not by mere logical inference or even by continuous, organic evolution, but through the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the practice and the life of the believing and praying Church.⁹¹ In the new perception of dogma, the two “sources,” Scripture and tradition in combination, transmit the message, less by explicit statement than by forming the imagination and

⁹⁰ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 47. The analysis of an idea in society is the paradigm for Newman’s theological theory of development. The process by which the aspects of an idea are brought into consistency and form is what Newman calls development. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), 61. This paradigm in the background, Dulles remarks that Newman explains how the idea of Christianity in the course of time expands into multiple aspects of itself. Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 202, Footnote 17. Of aspects emanating from objective revelation, Newman writes: “If then there are certain great truths, or duties, or observances, naturally and legitimately resulting from the doctrines originally professed, it is but reasonable to include these true results in the idea of the revelation itself, to consider them parts of it, and if the revelation be not only true but guaranteed as true, to anticipate that they too will come under the privilege of that guarantee.” *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 98. That this process properly occurs within the Church guided infallibly by the Holy Spirit, Walgrave states in this summary of Newman’s basic thesis: “Development of doctrine, then, is a continuous organic process of life by which the realizing faith of the Church expands itself into intellectual consciousness under the guidance of its illative sense, which is itself guided by the all-penetrating presence of the Holy Spirit.” Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation*, 307.

⁹¹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 95.

affectivity of the Christian community.⁹² Dulles has called attention to a shift from static content defined by propositional statement and defended by rational argument to a theology whereby Scripture and tradition are used to provide models or paradigms for the Christian community as it reflects on its current experience. This demonstrable shift has resulted in new accents in dogma, stability and continuity yielding to an emphasis on originality and innovation. Dulles explains,

But Scripture, as a stable sedimentation of the faith of the originators, needs to be supplemented by tradition, which presents the word of God in continually new forms, suited to the changing cultures and conditions in which the Church finds itself. Tradition is the process of diachronic communication whereby revelation, received in faith, perpetuates itself from generation to generation.⁹³

In the third place, the dynamic character of dogma is apparent to Dulles in its newly perceived existential function, demanding a unique type of assent. Irreformable dogma is vulnerable in its concepts and perhaps also in its language when an existential function is attached to it. On this point, Dulles cites Edward Schillebeeckx who claims that the Church's dogmatic heritage has an original and unassailable meaning, but one which will begin to function existentially in the new and contemporary self-understanding.⁹⁴ The dogma does not change. But its function is transformed into that

⁹² Ibid., 23-24.

⁹³ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁴ Avery Dulles, "The Modern Dilemma of Faith," in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology Compiled at the Canisium, Innsbruck* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1968), 18-19. Schillebeeckx' statement is about reformulation of doctrine for the preservation of the faith in the modern climate of ideas. This is important especially for the youth. See Edward Schillebeeckx, "Faith Functioning in Human Self-Understanding," in *The Word in History*, ed. T. P. Burke (New York: 1966), 58-59.

which is existentially relevant or important today.⁹⁵

In a lengthy passage, Dulles draws on the reflections of several theologians who challenge the objectivity of dogmatic discourse and seem to advocate an existential function for dogma.⁹⁶ Ian Ramsey points to the futility of treating dogmatic statements as though they were intended as descriptive or scientific statements.⁹⁷ Articulating his notion of “transcendental” revelation, Karl Rahner asserts that the realities of God and his grace do not admit of any simply objective presentation. Thus, dogmatic discourse must somehow contrive to point the way to an existential confrontation with the mystery itself.⁹⁸ Furthermore, dogmatic language in Rahner’s view is “mystagogical,” i.e., it conjures up the gracious presence of the divine. It has an almost sacramental function, transmitting not the *idea* but the *reality* of God’s generous self-outpouring. Edmund Schlink expresses the existential function of doctrinal expression when he observes that early creedal and confessional statements bring about a situation in which believers, gathered in worship, can better apprehend and respond to the revealing presence of the divine. According to Schlink, it is important to remember that most of the early Christian confessions, which form the basis of later dogmatic statements, were framed in a liturgical

⁹⁵ Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 18.

⁹⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 160-162.

⁹⁷ See Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: Macmillan Paperback, 1963), 191.

⁹⁸ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 161. Dulles cites from Karl Rahner, “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” In *Theological Investigations*, trans. K. H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 5:46-47; 58-60.

context and are doxological in form.⁹⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg assigns a proleptic character to creeds and confessions. Dogmatic statements, he says, transcend our present experience and power of conceptualization since they have reference to a new creation and a new life to be fully realized at the end of the world.¹⁰⁰ And Hans Urs von Balthasar admits to the truth of propositions of dogma insofar as they are a function and expression of the Church's understanding of the Christ-mystery, as given to it by the Holy Spirit. They cannot be taken out of this setting. Therefore, they do not have any *purely* theoretical (i.e., nonexperiential, non-existential) truth.¹⁰¹

The aggregate witness of these theologians is significant, and they are united by a common thread. It is an existential perception of revelation which is communicated by means of symbol rather than by propositional statement since it is not possible to objectify the transcendent meaning. Dulles summarizes, "The truth of symbol is existential insofar as it transcends the subject-object schema of ordinary propositional discourse and cannot be rightly apprehended without personal appropriation."¹⁰² If, as these theologians suggest, truth is existential and truth-statements by their nature are less than objective,

⁹⁹ Dulles cites from Edmund Schlink, "The Structure of Dogmatic Statements as an Ecumenical Problem," in *The Coming Christ and the Coming Church*, trans. by I. H. Neilson (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 16f.

¹⁰⁰ Dulles cites from Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Was ist eine dogmatische Aussage?" in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 159-180, esp. 175-176.

¹⁰¹ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Truth and Life," *Concilium* 21 (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1967), 90.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 162.

then irreformable dogma projected as an objective statement of truth to be apprehended rationally, can no longer be viewed as sufficient for presenting revelation or the Church's doctrine.

In summary, Dulles concedes that traditional doctrinal formulations were forged in the light of a general world-view that has become obsolete. However, Vatican II accepted the new modern climate of ideas and implicitly committed the Church to the formidable task of reinterpreting its entire dogmatic heritage in such a way that the unassailable meaning and content of church dogma should now function existentially. While the council is somewhat vague about specific implications, Dulles himself is certain that irreformability is dispensable in the present era.

The Reformability of Dogma

The Advent of Reformability

The longstanding acceptance of irreformability had been challenged on numerous counts by developments within the Church. So demonstrable were the challenges that Dulles could say, "Since Vatican II, the question of irreformability has become acute throughout the Church."¹⁰³ It was clear to him that the Church had no choice other than reconsideration of the status of dogma. He welcomed, therefore, the overtures of Vatican Council II which encouraged flexible formulation and expression in an age of scientific progress and cultural change, a flexibility always respectful, however, of the Church's ancient "deposit."

¹⁰³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 197.

But irreformability did not yield without a contest. Initiatives were taken in the middle twentieth century to protect the universal and timeless character of dogmatic statements. The papal encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani generis* (1950), rejected the view of those who, “contend that the mysteries of faith can never be signified by adequately true notions, but only by what they call ‘approximative’ and always mutable notions, by which the truth is in some measure manifested but is necessarily deformed.”¹⁰⁴ *Humani generis* made two significant points: First, the encyclical deplored “dogmatic relativism” of those who would hold that the same divine truth may be expressed on the human side by concepts which, even though mutually opposed, signify the same divine reality. Second, *Humani generis* affirmed that the theological notions in the Catholic tradition are based on a true knowledge of created things and that some of these notions have been used and even hallowed by ecumenical councils so that it would be wrong (*nefas*) to depart from them.¹⁰⁵

A second major initiative to insure the continuation of irreformability was taken by Pope Paul VI just prior to the close of Vatican Council II. In his encyclical on the Eucharist, *Mysterium fidei*, Pope Paul taught that formulas used by the Council of Trent to express the Church’s eucharistic faith, “. . . like others which the Church uses to propose the dogmas of the faith, express concepts which are not tied to a certain definite form of human culture, or to a certain stage of scientific progress, or to one theological school or another, but exhibit that which the human mind, in its universal and necessary

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 195. See DS 2882.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., See DS 3883.

experience of reality, perceives. . . . Hence they are suited to men of all times and places.”¹⁰⁶ The pontiff admitted that these formulas could be more clearly and evidently explained; yet, they can and should be retained in their original meaning.

These passages illustrate for Dulles that the magisterium since Vatican I had continued to insist on the irreformability of dogma. Furthermore, they interpreted irreformability in the most narrow terms. Not only must the affirmations be retained, but the very concepts and even the terms, when endorsed by the highest authority, are to remain in force. How differently did the Second Vatican Council interpret the status of church dogmas! The documents of Vatican II, notably the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis reintegratio*, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, took a more liberal approach, according to Dulles.¹⁰⁷ Official proponents for irreformability were still represented at the Second Council. But the Council ultimately came down on the side of reformability. Dulles carefully records this development. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, states that the heritage handed down by the apostles was received in different forms and different ways. From the beginning, it had a varied development in various places giving rise to various theological formulations, which, though differing, could be complementary.¹⁰⁸ Dulles understands these passages from the Decree on Ecumenism to imply that the formulas of proclamation

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 196. The reference is to *Apostolicae Sedis*, 57. 753-774. English translation by Paulist Press. (Glen Rock: NJ: Paulist Press, 1966), 34-35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 196-197. The reference is, *Unitatis redintegratio*, nos. 14 and 17; Abbott, 357-358 and 360.

and theology in the East and West are, at least in some instances, culturally conditioned and hence not suited to all times and places.

Dulles sees reformability encouraged by the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*. The introductory statement to the Constitution addresses Christians in general and points to the necessity of familiarizing oneself with the contemporary mentality in order to be able to speak to men's questions, "in language intelligible to each generation."¹⁰⁹ In subsequent paragraphs, the document encourages theologians to work out new ways of presenting the faith to men of today. The Constitution expressed virtually the words of Pope John XXIII who stated in his speech at the beginning of the Council, October 11, 1962: "The deposit of faith or revealed truths are one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another."¹¹⁰ The same Constitution asserts that this process of reformulation is no novelty. It states, ". . . for from the beginning of her history she [the Church] has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of the philosophers, too. . . . Thus each nation develops the ability to express Christ's message in its own way."¹¹¹ That reformability has come of age, is stated succinctly in this passage from the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*:

¹⁰⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4; Abbott, 202.

¹¹⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 62; Abbott, 268-269. Cf. footnotes 200 and 201.

¹¹¹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44; Abbott, 246. cf. no. 58, Abbott, 264. These references are provided by Dulles in *Survival of Dogma*, 197.

Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith), these should be properly rectified at the proper moment.¹¹²

Citing these passages from Vatican II, Dulles has shown that the Church, ever respectful of the perpetuity of the “deposit,” is nonetheless open to reform even in the areas of structure and doctrinal formulation. The plea for irreformability asserted by the magisterium since Vatican I was not silenced altogether. But the Church has taken a different turn since *Humani generis* and *Mysterium fidei*. The spirit of openness advanced by Pope John XXIII and initiatives toward *aggiornamento* by the Second Council suggested that reformability was more than a possibility. It is for theologians like Avery Dulles quite literally obligatory since Vatican Council II.

Reformability and Categories of Doctrine

That church dogma may be reformable is easier said than done.¹¹³ Dulles comprehends the complexity involved here. By no means, does he advocate less than careful scrutiny of the Church’s doctrinal formulations. He has cautioned against putting reliance on statements and formulas that are supposed to be exempt from rational scrutiny,

¹¹² *Unitatis redeintegratio*, no. 8; Abbott, 24. Cited in Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 30.

¹¹³ Dulles has stated appropriately certain definitions. He uses the term “reformable” simply as the opposite of “irreformable,” and hence as equivalent to “nondefinitive.” But, he wishes to be clearly understood that a reformable statement may be certain and may contain abiding truth. *The Craft of Theology*, 236, footnote 17.

lest we be unwittingly committed to an illusion.¹¹⁴ Still, the questions are formidable. In what directions shall rational scrutiny be applied in the interest of reformability? If there is a valid distinction between primary and secondary teachings, does reformability apply to the primary as well as to the secondary teachings? This question is complicated by the lack of consensus on criteria for determining which teachings are primary and which are secondary.¹¹⁵

Another important facet of this discussion should not be overlooked. The matter of assent to doctrines or dissent, whatever the case may be, is involved here. Freedom in the Church to give or withhold assent to church doctrines is important to both theologians and the Church's laity.¹¹⁶ According to Dulles, it is generally recognized today that not all

¹¹⁴ Dulles, "The Modern Dilemma of Faith," 28.

¹¹⁵ Vatican II, the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 11 [Abbott, 354], stated that there is a certain "order of hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith." In this same context, the Decree invited the faithful to concentrate upon those dogmas most intimately connected with the fundamental mystery of our salvation. Dulles observes that since Vatican II there has been great speculation as to the norms for determining which doctrines are primary or central and which are secondary or peripheral. He judges from the literature available to him that at least seven views have been proposed. Synthesizing numerous points made in the expression of several of these views, Dulles prefers to speak of primary or central truths as those that express the central mystery of God's saving work in Jesus Christ—the work that forms the principal theme of the Christian kerygma as set forth in the New Testament and in the historic creeds. Other truths of faith are somehow derivative from this central message and may or may not be explicitly set forth either in the Bible or in the creeds. Secondary truths are illuminative of the mystery of Christ and the Church and thus are helpful for a life that is in conformity with the gospel. *The Resilient Church*, 56.

¹¹⁶ Dulles gives close and extended attention to the subject of assent and options for dissent available to responsible theologians. See, *The Craft of Theology*, ch. 7, "The Magisterium and Theological Dissent," 105-118; *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, ch. 6, "Authority and Conscience: Two Needed Voices," 91-109; *A Church to Believe In*, ch. 5, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Church," 66-79; *The Survival of Dogma*, ch. 9, "Doubt

doctrines are equally central to the faith. Not all are on the same level of importance, and not all those that have been crucial at some time in the past are currently of crucial importance. He urges churches to distinguish between doctrines which by their very nature, or in the present historical juncture, are unconditionally binding on all members, and others, although valid and official, are open to questioning or challenge from within the community of faith.¹¹⁷

Recognizing the secondary character of certain doctrines permits a more relaxed attitude toward them. With respect to primary doctrines, Dulles is prepared to say that dogmas are responses to particular sets of circumstances in which historical relativities are at play. Consequently he believes that it may not always be advisable or necessary to require direct assent to ancient formulations of faith, composed in contexts alien to our own.¹¹⁸ As a rule the church should teach secondary doctrines without the threat of anathemas. Even in matters of primary doctrine, Dulles suggests that freedom should be allowed insofar as possible and curtailed only insofar as necessary.¹¹⁹

in the Church,” 139-154.

¹¹⁷ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 76-77.

¹¹⁸ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 57.

¹¹⁹ This statement is from Vatican II, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*. It is a statement of the basic principle of the “free society.” Still, Dulles agrees with John Courtney Murray that there is no reason why the principle may not be applied in the ecclesiastical as well as in the secular sphere. Dulles adds, “If applied, this principle could have important consequences in matters of doctrine.” *A Church to Believe In*, 76. See the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*, no. 7; Abbott, 687.

With respect to enforcement of doctrinal standards, Dulles believes that the Church’s doctrinal policy might suitably be governed by two ancient principles—those of

In the discussion of primary and secondary doctrines, assent and dissent, Dulles discovers at least one important argument for reformability. The early creeds are generally thought to be a sufficient declaration of the central articles of Christian belief. But Dulles joins Karl Rahner who questions whether the early creeds possess such sufficiency. Considering the ancient creeds today, one may observe how they impress our contemporaries as being far removed in thought patterns and language from the idiom of our time. When Dulles expresses his conviction that a short formula can scarcely bring faith to a sharp focus unless it takes its departure from the point at which we experience our own existence, he hints strongly at reformability of the “sufficient creeds” for the sake of persons who think with a late twentieth century mindset.¹²⁰

Reformability and the Possibility of New Creeds and Confessions

Following this discussion of reformability and categories of doctrine, the next logical topic may be reformability and doctrinal development. Since an entire chapter of this study is devoted to development, we shall defer this topic to Chapter Five and continue here with a related subject: reformability and the possibility of new creeds and confessions. Reformability quite naturally raises the question: Does flexibility of doctrinal expression suggest a search for new creedal formulations in the ongoing life of the Church?

parsimony and economy. The principle of parsimony would forbid imposing anything more than the necessary minimum to avoid deviations from the gospel. The principle of economy would require the magisterium to be slow to insist on secondary points which hearers are not prepared to accept. *The Resilient Church*, 57.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 57-58.

Addressing this question, Dulles is aware of the long shadow of irreformability effectively inhibiting consideration of creedal revision. For this reason he pauses to document the Church's longstanding determination ever to formulate its doctrine in ways which communicate clearly to the culture. There are restraints and constraints. Dulles takes a somewhat centrist role between advocates of rank subjectivity in formulation and traditionalists who would enforce slavish adherence to doctrinal statements from the past. Ultimately for Dulles, the Holy Spirit is both the stimulus to creedal reformulation and also the safeguard against radical expressions out of step with the faith confessed by the Church in past eras of its history.

Dulles calls upon teachers in the Church to adopt an attitude of openness to new formulations, and slowness to judge harshly those new formulas of faith which may appear to be irreconcilable with others long venerated in the Church. He considers such latitude necessary because of the cultural revolution through which mankind is presently passing.¹²¹ Dulles is certain that Christianity has remained a vital religion because for so many centuries Christians of successive generations have had the courage to rethink their faith in the light of the most pressing problems of the day. This was done, he states, by the biblical authors, by the Greek and Latin Fathers, and by the great Scholastics. He observes that the ancient creeds bear the impress of the life-and-death encounters between Christian faith and the secular cultures of the past. Dulles believes that similar encounters should be accepted as normal today. He suggests that such encounters may take the form of new creeds framed and introduced into the Church's liturgy as long as the best interests

¹²¹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 212.

of the Church are at heart.¹²²

Having encouraged such bold encounters, Dulles devises and articulates safeguards against excessive adaptation to a point where the Church risks the loss of identity. He urges guarding against mindless rejection of the old, and he recommends keeping the memory of the past alive. Do the ancient creeds have staying power? Dulles answers, by a process of education well within the reach of the lay believer, it is possible to grasp the message of the Bible and the ancient creeds. He even supports a healthy “archaism” versus an unhealthy “dogmatic archaism.”¹²³

However, Dulles is not consistent when expressing his views about new creedal statements. It seems that he goes back and forth between asserting freedom and imposing safeguards. Be that as it may, Dulles is firm in his conviction that new frameworks call for new formulations even when such new statements may appear at first to run counter to magisterial restraints. Anticipating the crucial question about proper criteria for judging the adequacy of new formulations, Dulles resorts to his notion that revelation is mystery. As such, it serves as a bonafide criterion, but in a particular manner. Dulles insists that objective criteria cannot be set up except in terms of a common framework.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, this principle does not open the door to blanket subjectivism, as some might

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Dogmatic archaism is the label Dulles assigns to the traditionalist view that the apostolic faith, as set forth in the Bible, admits of no further doctrinal evolution, meaning, the Bible is self-interpreting, at least to those who have the Spirit of Christ. He rejects this view outright. Cf. *Survival of Dogma*, 192f.

¹²⁴ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 211.

suggest. Can the criteria be entirely objective? Dulles pleads for a proper understanding of the term “objective.” Revelation, he says, is essentially mystery. It can never be fully objectified.¹²⁵ But there is objectivity in the sense of interior grace. Dulles comments,

The experience of grace—inarticulate though it be—enters into the ultimate judgment as to whether a given formulation is admissible. Only the man of faith—or the community of faith—can properly judge whether a new expression, interpreted in a particular sociocultural and linguistic context, is an acceptable articulation of the faith.¹²⁶

Scripture and tradition may be helpful at least in this respect that the canonical formulations have taught us what it means to be a Christian. Yet Dulles maintains that what we have gained from these written sources is faith—that is to say, a living apprehension that cannot adequately be reduced to anything in writing. He states, “The light of faith, sustained by the Holy Spirit, gives the Church in every age a sure instinct for discerning the true bearing of the ancient documents upon the questions currently being asked.”¹²⁷

Observe that it is not the formulations of the past, not even the canonical sources, much less the current pronouncements of the magisterium, which help the Church to determine the adequacy of new formulations in the present. Past or present statements, formulations, or pronouncements should not be accorded status and authority as “final” criteria. In the end, all are merely human statements bearing the weaknesses and inadequacies common to human expressions, in the light of the mystery which man neither

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

comprehends fully nor articulates adequately. Dulles comments, “To demand totally determinative objective norms, and to look exclusively to the letter of past magisterial pronouncements, would minimize the role of the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁸ Against the horizon of new presuppositions and new concerns in the culture, both reformulated dogmas and new formulations unfold under the aegis of the Holy Spirit, who is given to the Church for the sake of discernment in all times (cf. Jn. 16:13).¹²⁹

Summary

Clearly Dulles places the objective reference points, Scripture and tradition, in a role secondary to the personalistic faith of the individual and the community, faith presumably informed and guided by the interior presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Initiatives toward reformability and the generation of new formulations are free to develop not independent of the sources, but without close scrutiny under the sources as they were perceived by neo-Scholasticism especially during the decades after Vatican I up to the Second Council in the 1960s. Since that time, how do the sources function? From the writings of Avery Dulles, it is apparent that Scripture and tradition are no longer regarded as final and objective authorities. In a manner of speaking, the sources serve as consultants. They are “helpful” when the Church in faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit reflects on the legitimacy and adequacy of doctrinal reformulation or newly generated doctrinal expression. This approach differs substantively from the longstanding

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

notions of irreformability which had been enforced by the magisterium until the Second Council. The notion that dogmas, including their very concepts and terms, should be retained in perpetuity when endorsed by the highest authority, is a position effectively challenged following the Second Council. Dulles has noted these developments. More than challenged, irreformability has been effectively replaced by reformability and even the possibility of new creedal formulations. Thus, the status of dogma in the perception of many has undergone substantive changes. While the production of dogma retains its base in revelation and Christological content under the influence of the Holy Spirit, there has occurred a discontinuous shift whereby dogma may be both reformed or newly formed in the existential experience of the church and its personalistic faith. This shift is seen by theologians like Dulles as a necessary development when the Church keeps the mental and social structures of the contemporary world in mind.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVELATION, THE MATRIX FOR DOCTRINAL REFORMULATION

Revelation has a direct bearing on Avery Dulles's concept of church dogma, its reformulation and development. While neo-Scholasticism perceived a close relationship between revelation and dogma as propositional statement, Dulles disagrees. He attempts to dismantle any such connection. Instead, he favors the notion that revelation is God's self-communication personally to man. Once this notion of revelation prevails, both propositional revelatory statements and the static propositional form of dogma are questioned. The dogmatic statement becomes the expression of individual and community faith-experience of revelation.

This chapter sets forth Dulles's arguments for revelation as symbolic mediation. The implications of revelation in terms of symbol for the development of dogma will be treated at length in Chapter Five. Here, we shall be content to relate the changing face of dogma to new perceptions of revelation versus those held by neo-Scholasticism. We shall refer once again to the use of image and symbol in the divine self-communication. Both communication of the divine self-disclosure symbolically and apprehension of revelatory symbols will occupy much of the discussion. Significantly, reformulation is somewhat determined by the notion of revelation as symbolic mediation. It will become apparent that the title of this chapter has been chosen appropriately. In the thought and writings of

Avery Dulles, revelation is the matrix for doctrinal reformulation.

In Search of an Alternative to Propositional Revelation

The Separation of Revelation from Propositional Statement

Avery Dulles addresses a problem in connection with the development of church dogma. Stated succinctly, that problem is the thematization of transcendent truth, divine revelation. Neo-Scholasticism met the problem with the assertion that divine revelation consists of propositional truths communicated in propositional statements. This notion of propositional revelation was taught for generations by the manualist teachers in Catholic schools and seminaries. Dulles holds a different view. He is convinced that divine revelation cannot and does not manifest itself in propositional thought forms. Nor is human language adequate to express the fullness and richness of transcendent truths conveyed by revelation.

It goes without saying, as a Christian and theologian, Dulles is enamored with the transcendent God. He demonstrated his devotion when he joined an unofficial group which framed a document speaking concern over the growing loss of the sense of the transcendent in American Christianity. He was one of the framers and signers of this document which became known as the Hartford Appeal. It was completed in January, 1975. Dulles participated in this project because of his strong sense of the transcendent God. Also, he has a deep interest in cross denominational expressions of the meaning of religion and Christianity in American culture. The Hartford Appeal disclaims identity as a confessional statement. Yet insofar as the Appeal encourages acknowledgment of the

transcendent God within the major structures of American culture, it is a position statement for those who signed the document.¹

Having participated in developing the thirteen statements of the Hartford Appeal which affirm transcendency, Dulles nonetheless is convinced that revelation, the self-communication of the transcendent God, cannot be reduced to propositional statements. For instance, he levels two major criticisms against a propositional model of revelation. First, critical thinking of the day widely questions the objectifying theory of knowledge or the objectivist concept of truth that underlies the propositional model. Passages in the Bible which are replete with poetic, legendary, and mythical elements are void of objectivity necessary for propositional statements. Second, propositions play a minor role in communications. Even declarative sentences communicate more by their suggestive power than by their content. Moreover, for meaning, the propositions themselves depend upon a host of circumstances that can never be adequately stated in propositional form.²

Challenging the primacy of objectifying knowledge, focusing on the non-propositional genre in the Bible, and showing the dependence of propositions on a variety of non-objectivist factors, Dulles makes a broad case against linking revelation with propositional statement. He brings to the discussion statements of Church authorities. In *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, no. 5, the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine

¹ Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 62. See *Against the World for the World: The Hartford Appeal and the Future of American Religion*, ed. Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976).

² Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 49.

of the Faith cites the document from Vatican I, *Dei Filius*. This document states that the hidden mysteries of God “by their nature so far transcend the human intellect that even after they are revealed to us and accepted by faith, they remain concealed by the veil of faith itself and are as it were wrapped in darkness.”³ Furthermore, Vatican Council II, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, pointed out that the pilgrim Church is able to show forth the mystery of the Lord “in a faithful though shadowed way, until at last it will be revealed in total splendor.”⁴ Dulles observes from these passages that formulations of faith will always fall short of expressing the full richness of the divine mystery to which they refer. Especially in the statements from *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, Dulles sees an acute separation between the transcendence of divine revelation and the historicity of human formulations. He calls his readers to acknowledge that the categories used in ecclesiastical definitions are human and that the definitions therefore fall short of adequately expressing the content of revelation itself. “Dogmas,” he says, “must be seen as human formulations of the Word of God, formulations not undialectically identified with the revelation they transmit.”⁵ Dulles rests his case in these words, “Revelation, as a

³ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 142. *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, no. 5: text in *Catholic Mind*, vol. 71, no. 1276 (October, 1973). For *Dei Filius*, see *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 32nd edition, ed. H. Denzinger and rev. A. Schoenmetzer (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1963), no. 3016. Hereafter, DS.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 142-143. See *Lumen gentium*, no. 8 in W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 24. Hereafter, Abbott.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 143. Dulles offers these observations intending to suggest a reinterpretation of Vatican I definitions. In particular, they may cast some light on the situation of Christians who declare that they cannot accept the doctrine of papal

self-communication of the divine, inevitably exceeds the limits of what the human mind can comprehend in discursive thought or formulate in propositional terms.”⁶

Dulles is determined to separate between revelation and doctrinal formulations framed as propositional statements. He is convinced that this separation is necessary based on a proper understanding of proposition itself. Addressing the question, “Is faith propositional?,” in *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, Dulles defines a proposition (corresponding to the Latin term *enuntiabile*) as meaning a declarative sentence. He explains,

It is, so to speak, a mental utterance involving a specific truth claim—an assertion that is determinately true or false. A single proposition may be expressed in a variety of different linguistic formulations, but because human thought cannot dispense with language, the discussion of propositions cannot be neatly separated from the discussion of statements of faith.⁷

But Dulles adds an important comment with respect to revelation. The primary language

infallibility defined by Vatican Council I in 1870. Dulles treats this subject extensively in *A Church to Believe In*, chapter 9, “Moderate Infallibilism: An Ecumenical Approach,” 131f. Cf., Avery Dulles, “Infallibility: The Terminology,” and “Moderate Infallibility,” *Teaching Authority & Infallibility in the Church*, ed. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy and Joseph A. Burgess. *Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue VI* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978) 69-80, 80-100. 9 vols. 1965-1995.

⁶ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49. Elsewhere, Dulles distinguishes religion from all other subjects because it focuses attention on God, the absolutely transcendent. Commenting on religious education which has to do with mystery, he explains: “God, who dwells in inaccessible light, is not an object to be inspected. No human images or concepts can be properly predicated of God, and whenever we attempt to reduce the divinity to the measure of our human categories, we fall into a kind of idolatry: we adore the products of our mind.” Avery Dulles, *The Communication of Faith and Its Content* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1985), 6.

⁷ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 192.

of religious faith is not, or need not be, propositional. He observes that the original proclamation often conveys the revealed message in figurative and symbolic language. Descriptions or stories that are factually inaccurate, he states, may communicate truths of faith by their evocative power. He suggests that reflection is needed to elucidate the revealed meaning in symbolic actions, parables, myths, and legends, and to express this meaning in propositional statements. He argues that even in the creeds the propositional element is only inchoative and appeals to the fact that it is difficult to specify the literal truth contained in such statements that the eternal Son is “light from light,” that Jesus “descended into hell,” and that he “is seated at the right hand of the Father.”⁸

Dulles concedes that faith may be called propositional inasmuch as its contents can, at least to a large extent, be expressed in propositions, such as articles of the creed and dogmatic definitions. But he appeals to Thomas Aquinas who teaches that we must not confuse the propositions set forth in creed and dogma with faith itself.⁹ Clearly we may infer that we should not confuse propositions with revelation itself.

In Dulles’s view, the union between revelation and proposition was the “Achilles heel” of the logical theory of dogmatic development in neo-Scholasticism. For this reason, he opted for the organic approach to development. He identifies with Mohler and Newman, and later Rahner and Schillebeeckx writing in the late 1950s. The latter two

⁸ Ibid., 192-193.

⁹ The articles or propositions, Aquinas explains, are not, strictly speaking, the objects of faith “for the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition (*emuntiabile*) but in the reality [signified by the proposition]; for we do not form propositions except to have knowledge of things by means of them, whether in science or in faith” (*S. Th.*, 2-2.1.1, ad 2). Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 193.

men held that divine revelation was originally communicated not in the form of propositions but as a distinct whole, known only through a kind of global intuition.¹⁰ These notions of revelation, contradistinguished from proposition, were attractive to Dulles. They suggested an alternative. We shall look to explore that alternative, but not before naming several implications of the separation between revelation and proposition.

The first implication is compatibility with the secular mindset. Separating revelation from particular statements and doctrinal formulations has this advantage. It avoids the danger of conflict between faith on the one hand and history and science on the other. We recall that the modern mind questioned any attempt to express and articulate non-objective reality in terms of human objectivity and precision. This impediment was effectively removed by the dismantling of propositional revelation.¹¹

A second implication of the separation between revelation and proposition suggests less rigidity in formulation. Strict adherents to the propositional model of revelation cannot articulate revelation in any other than propositional terms. Can revelatory material be thematized more flexibly? Dulles's fifth model implies that revelation as new awareness provides that flexibility. In regard to this model, Dulles cautions that revelation cannot be thematized as propositions, i.e., in terminology

¹⁰ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49. See Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," in *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 39-77; Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Development of the Apostolic Faith into the Dogma of the Church," in *Revelation and Theology*, vol.1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 57-83.

¹¹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 110. Dulles is commenting on the fifth model of revelation: Revelation as New Awareness. He adds, "By situating revelation within the psyche, in its sociocultural context, this model escapes an unwelcome authoritarianism and appeals to minds enamored of freedom and progress." 110-111.

attributed to the Holy God. Thematization of new awareness is put in terms of expressive materials offered by any given culture (its secular experience, its historical memories, its characteristic modes of thought, and its literary usages).¹²

A third implication is the “thawing” of cold and static dogmas to the advantage of initiatives toward church fellowship and unity. One of the barriers to ecumenical dialogue prior to Vatican II was a concern registered by many Catholics. Their concern was about formulation, rising above historical relativities and articulating faith in timeless formulas. Dulles judged this concern to be a particularly modern one. And it created barriers to dialogue. Dulles meets the concern with arguments from the New Testament. In biblical times, he says, there was as yet no thought of “freezing” revelation in ideas and expressions that would be valid always and everywhere. The New Testament writings, he believes, propose the Christian message in terms of a variety of patterns of thought, none of them simply reducible to the others. The early Church likewise found it possible to achieve unity of faith amid a pluralism of confessional formulas.¹³

There is a fourth implication. The cleavage between revelation and proposition signals the negation of what the Church has traditionally called revealed doctrine. Dulles regards the perception of “revealed doctrines” as a remnant of propositional revelation. He counters, “In view of the transcendence of the content of faith, one may properly hesitate to speak of ‘revealed doctrines,’ although such expressions occasionally appear in

¹² Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 88.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

church documents.”¹⁴ According to Dulles, the separation between transcendent content and doctrine clearly implies that ecclesiastical definitions and doctrines framed in terms of human thought and language fall short of adequately expressing the content of revelation itself. Furthermore, because dogmas must be seen not undialectically identified with the revelation they purport to transmit, it is possible for faith to be expressed in multiple formulas that may even stand in tension with one another and indeed that seem contradictorily opposed.¹⁵

Again, Dulles questions the notion, revelation as “dogma.” He re-examines the relationship between revelation as a salvific event and those propositions we call “dogmas.”¹⁶ Dulles observes that contemporary theology commonly conceded that revelation does not actually exist except when it is being apprehended by a living mind. Revelation itself cannot be limited to spoken or written words. Nor do such words of

¹⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 52. Cf., *A Church to Believe In*, 142-143.

¹⁵ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 143.

¹⁶ Lest we oversimplify Dulles’s position on this relationship, we should be sensitive to his real concerns over this subject. Seeking to establish a relationship of “statements about God” to revelation, Dulles appeals to Emile Mersch, S.J. (1890-1940), a colleague of Joseph Marechal at Louvain. Having beginnings in the eternal Word, the perfect image of the Unbegotten, revelation, according to Mersch, cannot be scrutinized from outside, like an object. It is simply an act of divine life, which is given to believers through Christ the unique Mediator. Yet the formulas in which revelation is articulated play a vital part in the Christian life. How? Dulles quotes Mersch: “In Christ and in the consciousness He has as head [of the Mystical Body] there are found a superabundance and a kind of pressure of fullness that flow into His members through doctrines and formulas.” Emile Mersch, *Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis, 1951), 408. Cited by Dulles in, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 143.

themselves constitute revelation.¹⁷ The non-existence of revelation except when apprehended by the human psyche, is the mainspring of the argument. Dulles, however, must acknowledge one slight inconsistency of his own making. He may freely maintain the gap between revelation and proposition, also the notion that revelation exists only upon apprehension, except that there is no room in this paradigm for “special propositional revelation” which he concedes is still contained in the Bible.¹⁸ Treating revelation as non-objective and apprehension as pre-conceptual consciousness conflicts with Dulles’s stated view that God’s revelation has cognitive value and that the clear teachings of Scripture and the creeds are grounded in revelation.¹⁹

Apparent here is what Walter Kasper calls the “theological difference” between gospel and dogma. How does Dulles deal with this difference? He resorts to Kasper’s explanation that the truth of revelation is neither separate from dogma, nor identical with it. Dogma, says Kasper, has the value of revelation if, and only if, it is grasped by a mind presently influenced by God’s active self-bestowal. Dulles applies Kasper’s solution in a manner similar to what he calls the classical principle: There can be no revelation, and

¹⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 159.

¹⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, x.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52. In *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, Dulles says that faith has a doctrinal component. This affirmation is one of numerous points in a central tradition which he summarizes in the light of his own perspectives. He writes, “Although it may be initially communicated by means of symbols and metaphors, God’s revelation has a content that can, to a certain extent, be spelled out in propositions that capture its true meaning. God at times gives prophets and inspired writers the grace to formulate in declarative sentences particular truths that believers are to accept.” 276.

hence no faith, without interior illumination of grace.²⁰

The Alternative: Revelation as Personalistic Communication and Apprehension

Dulles concedes that dogma may become God's revelatory word, but only as an affirmation of the revealing God in personal communion with man. God's truth will not be reduced to the dead letter of dogmatic proposition. In the light of Dulles's unyielding position on this point, we probe further by asking, if revelation is neither communicated propositionally nor apprehended in propositional categories or terms, then how does the transcendent God communicate personally, and how does finite man receive the divine communication? If, as Rahner says, the realities of God and his grace do not admit of any simply objective presentation, then, how are those realities presented in a manner communicable and meaningful to man?²¹

Dulles addresses these questions forthrightly. He proposes an alternative paradigm for the communication of revelation and corresponding apprehension. Karl Rahner supplies Dulles with the governing principle for this paradigm. Returning to Rahner's assertion that the realities of God and his grace do not admit of any simply objective presentation, Dulles summarizes, "Dogmatic discourse, therefore, must somehow contrive

²⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 159-160. Kasper's solution is framed analogously to what Heidegger has said about paradoxical diversity of beings all of whom are interiorly lighted by Being. This "ontological difference" is the analogy for Kasper's "theological difference" between gospel and dogma. See Walter Kasper, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* (Mainz: Matthias-Gruenewald, 1965), 101-106.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

to point the way to an existential confrontation with the mystery itself.”²² Dulles makes the application. He asserts that the truth of symbol is existential and transcends the subject-object schema of ordinary propositional discourse and cannot be rightly apprehended without personal appropriation. In the background is Dulles’s notion of personalistic transcendental theology expressed in these words, “The Truth of the gospel is the saving truth of God, made personally present to us in Jesus Christ. The mystery to which the Christian stands committed is something that cannot be fully specified in explicit propositional language.”²³ It is clear, Dulles has selected an alternative, namely, revelation recognized as divine personal communion with man, and faith perceived as personalistic apprehension of mystery. From his vantage in the 1960s, he considered this alternative to be in the mainstream of Catholic theology. He characterizes Catholic theology at that time as principally Christocentric, historical, interpersonal and biblical.²⁴

²² Ibid., 161-162.

²³ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 52. Dulles argues that it was possible for the first Christians to be fully dedicated to the faith without personal awareness or acceptance of what have subsequently been defined as dogmas. And, regarding later dogmas, he inverts the argument when he suggests that it is impossible to say how St. Peter or St. Paul would have reacted if they had been asked what they believed about, for example, the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.

This assertion should be examined more closely in the light of the New Testament Pauline and Petrine Epistles. How does the apostolic word speak to the Marian dogmas? It may be that the Apostles, in their strong Christological affirmations, do, in fact, position themselves firmly against these dogmas even though the dogmas were declared in later centuries.

²⁴ Some of these accents, Dulles notes, were overlooked by exponents of propositional revelation. For example, in his work, *The Divine Revelation*, Paul Helm neglects to take up the latent and symbolic dimensions of revelation, or its mediation through the living tradition of the church. *Models of Revelation*, ix.

A Revised notion of Locutio Dei

The alternate view of revelation proposed here departs from the traditional notion of revelation as *locutio Dei*. This is understandable because Dulles has already separated between revelation and proposition. Does God speak in terms of revealed doctrine? Dulles does not sidestep the question, but he has learned from Rene Latourelle's work, *Theology of Revelation*, that the *locutio Dei* may be understood as God speaking in existentialist and personalist themes. Speech is specifically an interpersonal phenomenon; it involves, not simply the transmission of ideas or information, but also the self-expression of a speaker and an appeal to a personal addressee. Therefore, God's speech to man is far from being a mere communication of supernatural information. It is, above all, a gracious self-donation, an appeal for the obedience of faith, and an assumption of man into a transforming situation of divine friendship.²⁵

From Latourelle, Dulles gained a personalist view of the *locutio Dei*. But the French theologian influenced Dulles only to a point. Latourelle still maintained that the revelatory significance of redemptive history can be comprehended only in the light of divinely communicated interpretation, which is at least seminally doctrine. In its finished form, as committed to the Church, revelation takes on the form of a body of truths to be preserved, defended, and taught.²⁶ Dulles, however, prefers a fuller discussion of how revelation can be communicated in an inchoate manner without doctrine, i.e., without

²⁵ Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Instrumentorum, Inc., 1968), 55-56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

precise conceptualization and carefully articulated enunciation.²⁷ Dulles thinks that a more comprehensive concept of revelation than exhibited by Latourelle would better take into account how God reveals himself to the unevangelized gentiles through the universal illuminative office of the Logos.²⁸ He appeals to St. Thomas's doctrine of justification by a "first moral act" at the dawn of reason.²⁹ If St. Thomas is correct in this supposition, Dulles concludes that it must be possible for one to receive supernatural revelation prior to any instruction about the facts of redemptive history and their doctrinal interpretation. He comments, "In such a perspective, the interior illumination of grace seems to take on a

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 58. Dulles cites numerous passages from Vatican II documents to show that faith exists beyond the Catholic Church. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2; Abbott, 345, asserts the possibility of faith among the ecclesial communities separated from the Catholic Church. The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate*, 2; Abbott, 661, recognizes that not only Judaism and Islam, but even those faiths untouched by the influence of the biblical revelation, contain reflections of the radiance of that divine Truth "which enlightens all men," and therefore deserve to be men in a spirit of fraternal dialogue and friendly cooperation. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 3; Abbott, 112, implies that God's Word comes to men independent of his special historical revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments. It asserts that God "gives men an enduring witness of himself in created realities." This suggests to Dulles the possibility that faith cannot consist essentially in the explicit acceptance of any particular doctrines. He explains his view in these words, "While the faith of the professed Christian implies the acceptance of certain revealed truths, such acceptance is not precisely identical with faith itself." Dulles deduces as much from the notion supported by Vatican II statements that faith is possible without any explicit belief in the existence of God or any religious affiliation. See The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 16; Abbott, 35; The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, 22; Abbott, 221. See Avery Dulles, "The Modern Dilemma of Faith," in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith: Readings in Theology Compiled at the Canisianum, Innsbruck* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1968), 22-23.

²⁹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 58. The reference is to *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 89, a. 6).

greater constitutive role in the process of revelation than Latourelle is inclined to allow it.”³⁰ Dulles is quite outspoken when he says that the ineffable experience of the word holds a certain precedence over doctrine. He cites Maurice Blondel who observed, “It would be true to say that one goes from faith to dogma rather than from dogma to faith.”³¹

Revelation as Interior Grace

In this discussion, Dulles has emphasized the primacy of revelation as preconceptual disclosure. Revelation cannot first be doctrine or the interpretation of revelatory events. As an exponent of Catholic transcendental theology, Dulles locates revelation primarily in an experience or awareness of grace. He has gained this perspective from Karl Rahner’s theory of revelation presented in terms of an evolutionary view of the world. For Rahner, grace itself implies revelation, God’s self-communication to man who is a spiritual and self-conscious subject. Grace discloses God as

³⁰ Ibid. It appears that Dulles tacitly suggests what Thomas Hughson asserted, namely, that St. Thomas’s theology might not be the prototypical case of revelation-as-doctrine, “in the form of words having a clear propositional content.” (cf. Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 45) Hughson asks, “Does Aquinas fall under Dulles’s critique of revelation-as-doctrine?” Addressing the question, Hughson points to Victor White who asserts that Aquinas recognized vehicles for prophetic revelation other than rational concept, i.e., the concrete image, the phantasy, the dream, the hypnogogic uncontrolled imagination. Moreover, according to White, Aquinas recognized that the images seen by prophets were not mere signs of that which is otherwise knowable, but *symbols* for what actually transcends sense perception or rational comprehension. In White’s view, Aquinas has room for both symbolic knowledge of the divine and for the judgment affirming its truth. Thomas Hughson, “Dulles and Aquinas on Revelation,” *The Thomist* 52, 3 (July, 1988): 447-449. See Victor White, “St. Thomas’s Conception of Revelation,” *Dominican Studies* 1, 1 (Jan., 1948): 7, 20.

³¹ Ibid., 59. See Maurice Blondel, *History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 279.

communicating himself. The human subject is tending toward transcendent self-fulfillment in union with God. What Rahner calls transcendental revelation is simultaneously anthropocentric and theocentric.³² Applying Rahner's thought to the theology of grace, the Belgian Jesuit, Piet Fransen, holds that the inner experience is the focal point where revelation occurs.³³ Dulles derives numerous insights from Rahner and Fransen. Furthermore, Canon Mouroux's study of the personal structure of faith lends support to Dulles's notion that revelation as interior grace is essentially nonobjective and preconceptual. Through an act of faith man surrenders himself to an overwhelming reality made present to him by God's grace. Summarizing the ideas of Mouroux, Dulles comments, "The spiritual plenitude of this total engagement issues in a 'profound affirmation' that cannot be encompassed in words, concepts or judgments."³⁴

³² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 100. Transcendent self-fulfillment is Dulles's rendering of Rahner's term, "self-transcendence." Rahner means transcendence of the self in the direction of Spirit which can occur because the Absolute Being is spirit. Self-transcendence is apparent when the agent rises above itself and becomes ontologically richer than it was before. We are justified in saying that such an advance takes place because of the Absolute Being which is the cause and ground of the activity of the creature which transcends itself. Dulles provides a summary of Rahner's notions of transcendence and immanence or intervention in the creation whereby man's evolutionary striving is seen as having the possibilities of self-transcendence. See Avery Dulles, "Revelation and Discovery," in *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner*, S.J., ed. William J. Kelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 20.

³³ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 70. Both Rahner and Fransen insist that the transcendental experience of God is nonobjective, but it correlates with revelation through word and history. These theologians, however, should not be considered as exponents of Dulles's third model of revelation: Revelation as Inner Experience.

³⁴ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 60. In this same context, Dulles represents revelation as preconceptual knowledge assisting the Church in formulating and judging doctrine. In this process, the Church draws on abundant preconceptual knowledge gained through a mysterious contact with the divine Persons. Dulles is, of

Revelation, the Relational Dimension

With grace working interiorly, revelation links man in friendship with God. This relational dimension has significant implications for dogma. A theme in contemporary theology, according to Dulles, asserts that man is creatively transformed when he freely opens himself by faith to the God who offers himself in friendship. Vatican Council II reflects the same theme. The Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, relates that through his revelation, “the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends.”³⁵ If revelation is decidedly relational, Dulles questions whether revelation can any longer be perceived as divinely imparted timeless truths that are propositional in kind. He follows with a rhetorical question, “Or is revelation rather a living encounter in which man becomes linked in friendship with God, who opens up His heart to the creatures of His own predilection?”³⁶

Dulles has moved beyond the separation between revelation and propositional statement. In this discussion, we surmise that he doubts seriously that revelation may be perceived at all in propositional terms. Revelation is transcendental, gracious, interior, relational. It is not propositional! Dulles advances a new perception of revelation since Vatican II which signals also a new and different status for church dogma. He states, “The constitution *Dei Verbum*, without turning its back on previous Church

course, countering the notion that revelation comes to man as doctrine *per se*. If there be doctrine, revelation was there first as preconceptual awareness and knowledge.

³⁵ Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 23. See *Dei Verbum*, 2; Abbott, 112.

³⁶ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 48.

pronouncements, depicted revelation primarily as a vital interpersonal communion between God and man.”³⁷ In doing so, concludes Dulles, the constitution paved the way for the reconsideration of dogma. The new arises out of the demise of the old. Dulles puts the matter succinctly. Post-Conciliar theology calls into question four important features of the neo-Scholastic notion of dogma: its identity with revelation, its conceptual objectivity, its immutability, and its universality.³⁸

The Human Reciprocal Role in Revelation

Consider one additional aspect of this new perception of revelation, the notion of man’s role in revelation.³⁹ Dulles always asserts that divine self-communication is unilateral. He states that in the final analysis Christians are committed to one revelation and only one—the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ Still, he resists any notion that revelation or faith come to man without effort on his part and all at once. Faith is the supreme exercise of reason. Such faith arises when the spirit of man, borne by the divine Spirit (see 2 Pet. 1:21), overleaps itself. Human effort is involved. Dulles adds, “In biblical history, faith is not portrayed as a collection of abstract truths handed to man on a

³⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 158.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 21, 31 n. 15. On the subject of man’s role in the revelatory process, Dulles refers the reader to Karl Rahner, “Observations on the Concept of Revelation,” in K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, trans. W. J. O’Hara (*Questiones Disputationes*, 17: New York, 1966).

⁴⁰ Dulles, “Revelation and Discovery,” 22.

platter.”⁴¹ Again he stresses human involvement when he states, “All truth, and perhaps especially ‘revealed’ truth, is a laborious acquisition that takes the cooperation of many minds and the passage of many years. The Bible records the tortuous progress of the Judaeo-Christian phylum of revelatory history over the course of more than a millenium.”⁴²

There is an inconsistency at this point in Dulles’s argument. In many passages, he speaks of revelation as gift, as interior grace. Jesus, he asserts, is the unsurpassable self-communication of God. But he also says, to be involved in the divinization process as it radiates from Jesus requires an existential affinity with the meaning of the events themselves. It demands that one be caught up in the dynamism of the incarnation event itself. He then emphasizes in biblical terminology, no one comes to Jesus without being drawn by the grace of the Father (cf. Jn. 6:44). Here, Dulles speaks about grace and then about human involvement by human initiative. One senses a certain hesitation when he speaks about grace. He acknowledges that the dogmas of the Christian faith—such as the Incarnation, the atoning death of Jesus, and his resurrection—articulate what the community of disciples discerned as taking place in the event of Jesus Christ. But regarding revelation, he argues that man has a definitive role as receiver of “the event.” He states,

The mere fact of Christ, taken as an objectively certifiable occurrence, is not yet revelation, but when met by a believing interpretation which captures its true significance, it becomes revelation in a special and altogether unique sense. God’s

⁴¹ Dulles, “The Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 21.

⁴² Ibid.

self-revelation in Jesus therefore comes to fulfillment only in the human discovery whereby it is received.⁴³

Revelation, then, demands the complement of faith. “As something discerned by a spiritually attuned consciousness,” says Dulles, “revelation never truly exists outside of faith.”⁴⁴ And to some extent, at least, faith is human initiative and discovery. Faith is heuristic. Dulles can say, within the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy, that faith is a human acquisition as well as a divine gift.⁴⁵ He means that the Word of God comes to maturity only insofar as it also becomes the word of man. Against alleged passivity of faith, he argues that the creativity of the human mind should not be suppressed but rather enhanced by the grace of God. “Revelation occurs when man, under the quickening influence of the Spirit within him, correctly answers the questions of deepest import for his total destiny, his salvation.”⁴⁶

Dulles is not entirely clear about the relationship of the Spirit’s work interiorly and divine grace. Faith presented as both divine gift and human acquisition raises questions about the monergism of God’s grace. More to the point for our present subject, what are

⁴³ Dulles, “Revelation and Discovery,” 23.

⁴⁴ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 151.

⁴⁵ It is important to note in connection with the notion of faith as human initiative and discovery that Dulles distinguishes carefully between faith perceived in many corners as a religious experience and faith understood in Christianity as conscious adherence to a public revelation that can be traced through the apostolic tradition to Jesus Christ, who was himself divine. Dulles comments, “Faith in the Christian sense, therefore, is not simply a personal interpretation of one’s experience. It is an acceptance of a holy and divine revelation as the key to interpreting the meaning and goal of all human experience.” *Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 218.

⁴⁶ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 21.

the implications for dogmatic statements when revelation is viewed in terms of symbolic mediation and existential apprehension? The manner in which Dulles addresses this question is vital for comprehending his perception of the status of dogma.

Continuous Revelation

God communicates personally, offering himself to man in Jesus Christ. Working grace interiorly, the Holy Spirit enlarges man's horizons in awareness or faith, also termed self-transcendence toward Spirit or Being. Is revelation, then, an ongoing process? Does Dulles advocate continuous revelation versus once-for-all-time disclosure in the apostolic era? Hardly can any notion of continuous revelation accommodate static propositional revelation. If Dulles affirms continuous revelation, it is likely that he also affirms the need for continuous formulation or reformulation of doctrine. Again, revelation has a bearing on dogmatic formulation.

God's Continuous Speaking

The point of departure for Dulles on this subject is Vatican Council II. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, has stated, "For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to different ages."⁴⁷ Dulles comments on this passage: "The Pastoral Constitution, with its positive orientation toward contemporary history, implicitly affirms that revelation is a continuous process,

⁴⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 58; Abbott, 264.

and that it must be newly expressed for every age in prophetic witness.”⁴⁸ He notes how *Gaudium et spes* urges the Church to accurately discern “the signs of the times,” through which God communicates himself in a new way in every epoch of history.⁴⁹ According to Dulles, “the signs of the times,” signifies that God is present and active “in the happenings, needs, and desires” of the age and culture. Communication of his revelation continues to occur.⁵⁰ Again Dulles interprets and says:

The events of world history, viewed in the light of Christ, help to mature our understanding of what was initially revealed in Christ. Revelation, therefore, comes to fulfillment in the course of history, and through contact with the various forms of human culture, which bring out one or another aspect of the divine message.⁵¹

Thus, Dulles finds in the Pastoral Constitution a wider view of revelation in terms of secular and cosmic dimensions. He notes in particular that the constitution does not limit God’s revealing activity to the times long past. Indeed, God continues to speak to man through the life of the Church and the events of world history. This is confirmed in a passage from The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, which portrays divine tradition as a dynamically developing patrimony and assures us that by

⁴⁸ Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1969), 158.

⁴⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4. Abbott, 201-202. Footnote 8 in Abbott indicates that the phrase “signs of the times,” frequently employed by Pope John XXIII, especially as a heading for several passages in his, “Pacem in Terris,” though somewhat unfamiliar and even misleading to some, has found its way into the vocabulary of the church as a result of this usage by the Council.

⁵⁰ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 220.

⁵¹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 97.

means of tradition, “God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of His Beloved Son.”⁵² Dulles interprets this conversation to mean a process whereby the Church unceasingly discerns new aspects of what previously lay hidden. “The Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.”⁵³

Two themes emerge from these Vatican II statements and Dulles’s interpretation. First, God continues speaking. Second, the church continually discerns new insights which had previously lay hidden. Complementary to these themes is the notion that interaction with the culture provides insight into God’s speaking in the present time. This is what Dulles means by contextual revelations. Incorporating the well known phrase from Pope John XXIII, Dulles comments, “God speaks to us not simply through the Bible, ecclesiastical documents, and pastoral leaders but also through the ‘signs of the times,’ as Jesus pointed out to his adversaries.”⁵⁴

Revelation as God’s Christological and Ecclesial Speaking

In what manner God continues to speak is variously treated in Catholic theology and in the writings of Dulles. It bears repeating that Dulles clearly affirms the one definitive and final revelation in Jesus Christ! He is unmistakably clear about the Incarnation when he says, “Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ, since there can be no

⁵² *Dei Verbum*, 8; Abbott, 116-117.

⁵³ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 30.

⁵⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 85.

disclosure above or beyond that whereby God fully and unsurpassably communicates himself to the world in the life, teaching, death, and glorification of his Son.”⁵⁵ So, the Church cherishes the memory of God’s previous self-manifestations, and especially that of his irrevocable self-giving in Jesus Christ. But, it does not fixate on this “deposit of faith.” Dulles cautions that these tokens of God’s love and fidelity are not to be clung to for their own sake. They possess value for eschatological reasons. Their chief value, he says, is to nourish our trust that God continues, and will continue, to give himself until we see him “face to face.”⁵⁶

Moreover, Dulles indicates a number of ways in which the solidarity and finality of the “deposit” in terms of the Incarnation itself, is accommodating to the continuous speaking of God, understood as continuous revelation. Though God’s self-revelation reached its unsurpassable fullness in Christ, Dulles recalls how Vatican Council II left ample room for development in the Church’s assimilation of that fullness in new and unpredictable ways.⁵⁷ Furthermore, revelation is not complete without the Church.⁵⁸ By this statement, Dulles means to say that revelation as a communication from God to human beings, destined for their conversion and redemption, achieves itself only when it is

⁵⁵ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 219. Dulles refers to Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 2, where Christ is said to be, “the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation.” See Abbott, 112. Elsewhere, Dulles speaks of the traditional insistence of Christianity on the fullness of the revelation communicated once and for all in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, as witnessed by the apostolic Church. *Models of Revelation*, 112.

⁵⁶ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 220.

received and responded to in faith. This emphasis we noted earlier. Yet, here Dulles treats the Church as sacrament, the extended presence of Christ in the world. There is, then, an important sacramental aspect to revelation. The Church is deeply involved. Dulles explains best in his own words the relationship between the Incarnation and the Church in the process of revelation. He writes,

Revelation in this perspective is essentially Christological and ecclesial. It is Christological because Christ, as the Incarnate Word, expresses and communicates the unsurpassable self-donation of the divine. It is ecclesial because the Church perpetuates Christ's sacramental presence in the world, and is thus a sort of continued revelation.⁵⁹

Christ and the Church with reference to revelation is a recurring theme in Dulles's writings. Perhaps he articulates most clearly this relationship in terms of revelation when he says, "If Christ as sacrament is the culminating self-revelation of God, it follows that the Church, to the extent that it is the sacrament of Christ, is also a kind of concrete revelation of the divine."⁶⁰

In these reflections, there is an unmistakable sense that revelation is indeed continuous. What other conclusion is possible when Dulles states in this same connection, "The Church is always more revelatory in some degree, but is always called to become more revelatory than it is."⁶¹ This sacramental approach to revelation undergirds yet another notion—that continuous revelatory speaking is to be expected in the ongoing life of

⁵⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 171.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

the Church. Dulles asserts that Christians since biblical times have spoken with special assistance of the Spirit. And the Spirit, who previously “spoke by the prophets,” shall remain at work in the Christian community to the end of time. Dulles urges, therefore, that we should make an effort to identify the occasions on which God may be judged to be speaking through persons who have lived since Christ and the apostles.⁶²

The Question of Developing Revelation

Have we arrived at clarification about continuous revelation? Perhaps we should ask, “Is there developing revelation?” To be sure, it is difficult to reconcile any notion of developing revelation with the traditional insistence of Christianity—Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox—on the fullness of the revelation communicated once and for all in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, as witnessed by the apostolic church.⁶³ Yet Dulles affirms the Second Council’s Pastoral Constitution when it says that revelation is a continuing process.⁶⁴ The council said that the Church is open to development and assimilation of that fullness in Christ in new and unpredictable ways. Moreover, Dulles understands, though the council avoided using the term, “continuing revelation,” it did allow something

⁶² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 96.

⁶³ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 112.

⁶⁴ On this point, Dulles interprets the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The Constitution is saying that God reveals himself to his people to the extent of a full manifestation of himself in his incarnate Son, speaking to the culture proper to different ages. He continues to speak to man through the life of the Church and the events of world history. Dulles summarizes: “The Pastoral Constitution, with its positive orientation toward contemporary secular history, implicitly affirms that revelation is a continuous process, and that it must be newly expressed for every age in prophetic witness.” Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 158. See *Gaudium et spes*, 58; Abbott, 264.

of the kind.⁶⁵ What can this mean for the Church living in the period between the apostles and the eschaton?

Dulles is certain that God continues to communicate awareness of himself through the Holy Spirit, “and in that sense to reveal.”⁶⁶ Is such continued communication to be understood as developing revelation? No, not unless the contemporary Church reverts to sentiments expressed by Claude Lejay at the Council of Trent. Lejay said, “In general councils, the Holy Spirit has revealed to the Church, according to the needs of the time, numerous truths which were not explicitly contained in the canonical books of Scripture.”⁶⁷ Certainly this is an assertion of revelation development.

But Dulles does not teach revelation development. He only seeks to understand statements from Pope John XXIII and Vatican II which leave ample room for development in the Church’s assimilation of that fullness of God’s revelation in Christ.⁶⁸ He himself comprehends revelation as symbolic discourse. But he notes that signs and symbols of God’s self-communication are not new revelation in the sense of providing anything that could serve as an additional or independent norm of faith, over and above Christ and the gospel. He adds, “The signs of the times must be discerned in the light of the gospel, and only then can they serve to elucidate or confirm what is in principle a part

⁶⁵ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 30.

⁶⁶ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 237.

⁶⁷ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 39. See Gorres Gesellschaft, ed. *Concilium Tridentinum, Tractatum Pars Prior* 12 (Freiburg im Br., 1930), 523.

⁶⁸ Dulles, “Modern Dilemma of Faith,” 30.

of the gospel itself.”⁶⁹ By this statement, Dulles acknowledges that in the “signs of the times” there is continuous speaking on the part of the self-communicating God. But there can be no development of revelation beyond the very gospel “deposit” itself.

Developing Dogma

There is one question remaining. If there be essentially no developing revelation, does this mean that dogma does not and should not develop? The major thesis of this study is at issue at this point. We inquired whether there was a correlation between Dulles’s notions of revelation, symbolic mediation and existential apprehension, and reformulation of doctrine and development. We extended the discussion by asking whether Dulles’s revelation theory allows for revelation development? The answer to this question was no. Does this mean in Dulles’s view that dogma is irreformable and non-developing? To this question he also replies in the negative. That revelation is not developing does not preclude reformulation and development of church dogma. Dulles’s reflections on this issue are two dimensional. First, the agenda for individual faith prompts the discovery and expression of new formulas. Faith really comes into its own when the individual Christian derives effective guidance and illumination from what Christianity teaches. As individuals continue to appropriate the Christian tradition, making it real and effective for themselves, they shall find the capability to express it in new formulas that are authentically their own. In this way, says Dulles, the authority of revelation ceases to be,

⁶⁹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 237.

in Tillichian terminology, “heteronomous.” It becomes “theonomous.”⁷⁰

Second, the Church ultimately determines dogmatic reformulation and development. The magisterium of the nineteenth century acted on this principle and promoted what we have named developing revelation. Witness the status of the so-called “new dogmas,” the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the teaching of the Infallibility of the Pope. These “new dogmas” were defended because they were viewed in some manner implicitly contained in the apostolic deposit of faith even though historical or exegetical investigation does not sustain such a view. Clearly this is developing revelation. When the Church pronounced the “new dogmas”, it claimed infallibility for its assertion that these truths were in fact revealed. And it was sufficient to establish that they were believed as “revealed” by the Church today.

Dulles is not adverse to the new dogmas, much less does he disclaim them. But neither does he consider them “new revelation.” He entertains the notion of new formulation based on assumptions and methodology contradistinct to nineteenth century neo-Scholasticism. As a post-Vatican II theologian, Dulles adopts a balanced view. He respects past doctrinal statement while maintaining openness to new expressions. He has learned openness from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World which provides important clues for the unending process of distinguishing between the

⁷⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 39. In a related passage, Dulles tells how individual Christians, who meditate on the Scriptures and dwell within the Church and its tradition, can bring forth new riches pertinent to new situations. In this way the living voice of the gospel continues to resound in and through the Church, the community of faith where the deeper meaning of the Scriptures comes to light. See Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 224.

permanently valid content of Christian revelation and the time-conditioned formulations which necessarily come to us.⁷¹ The point here is that development for Dulles is not conterminous with revelation. Revelation is unsurpassable, final, and complete in Jesus Christ. Yet, this very revelation is at the same time tolerant and accommodating to new formulations.

The Mediation of Revelation by Symbol

Revelation, we contend, is for Dulles the matrix for doctrinal reformulation. In the light of this thesis, it seems important to observe that his principal notions about revelation contribute to his perception of reformulation and development of dogma. In this connection, some of the earlier topics treated in consideration of his epistemology and methodology may properly be expounded here in greater depth. His notion of symbolic mediation as communication and apprehension, the particulars of images and symbols related to revelation, and the interpretation of symbol with implications for reformulation will provide a detailed but lively discussion at this point. The object is to demonstrate how Dulles's theory of revelation does form and shape his notion of dogmatic development.

Revelation Understood as Symbolic Mediation

Avery Dulles explicates divine revelation in terms of symbolic mediation. Symbol is the primary medium for revelation. He believes that symbols as communicators have far more potential than explicit statements. Symbolic discourse brings human consciousness,

⁷¹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 97.

mind and being, into the realm of mystery. Symbol effects involvement of the whole person with the ineffable transcendent Being. This expanded involvement exceeds former notions of faith perceived as mere intellectual response to propositional statement.

Symbol communicates in unique ways. In contrast to propositional speech, symbol imparts its meaning, not by explicit denotation, but by suggestion and evocation.

Revelation as symbol may employ symbolic qualities of propositional speech, yet it is ever distinct from proposition. Also, symbolic mediation differs significantly from the claims of pure interior experience of the transcendency as well as from unmediated perceptions of the same. Dulles states this important distinction as follows:

According to this approach, revelation never occurs in a purely interior experience or an unmediated encounter with God. It is always mediated through symbol—that is to say, through an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define. Revelatory symbols are those which express and mediate God’s self-communication.⁷²

Dulles counters any notion that symbolic mediation is a subjective enterprise. Explaining his use of symbolic mediation dialectically with five models of revelation, he writes:

I maintained, revelatory symbols must themselves be understood not as projections of the believer’s subjectivity but rather as means by which God chooses to bring people into living relationship with himself, especially through the incarnate Word. I argued the case for what I called “symbolic realism.”⁷³

Though revelation as symbolic truth is non-objective, nevertheless it possesses cognitive capabilities on par with propositional revelation. Dulles concedes that symbolic knowledge is in the first instance participatory and implicit. Only through a subsequent

⁷² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 132.

⁷³ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 50.

process of reflection does it become in some measure objective and explicit.⁷⁴ The symbol, as Paul Ricoeur has said, “gives rise to thought.”⁷⁵ That symbol is at home with inscrutable mystery should not lead one to question its cognitive qualities. Dulles argues that symbol opens into a larger room of meaning, so to speak, so that its possibilities for knowledge are far more expansive than meaning and intelligibility reduced to the narrow confines of conceptual logic.⁷⁶ The cognitive capabilities of symbol, Dulles believes, can initiate one into a wealth and intensity of meaning that could not be conveyed by indicative signs.⁷⁷

The ultimate reality is mysterious, and Dulles believes that its true character will become better known through symbol than through conceptual and propositional discourse alone. The religious symbols confirm this notion for him. They give religious insight and imply something about the real order. Dulles sees definite cognitive content implicit in the originaive symbols. For example, the Cross reveals to the Christian something of the depths of God’s love; the Resurrection, something of power and fidelity. The doctrinal statements of Scripture and Christian tradition, says Dulles, are in many ways tributary to the seminal symbols.⁷⁸ Of all symbols, the revelatory word is the most

⁷⁴ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 47.

⁷⁵ Ibid. The reference is, Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 26.

⁷⁶ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 150.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 144.

spiritual and the most akin to the divine. However, the word is ever cognitive in substance as the self-expression of the revealing God who addresses his creatures by means of it. The word, says Dulles, works mysteriously on human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can describe or define. It points beyond itself to the mystery which it makes present. Then as the inspired words enter a stable tradition and become rooted in the collective consciousness of a believing people, they become still more palpably symbolic, certainly with cognitive capabilities.⁷⁹

Primary Revelatory Symbols

Dulles has stated that a symbol is a sign which may be called a gesture. The great series of mighty deeds by which God manifested His mercy and faithfulness to His chosen people are essentially God's gestures in history. Foremost among these gestures are the miracles, sign-events in which a properly attuned consciousness can recognize, so to speak, the handwriting of God. For they reveal what Paul calls the "philanthropy of God our Savior." (Tit. 3:5).⁸⁰ The symbol and gesture supreme is the Incarnate Son of God. The mighty deeds of Jesus climaxing with His total self-oblation on Calvary, and God's acceptance of that sacrifice in the Resurrection and Ascension—all these events symbolically disclose various aspects of his person and mission.⁸¹ As event and symbol, the Incarnation is an intrinsic element in the process of revealing. Dulles resists any de-

⁷⁹ Ibid., 151-152.

⁸⁰ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 23.

⁸¹ Ibid.

objectification of Christ when speaking of him as symbol. The Christ-symbol is not a free creation of the community, but is first of all a real event that brings the community into existence.⁸²

Christ as symbol sustains this community so that it becomes both sacrament and symbol. Dulles sees an expanded usage of sacrament in contemporary ecclesiology. A sacrament contains and transmits the grace that it signifies. Christ is the sacrament of God—the one in whom God’s redemptive love becomes present in a historically tangible manner in the world. In turn, the Church is the sacrament of Christ—the living symbol to all that he is still actively present in the world through his “alter ego” the Holy Spirit. Dulles asserts, “Christ is embodied in the community of his disciples.”⁸³ Moreover, as the sacrament of Christ in the world, the Church is a revelatory symbol. It is such a symbol not in the weak sense of merely standing for an absent reality, but in the strong sense of making palpable the divine reality that is present and hidden within itself.⁸⁴ As symbol the Church beckons its prospective members to embark upon the way of life for which it stands. All who answer the Church’s call become involved in the reality of the Church itself and by that fact they too are taken up into the sacramental sign.⁸⁵ This is to say, the

⁸² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 166-167.

⁸³ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 46. Dulles offers this definition: “A sacrament, and hence the Church as sacrament, is a socially constituted and communal symbol of grace as present and transforming individuals into a people.” *Models of Revelation*, 220.

⁸⁴ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Regarding the Church as sacrament and revelatory symbol, Dulles states, “Only in connection with the Church, the community of believers, does the individual have access to the revelation of God in Christ.” *Models of Revelation*, 220.

Church must be an efficacious sign—one in which the reality signified is manifestly present and operative. In other words, the Church must be a lasting incarnation in the world of God's redemptive love for all humankind as originally signified and concretized in Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

Symbolic discourse engages not only the Incarnation as symbol and the Church as sacrament and symbol, but also a third primary symbol, Holy Scripture. The Bible may be viewed as a revelatory symbol because it records great revelations which are symbolic. These revelations are principally miracles, theophanies, events, and teachings. Consider for example the miracle of the Exodus, the theophanies of Sinai, the inaugural visions of the major prophets, also the ecstasies of the apocalyptic seers. Highly symbolic circumstances surround Jesus' conception and birth. Dulles marks the numinous phenomena at the beginning of the Lord's ministry in the transfiguration. Then, his death on the Cross as well as the Resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit are symbolic events fraught with meaning at a time of "disclosure" in redemptive history.⁸⁷ No less than events, the central themes of the teaching of the prophets, of Jesus, and of the apostles are likewise symbolic in form, according to Dulles. For example, according to Norman Perrin, the Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus is not a clear concept or idea with a single, univocal significance; it is a symbol that "can represent or evoke a whole range or

⁸⁶ Ibid., 94. Here, Dulles elaborates on what have been called the traditional "four notes" of the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

⁸⁷ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 135.

series of conceptions or ideas.”⁸⁸

Furthermore, the very language of the Bible, especially the use of images, is the language of symbol. Dulles argues that the language is symbolic because it has to do with symbolic realities including, as noted above, the historical events recorded in Scripture.⁸⁹ In this regard, the majestic symbolism of the Bible points beyond itself to mystery in ways superior to explicit language and concepts. Dulles says, “While the Bible is not lacking in doctrine, its language suggests far more about God and His ways with man than it conveys by express concepts.”⁹⁰ The imagery of the Bible as symbol possesses great powers to evoke in man’s heart awareness of mystery. The inexhaustible riches discovered in the Bible by theologians and men of prayer are intimately bound up with the Bible’s symbolism.

Hermeneutics of Symbol

Revelation mediated by symbol calls for interpretation. Both the multitude of symbols and their individual nuances require interpreting. And the interpretation of symbol has implications for dogma, its formulation and reformulation. According to Dulles, symbol does much more than tacitly arouse interior consciousness. Symbol

⁸⁸ Ibid. See Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 33. Commenting on Perrin’s extended commentary on the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching, Dulles writes: “To seek to pin down some one definite meaning of the term ‘Kingdom of God,’ according to Perrin, would be to overlook the polysemic character of symbolic communication, which always suggests more than it clearly states.” *Models of Revelation*, 136.

⁸⁹ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 22.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

becomes revelation, but only when it is interpreted. And interpretation never occurs without a linguistic component.⁹¹ Therefore, Dulles places propositional explication of doctrine in the service of symbol. Unless monitored, the multitudinous images and their polyvalent signification play to subjective interpretations. To clear up ambiguity and prevent distortion, Christian doctrine sets necessary limits to the kinds of significance that can be found in the Christian symbols. For example, without doctrines, we could hardly find in the Cross of Christ the manifestation of divine grace and redemption.⁹² In this way, doctrine enriches the meaning of symbols. But it is also true, according to Dulles, that Christian doctrines “live off the power of the revelatory symbols.”⁹³ Speaking about the manner in which symbols are related to thematization and the discourse of theology,

Dulles summarizes:

The Christian symbols taken in the entire network that forms their context, and interpreted in the living community of faith, give secure directives for thought and conduct. Interpreted against the background of the symbols and of Christian life, certain conceptual formulations can be put forward as bearing the authority of revelation.⁹⁴

Essential for the proper interpretation of symbols is the community of faith and its leaders, the magisterium. Symbol draws the faithful into that “world of meaning,” the revealing God and his disclosure in the moment of revelation. The faithful participate. They are involved. From within their live existential relationship with the God who is

⁹¹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 152.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

spoken of as Father, Lord, Redeemer, and the like, symbols lose any ambiguity and receive a measure of definiteness.⁹⁵ Symbols evoke what lies beyond the range of conceptual logic and explicit statement. Accordingly this results in pluralism of meaning. An allowance is made for this. But Dulles trusts the steadying influence of the religious experience of the faithful. This is apparent in his comment about religious imagery:

Religious imagery is both functional and cognitive. In order to win acceptance, the images must resonate with the experience of the faithful. If they do so resonate, this is proof that there is some isomorphism between what the image depicts and the spiritual reality with which the faithful are in existential contact. Religious experience, then, provides a vital key for the evaluation and interpretation of symbols.⁹⁶

Furthermore, within the community of faith there is accountability to the magisterium as trustworthy witnesses. Dulles emphasizes this point especially for the sake of the novice. "Because symbols of faith cannot be reliably interpreted except within the community of faith, submission to the community and its leaders is still necessary to gain access to the Christian heritage."⁹⁷ Lest their oversight be heavy handed, Dulles recommends that the magisterium be attuned to revelatory symbols and employ symbolic discourse. He is certain that symbolic mediation of revelation far surpasses post-Tridentine and neo-Scholastic paradigms. Theologies represented in those paradigms failed to reckon with God's mysterious and personal presence in his word, a presence that lies beyond all human control. They spoke as though faith terminates in the words of the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁶ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 18-19.

⁹⁷ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 106.

hierarchical teachers. Therefore Dulles reflects, “In a deeper theology it becomes apparent that the ecclesiastical teaching, however authoritative, is at best a sign permitting the believer to receive or recognize the word of God, to which alone the assent of faith is due.”⁹⁸ Dulles comes full circle with a fitting observation about the transforming powers of symbol. Only as revelatory signs evoke what lies beyond the range of explicit statement can they be capable of radically reshaping the minds and lives of the recipient. As bearers of God’s self-communication, these signs both call for and have the power to effect conversion.⁹⁹

Revelation and the Status of Dogma

The present chapter opened with the assertion that Dulles’s theory of revelation has a direct bearing on his notion of dogmatic reformulation. Both his need to discover an alternative to propositional revelation and his notion of revelation as symbolic truth have implications for dogma. We have hinted at those implications in consideration of the primary revelatory symbols, Christ, the Church, and Scripture. Following that discussion, numerous questions remain. There is the question of finality. Are the ancient biblical and traditional church symbols bearers of meaning for the present era? Again, are the ancient creeds and symbols perdurable today? There is the question of modernization. What would the quest for updated symbols and images mean for church dogma? And there is the question of communication. How does the Church communicate non-objective

⁹⁸ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 115.

⁹⁹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 22.

mystery to a culture absorbed with the objectivity of science and technology? These questions are addressed in the closing paragraphs of the chapter.

The Status of Images

An Assumption

An assumption surfaces here in the form of a sequence. The assumption is that symbolic mediation in both of its facets, communication and apprehension, finally determines doctrine and doctrinal formulation. The sequence unfolds something like this: as symbols communicate, so goes the apprehension of revelation; as revelation is apprehended, so goes doctrinal formulation. In the background is yet another assumption expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. He asserts that the meaning of the classical text and of its symbols is never static.¹⁰⁰ According to Dulles's summary, Gadamer makes two important observations: (1) in every age, the Bible forms the consciousness of its own readers, brings its own horizon with it, and thereby shapes a tradition of interpretation, (2) today, we approach the text in a world that is different than the biblical world, i.e., since we are different, we understand the text in a different way, or we do not understand it at all.¹⁰¹ Gadamer himself mediates between these two statements. And Dulles follows Gadamer's centrist position. Historical consciousness, says Gadamer, distinguishes the horizon of the text from that of the interpreter, and limits itself to neither horizon.

¹⁰⁰ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 209. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 255.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Speaking to Gadamer's principle, Dulles affirms on the one hand that certain biblical images remain powerfully evocative. The biblical symbols should continue to be cultivated. On the other hand, they should not tyrannize the modern reader. Dulles is sensitive to the fact that two millenia separate the Church from the origin of the biblical texts. The common grace-given relationship to God shared by Christians in every generation bridges the time gap. Notwithstanding, there will be some reinterpretation of the biblical images and symbols. Passing through time, the Church will even educe new meanings and old from the stories, symbols, and teachings of Scripture.¹⁰²

Changing Images, Symbols, and Expressions

In his monograph "Myth, Symbol, and Biblical Revelation," which reappeared as the first chapter in *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, Dulles questions whether traditional Christian symbolism is obsolete as an idiom for communicating Christianity to the secular mentality of the day. He observes, "The example of the early Christians themselves suggests that the symbolism may be changed; faith can never be bound to a single set of images. The overwhelming realities of revelation are such that they can never be contained within a set of terms."¹⁰³ Still, at the time of publishing *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* in the late 1960s, Dulles was not yet prepared to give a simple yes or no answer to the question whether the biblical symbolism is outmoded today. We noted above how he considers certain biblical images powerfully evocative in the present time.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 43.

But he also considers it urgent, as Pope John XXIII declared, to restate the Christian message in “the literary forms of modern thought.” He comments:

It seems clear . . . that the biblical images do not furnish sufficient materials for evangelizing the increasingly secular and urban world in which we live. . . . At no time in her history has the Church been content to reproduce mechanically the symbols of the Bible. It continually forges new ciphers to convey more adequately that which, in its full reality, bursts the bonds of any human language.¹⁰⁴

This statement recalls an earlier assumption Dulles made regarding revelation and the frailties of human language. The latter in any generation or culture is much too limited to adequately convey the revelation of God. Therefore, the self-communicating God has chosen symbol for divine disclosure. And symbolic language is not tied to the dialect of one group or another. It may be expressed adequately in any number of images or languages. Acting on this assumption, the Church may pursue various expressions even at the level of its official speaking of dogmatic statements.

Additional Nuances of Revelation Theory

Several nuances in Dulles’s revelation theory at least have an indirect bearing on his notion of doctrinal formulation. Dulles elaborated on his view of a separation between revelation and propositional content and form. He arrived at this understanding convinced that revelation is essentially mystery and can never be fully objectified. We review briefly the significance of this assertion. Dulles states that rightly understood revelation is a divine action, i.e., transcendent mystery far exceeding man’s finite state. It is obvious to Dulles, therefore, that there can be no absolute equation between the word of God and the words

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 45.

of men. However, there can be a paradoxical or dialectical identity between the two. Moreover, consciousness of the historical conditioning and the relativity of all human utterances does not in any way negate the word of God. This consciousness simply enables us to situate the human coefficient and thus to perceive more clearly the truth that is divine.¹⁰⁵

The distinction and separation between revelation and propositional articulation suggests another subtle nuance in Dulles's thought, namely, the distinction between gospel and revelation. For purposes of this discussion, it is important to distinguish between gospel content, i.e., the unsurpassable revelation of the Incarnate Son of God, and the gospel as proclamation, teaching, also dogma, i.e., the gospel as external symbol. According to Dulles, the truth of the gospel as substance or content does not come to us in any eternally valid (gospel) representations. This is so because these representations consist of man's concepts which are necessarily drawn from the fluctuating world in which he finds himself.¹⁰⁶ As such, these same representations do not by themselves contain the "truth" of the gospel. What they do is serve to facilitate the encounter with "mystery," or revelation. The content of these representative statements may be the Incarnation. Still, they serve as symbol, even as the Incarnation is symbol, in order to effect the encounter with mystery in Jesus Christ. To summarize, revelation is by the imparting of grace itself, the self-communication of God, the absolute Spirit, to the spirit and freedom of man. In his existential awareness of the ineffable transcendence, man as spirit moves toward Spirit.

¹⁰⁵ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 189.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Like the prophets and religious founders who have most vividly apprehended the mystery of the self-revealing God, man as recipient of revelation today expresses such reception by means of concepts and terms derived from the culture in which he lives.¹⁰⁷

In the present culture, the Church's "gospel" preaching, teaching, and dogmatic statements are ever historically conditioned. What is more, according to Dulles, they are disengaged from revelation itself. Could Dulles agree with Lutheran theology which affirms that when the gospel is preached, God reveals Himself in Christ as a loving and merciful God? The correspondence between gospel content and gospel word in Lutheran theology is not apparent in Dulles's schema. In his view, revelation as salvific truth is an existential reality. Having to do with the redemption of man and the world, salvific truth is, most centrally, the mystery of God's self-communication. And that divine communication comes to us as a call to transcend our limited self-interest and to entrust ourselves to God.¹⁰⁸ This revelation, however, is disengaged from any human statement or formulation, even though such expressions are necessary. The gospel word cannot in any sense be salvific truth because doctrinal formulations, whatever their shape or variety,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 203. These concepts, says Dulles, have to be interpreted against the horizon of the fundamental experience of grace. On this point, he quotes Karl Rahner who states, "The imparting of grace itself is always of itself the basic mode of revelation itself, because grace as the self-revelation of God, the absolute Spirit, to the spirit and freedom of man, never resides in man as a merely objective, absolutely pre-conscious condition." 203. Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards from the 1963 ed., rev. by J. B. Metz (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 22 n. 6. Dulles explains that this footnote was actually written by Metz. But it represents the thought of Rahner. See *Survival of Dogma*, 227-228, n. 29.

¹⁰⁸ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 179.

are incapable of embracing the mystery of revelation in a pure state.¹⁰⁹ The gospel is essentially Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection, and the Lord's Exaltation. But even these crucial gospel events are not themselves revelation according to a pure understanding of it. They are symbols framed out of the prophetic-apostolic experience. They function in order to evoke awareness of the mystery, the self-communicating God, revelation. They draw the believer into that mystery as one participating in the grace relationship with the revealing God. Though Dulles concedes that the truth of the gospel must come to us through human formulas, he is adamant in his contention that revelation could not be borne by the text, the words of men.¹¹⁰ Scripture and tradition, or dogmas and confessions, may be considered as bearers of revelation in the sense that they serve in the schema of symbolic mediation. At most these sources have symbolic significance as they serve to evoke an existential affinity with the self-communicating God. As Russell has observed, Dulles does not deny that the witness of Scripture and the interpretive experience of Christian tradition consistently offer a context for the renewal of faith.¹¹¹ Still, these sources have revelatory significance only to the extent of their function as symbols for the mediation of revelation to man existentially.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. The disengagement of revelation from gospel communication is clearly apparent in Dulles's theory of revelation. However, it bears repeating in this connection. Dulles says, "Once revelation is understood as a divine action, it is obvious that there can be no absolute equation between the word of God and the words of men." Ibid.

¹¹¹ John F. Russell, "The Development of Theology of Revelation in the United States in the Decade after *Dei Verbum*: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Theological Writings of Avery Dulles, S.J. and Gabriel Moran, F.S.C." (S.T.D. diss. The Catholic University in America, 1978), 104.

Dogmatic Formulation

In the light of their disengagement from revelation rightly understood, what is the status of dogmatic statements? How are Scripture, tradition, creeds, and confessions serviceable in the Church's life and ministry? With limitations by virtue of historical and cultural conditioning, are they in any sense normative? Do doctrinal statements possess enduring value for future generations and eras of the Church? Considering that they emanate from the experience of those who framed them, in what respects are they reformable? Answers to these questions contribute much to the remaining major topic of this study, Dulles's development theory.

On one hand, doctrinal statements are indispensable. When one speaks about the themes of revelation, he necessarily has to use concepts and terms drawn from his experience in the world. Dulles recognizes that there is no other way to designate the saving mysteries except with the help of ideas and terminology supplied by the culture in which we live.¹¹² Still, Dulles tends to assign a diminished value to these statements. In his view, they are at best limping and sometimes faltering expressions of revelation. Such formulations are man's feeble attempt to symbolize in creed and statement as well as deeds and even sacrament, what he knows interiorly by grace in a non-objective manner. It is that interior knowledge afforded by the Holy Spirit that surpasses all expression of the same in doctrinal statements! Reaching out toward the absolute, with which he is already mysteriously in contact, man is conscious of the relativity and conceptual poverty of his

¹¹² Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 179.

own affirmations.¹¹³

Doctrinal expressions follow and reflect upon the revelatory experience. They are ever secondary to that primary intrinsic apprehension of mystery. Whether creed or dogma, the doctrinal statement can only be tentative.¹¹⁴ To designate them as final determinative norms would be to minimize unduly the role of the Holy Spirit who is given to the Church for the sake of adequate discernment in all times (cf. Jn. 16:13). In this light, Dulles takes to task attempts to make the “letter” of past magisterial pronouncements statically objective and determinative. He urges that the Church should be content to state the contents of Christianity in a meaningful and credible way for men of the present time. He asserts, “No one generation can capture the abiding content of the faith in a ‘chemically pure’ state, so as to commit all future generations to repeat its formulations.”¹¹⁵ One may legitimately ask, “For what good purpose do such tentative dogmas serve?” Dulles reverts to his notion of revelation as mystery. He answers, “The dogmatic statement has its theological intelligibility by reason of its ability to conjure up, in some sort, the experience of the absolute mystery that communicates itself to us in the

¹¹³ Ibid., 202. Dulles states, “If revelation is essentially mystery, it can never be fully objectified.” He explains that it is the experience of grace—inarticulate though it be—that ultimately judges the appropriateness of doctrinal formulation. See *Survival of Dogma*, 205.

¹¹⁴ Because the present generation can do nothing more than make use of the terms and concepts at hand in a given culture, these very cultural specific statements will advisedly undergo review and perhaps also reformulation by theologians in later generations. See *Survival of Dogma*, 205.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 212.

grace of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁶

Summary

Anticipating the discussion in the next chapter, we may inquire, “What are the long range capabilities of dogma when it functions in the expressive and evocative manner described by Dulles?” Surely he is convinced that the ancient dogmas, perhaps also the creeds, might well be reconsidered from the vantage of new cultural situations. Is such a program deserving of attention from the universal Church? Do not these much dated doctrinal standards communicate eternal truths?

When we put such an inquiry as the last question to Dulles, we must remember that he answers consistently from his understanding of transcendental revelation. Eternal truth, if it be communicated at all, is the expression of the present self-communication, the divine disclosure mediated to man, a disclosure involving also man’s participation in that revelatory moment. Dulles recognizes the validity of dogmatic expressions which originated when the Church, guided by a sure instinct of faith, accepted or rejected certain views. He concedes that the contemporary Church may even be guided by these ancient statements. But he hastens to emphasize that contemporary Christians are not bound to accept the conceptual-linguistic frameworks within which the ancient statements were formulated. On the basis of his assertions and arguments presented here, Dulles has concluded that those dated frameworks are not up to expressing the experience of revelation by contemporary believers. Moreover, Dulles would have us remember that

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 203. See Karl Rahner, “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” trans. K. H. Kruger, *Theological Investigations*, 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 60.

Christians in each successive generation have had the courage to rethink their faith in the light of the most pressing problems of the day. Can the present generation have less courage in the face of the cultural shifts occurring in the present era?

To summarize, the cultural and historical specificity of dogmatic statements disengaged from revelation and in some instances hopelessly out of step with succeeding generations and their experiences of revelation calls for reformulation. Dulles is convinced that the Church should by all means proceed with this task even in the face of tensions with the longstanding notion that ancient creeds and dogmas possess distinctive and long range transcultural significance which prevails until the eschaton. For Dulles, it is apparent that the immediate task of dogmatic reformulation in order to best communicate the Church's faith to this and future generations is more important than waiting to resolve these tensions. We have shown how his revelation theory is essentially the matrix for such a program of dogmatic reformulation. It remains to be seen in the following chapter how strains of this same revelation theory influence his notions of development.

CHAPTER FIVE

DULLES'S TREATMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOGMA

The Background to Development Theory

Question: Is there Development?

Is there development of dogma in the Roman Catholic Church? This question is essential for an understanding of Dulles's views of development. The status of church dogma has long been debated by Catholic theologians. Non-development of dogma was espoused by the magisterium following Vatican Council I and more recently by theologians of the *nouvelle theologie*. However, these two bodies opposed development for different reasons. Vatican I rejected the notion that revelation is something progressively discovered by human effort. The council declared that revelation is a "divine deposit delivered to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared."¹ Peter and his successors were to be the custodians of this one declared "deposit." Dulles summarizes, "For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that by his revelation they might make known new doctrine, but that by His assistance they might inviolably keep and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith delivered through

¹ H. Denzinger, ed. *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 32nd ed., rev. A. Schönmetzer (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1963), 3020. (Hereafter, DS). Cited by Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1969), 76.

the apostles.”² This was the position of Vatican I and the magisterium in the decades following the council.

Also opposed to development of dogma, but for other reasons, were the theologians of the *nouvelle theologie*. According to Dulles, Henri de Lubac attempted to expose the fallacious argument advanced by Charles Boyer, S.J., and others who maintained that new dogmas arose by logical deduction from earlier doctrinal formulations. Furthermore, de Lubac held that the original “deposit” of revelation consisted in a concrete adherence to the person of Christ independent of doctrinal statement. The mystery of Christ, to which the apostles bore witness, was never a mere object of intellectual assent. Faith apprehends the mystery of Christ as faith in action versus intellectual assent to a doctrinal formulation. Hence there is no development of statement. De Lubac is saying that dogma doesn’t have to develop. Indeed, it does not develop because Christ himself is the totality of dogma (*le Tout de Dogme*), the first and the last, and hence the unsurpassable. And notions of variation and reformulation of dogma are simply a flair from the interior experience of being through the process of revelation.³

Development within the Context of Church Reform

What is Dulles’s position with respect to non-development advocated by

² Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 76.

³ Ibid., 148. Dulles cites de Lubac’s article on the development of dogma, “Le probleme du developement du Dogme,” *Reserches de Science Religieuse* 35 (1048), 130-160.

theologians representing either Vatican I or the *nouvelle theologie*? He distances himself from both groups. Reasonable change in keeping pace with the culture is peculiar to Dulles. And he became an advocate of development. There is something of “development” in his thinking. For instance, he expresses a basic conviction about the function of dogmatic definitions. Instead of closing the discussion of a question, definitions are to keep open the path toward future reflection and possible development. Dulles agrees with Walter Kasper who has said that dogmas point beyond themselves and open up the future of the Church rather than bring it to a halt.⁴ Similarly Dulles is reluctant to view church dogma at any time in history as a fixed and final word. This is a sure sign of his openness to notions of dogmatic development.

This study intends to demonstrate that development for Dulles is shaped within the context of church reform. But the actual genesis of his positive attitudes toward development is reflected in what he saw as an ecumenical problem manifest in resistance outside the Catholic community to the notion of “*Ius Divinum*.” He says, “Perhaps *ius divinum* may best be understood as something given only inchoatively at the beginning—that is to say, as something that unfolds in the history of the Church.”⁵ Dulles

⁴ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma*. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 205-206. See Walter Kasper, “Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen?” *Stimmen der Zeit* 179 (1967): 409. Dogma in the sense of openness to future discussion, decision, and development is a principle Dulles applies to the definition of the dogma of infallibility, an instance of doctrinal expression in language and literary forms of a particular time, precisely the year 1870. If formulated today for the first time, the definition, says Dulles, would sound different. In fact, the word “infallibility,” may not even be used.

⁵ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 87.

suggests that such a dynamic perception of *ius divinum*, if accepted, would be consonant with the dynamic understanding of divine tradition set forth in the Constitution of Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.⁶ This reference to *ius divinum* is not intended to mark chronologically Dulles's earliest ideas of development theory. It simply reflects his rudimentary thinking and outlook. His reference to the gradual unfolding of new understandings of divine law is an indication that he is thinking development. The notion of an inchoate beginning of an idea and its future flowering in the Church is something of a paradigm for development.

Dulles concretizes his notions of development similar to the manner in which he expresses perceptions of church reform. The second chapter of his book, *The Resilient Church*, is titled, "Church Reform Through Creative Interaction." Here Dulles distinguishes reform from revolutionary ideas. Appropriate reform signals change that recognizes and affirms the original nature and identity of that which is being changed. In the Church, appropriate reform measures do not introduce ideas and practices that are foreign to the true spirit of Catholicism. Reform may best be understood as "renewal" in that it takes its inspiration from what has already been given in Christ.⁷ Yet Dulles also believes that reform must be accepted more radically than in the past. Reform will extend to all aspects of the Church's life: morality, governmental structures, discipline, liturgy,

⁶ Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, chapter 2. See Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (The America Press, 1966), 114f. (Hereafter, Abbott)

⁷ Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 1-2, 31.

and [significantly] doctrine. Dulles admits the sensitivity of many Catholics to reform in doctrine.⁸

More particular development occurs within the context of church reform which Dulles labels creative interaction or response. Historically, corporate reform of the Church as an institution has been conceived in various ways. Dulles reduces them to three:

1. Repristination or restoration. Reform is a restoration of the Church to its original state of perfection, or in a word, repristination. This view is generally criticized today for unduly idealizing the period of Christian origins as a norm of faith and practice for today.
2. The developmental concept of reform reflects what Newman and others held, namely, the Church must constantly develop. This view rests upon a somewhat optimistic estimate of the powers of human nature aided by grace. The Church with the Spirit bestowed by Christ as its soul, assimilates from the secular culture without adulteration.
3. Reform as interaction or response gives attention to the interplay between the Church and its environment. Because the Church is under obligation to keep abreast of the times, reform is not simply a matter of internal evolution but of dialogue between the Church and other human communities.⁹

Formerly, the Church had been the controlling influence in Western culture. Reform by development and assimilation had been an adequate model. But today a proper respect for the autonomy of secular life, says Dulles, demands a less possessive and more dialogic relationship. Therefore, he prefers the third type of reform. And he takes a mediating

⁸ Ibid., 45. Inclusion ours.

⁹ Ibid., 32-33. According to Dulles, the third concept of reform acknowledges that the Church can properly accept innovations that do not simply grow out of its own previous ways of speaking and acting, not because they were wrong in themselves, but because they have ceased to be appropriate.

position. Dulles is aware of the lengths to which some theologians would carry church reform. For instance, Yves Congar insisted that the present epoch of radical change and cultural transformation called for a revision of “traditional” forms which goes far beyond the level of adaptation or *aggiornamento*, and which would be instead a new creation. No longer is reform a matter of adapting to what has already been. It is necessary to reconstruct the past. This was Congar’s program.¹⁰ Pursuing a more moderate course, Dulles preferred what he calls “creative interaction” to indicate both the element of novelty and the element of continuity with the Church’s past.¹¹

Responsive and dialogical church reform provides a background for doctrinal reformulation deemed appropriate for the times. The Church is understood no longer substantialistically, but relationally. In the old monologic view, it seemed possible to delineate in an exact and precise manner the essentials of the Church. But the new dialogic outlook infers that the forms and structures of the Church must be constantly revised in view of the shifting human environment in which the Church lives and carries out its mission.¹² This new concept of reform is shaped by Vatican Council II. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, pictures the Church like a pilgrim on its way through history. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, portrays the Church for Dulles, not in static terms, immune from change and incapable of progress,

¹⁰ See Yves Congar, “Renewal of the Spirit and Reform of the Institution,” in A. Muller and N. Greinacher, eds., *Ongoing Reform in the Church, Concilium 73* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 47.

¹¹ Ibid. Footnote 9. 200.

¹² Ibid., 33.

but concretely, the pilgrim Church involved in history.¹³ Moreover, when the council advocated adaptation, it made allowance for sweeping change which involved, among other things, the possibility of doctrinal reformulation. Dulles so interprets the Council documents when he writes, "The mutable elements in the Church, such as its liturgy, its canon law, and even the manner in which its doctrinal teaching is formulated, must be constantly adapted to the needs and opportunities of the times."¹⁴

Dulles seems to be fascinated by a dynamic view of the Church, dependent upon anticipated new outpourings of the Holy Spirit which abound also in Christendom outside Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ The Decree on Ecumenism, says Dulles, advanced beyond earlier and inadequate notions of the *vestigia ecclesiae* to a point that the Church recognizes the interior working of the Spirit in non-Catholic Christians.¹⁶ As the Church reconsiders her own dogmatic statements in the present time, she may profit from review of formulations advanced by non-Catholic Christians. Openness and interaction with other Christians may provide lessons which assist the Church to adapt its dogmatic formulations in the present environment.

¹³ Avery Dulles, *The Dimensions of the Church: A Postconciliar Reflection* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1967), 17, 29. See *Lumen gentium*, 9; Abbott, 24-26; *Unitatis redintegratio*, 6; Abbott, 350-351.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶ See the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3, Abbott, 345; the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, nos. 14, 15, 16, Abbott, 32-35.

The Reconsideration of Irreformability

The new understanding of reform inspired by Vatican II led to openness on several fronts. Dulles saw the Church prepared to initiate reforms in order to facilitate interactive dialogue with the culture. He understood such reforms to include reconceiving and expressing the Christian message for the Church's "living exchange" with the diverse cultures of people.¹⁷ This exchange necessarily involved reformability of doctrinal expression, an initiative contradistinctive to the First Council's monologic view of reform. For nearly a century after Vatican I, the magisterium continued to insist on the irreformability of dogma. The strict interpreters of the First Council maintained that affirmations had to be retained and even their very concepts and terms were to remain in force when endorsed by the highest authority.¹⁸

Vatican II, however, seems to take a more liberal approach. The Second Council reforms were typically those of the third type described above. Consonant with this dialogic and interactive approach, Dulles observed that it is difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to specify irreformable elements either in structure or belief that could under

¹⁷ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 34-35. Dulles expresses the sentiments of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44; Abbott, 246.

¹⁸ The only admissible type of development was a further refinement of original teaching. Other notions of reformability such as that offered by Henri Bouillard did not appear to be countenanced. Bouillard suggested that Christian truth is imbedded in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure. He saw development as a discontinuous shift into a different thought system. Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 194, 196. See Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grace selon S. Thomas d' Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 220.

no conceivable circumstances be relinquished. Dulles is not pitting the two councils against each other. But he sensed that Vatican II was open to considering the notion that the concrete form of any dogmatic statement is historically and culturally conditioned. Therefore, he favored reformability of doctrine consistent with his own notions of dialogic and interactive church reform. He summarizes, "Fidelity, then, is not a matter of holding on to certain objective constituents that were present at an earlier time. Rather, it is a matter of doing what is required in order that the gospel may remain living and effective."¹⁹

Limitations on Reformability

Dulles is aware that pressing adaptation and reformability could result in unfortunate overreactions. Certain radical elements in the late 1960s and through the 1970s interpreted much of Vatican II as a license for individualism. Against these free spirits, Dulles made a strong defense of the Church's dogmas. In one passage, he comments:

The Catholic Church is deeply conscious of its responsibility to proclaim, without dissimulation or attenuation, God's revelation in Christ. Like other Christian bodies, the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the teaching of the Bible and to the articles of the creed—especially those basic articles dealing with the triune God, the Incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and our hope of unending life. Like most other Christian bodies, too, the Catholic Church cherishes in its own tradition certain specific teachings which it regards as non-negotiable. They are badges of the Church's identity.²⁰

Dulles asserts that the Church stands under the gospel. It may not arbitrarily change its

¹⁹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

teachings, its structures, and its practices at will. Only the demands of the gospel can determine what must be retained and what must be altered for the sake of continued faithfulness.²¹ Speaking in this manner, it almost seems that he defends irreformability. But we should understand that taken as a whole, his statements about doctrine and reformulation consistently follow the intentions of Vatican II. In fact, some discussions of development noted later in this study may indicate that he exceeds the bounds of the Second Council! Here, he is obviously more reserved. He cautions his fellow theologians. In the interest of reform, they should not uncritically take over whatever the secular world finds appealing. “They should propose only changes that have been carefully checked for their consonance with God’s revelation in Christ.”²²

The Problem of the New Dogmas

The New Dogmas and the Apostolic Deposit of Faith

Dulles upholds faithfully the integrity of the apostolic “deposit” of faith. But he confronts realistically the tensions created by the appearance of the so-called “new dogmas”.²³ These new dogmas presented a challenge to the magisterium, and they posed

²¹ Ibid., 34.

²² Ibid., 43.

²³ The expression “new dogmas” refers particularly to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the declaration of the Infallibility of the Roman Bishops. The former came as an encyclical, *Ineffabilis Deus*, issued by Pius IX on December 8, 1854. The latter was enunciated by Vatican Council I when the Council adopted The First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ also known as *Pastor aeternus* on July 18, 1870. Although much later, *Munificentissimus Deus*, the 1950 apostolic constitution of Pius XII defining the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary into heaven, is frequently also

a dilemma for the theologians. On one hand, the Church remained committed to the view that the deposit of faith had become complete with the apostles—a view evident in the decrees of Vatican I and restated emphatically in the Roman condemnations of Modernism. Yet the new dogmas, without any apparent connection to the original deposit, were proclaimed as truths revealed by God. Claiming that the new dogmas were revelation, the magisterium left it to the theologians to show how these recent dogmas were contained in the original deposit. The magisterium felt no obligation to prove by historical research that the new dogmas indeed were primitive. Dulles comments on these dogmas:

It seemed sufficient to establish that they were believed as revealed by the Church of today. For the Church claimed infallibility for its assertion that these truths were in fact revealed. To show how the new dogmas were contained in the original deposit was, according to the popes, the task of the theologians.²⁴

Clearly, the issue is the development of dogma. What the magisterium was satisfied to not investigate at length, the theologians took seriously. They produced theories of development that fall into two general categories—the logical and the organic. We shall consider these general theories and Dulles's own thinking in this regard, but not before addressing two additional factors surrounding the development of the new dogmas.

The Impact of Popular Devotion on the Development of Dogma

Any theory of dogmatic development advanced in the late twentieth century must take seriously not only the implications of Vatican II, but especially the contribution of the

classified as a “new dogma.”

²⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49.

Church's worship and piety to the advent of the new dogmas, in this instance the Marian dogmas which appeared in the two encyclicals: The Immaculate Conception (1854) proclaimed by Pius IX and the proclamation of the Assumption of Mary by Pius XII in 1950. In his early reflections and writings, Dulles was accepting of these encyclicals as initiatives of the magisterium. Later, he sought to account for the new Marian dogmas, seeing that they were not part of the original apostolic "deposit." He discovered an approach to the problem in the ancient maxim, *lex orandi/lex credendi*, which showed promise of a mutuality between faith and prayer. That relationship is grounded in the early centuries of the Church. In Chapter 8 of the *Indiculus gratiae* of Pope Celestine I (422-32), the Holy Father exhorted the Church to examine the sacred words of the prayers of the priests as these words were handed down from the apostles so that the law of supplication may establish the law of believing (*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*).²⁵ If the "law of supplication" emanates from the apostolic command, it seems clear as stated by Prosper, the reputed penman of this chapter of the *Indiculus*, that

²⁵Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 200. Dulles explains that the composition of this papal exhortation is attributed to the lay monk Prosper of Aquitaine. In a passage from his *The Call of All Nations*, Prosper relates the supplications for all sorts and conditions of men to the apostolic precept in 1 Timothy 2:1-4. Dulles finds some correspondence between this reference and the exhortations in chapter 8 of the *Indiculus*. Here, "the law of supplication," petitions in the Good Friday liturgy embracing infidels, Jews, heretics, schismatics, lapsed Catholics, and catechumens, demonstrate how the Church is to pray in view of the teaching of the apostles found in Scripture (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-4). Dulles treats this subject in an essay presented for a Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture held in North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, October 8-11, 1992. The title is, "Theology and Worship: The Reciprocity of Prayer and Belief." The essay first appeared in *Ex Auditu: An International Journal of Theological Interpretation of Scripture* 8 (1992): 85-94. It was published again as Chapter 13 in the second edition of *The Craft of Theology* under the title, "Theology and Worship."

all priests and all the faithful were to adhere to the norm for supplication set forth in the apostolic teaching. Dulles concludes, "In instructing the Church how to pray the apostle is implicitly teaching what it should believe. In this instance the requirements of prayer are laid down in Scripture, to which Prosper appeals as his primary authoritative source."²⁶

Dulles's argument, however, is not that the Church's doctrine is derived from Scripture. Instead, he points to the close bond between prayer and doctrine which can already be noted in the New Testament.²⁷ Furthermore, he believed that the contents of the fifth century encyclical of Pope Celestine demonstrate how it is possible that Mariology as one area of popular devotion could have significant influence on the development of new dogma. He notes traces of devotion to Mary in the early church and in the Middle Ages. The conception and birth of Mary, and later her assumption, came to be a part of the Church's life and more formally, its liturgy and calendar of feast days. The visibility of Mary was such that Dulles could conclude, the *lex orandi* played a real but modest part in bringing about the Catholic dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The Church and its worship, combined with the devotion of the people, paved the way for the papal encyclicals which generated these new Marian dogmas.²⁸

²⁶ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 201-202.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁸ For a millenium or more prior to the encyclical of Pius IX in 1854, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was visible in both the Litany of Loret and in the Preface of that mass, so that, in the words of the pontiff, "the rule of prayer might thus serve to establish the rule of belief." See *Collectio lacensis* 6 (Freiburg: Herder, 1882), 837 and Dulles's modified translation in *Papal Documents on Mary*, ed. William J. Doheny and Joseph P. Kelly (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 65. Dulles explains, as a belief, the dogma of the Assumption antedates the Immaculate Conception and is traceable to several

With varying intensity, the theologians have assigned significance to *lex orandi/lex credendi* for the Church's dogma. Both Edmund Schlink and Yves Congar affirm in their own way a definite relationship between worship and teaching. Schlink admits to the timely necessity of dogmatic statements, but these same statements should be recognized as secondary and derivative in relation to the Church's doxological expression.²⁹ Yves Congar, seeking a way of overcoming the doctrinal impasses between the Orthodox and Catholic churches on the procession of the Holy Spirit, sees dogma as only a landmark in the Church's experience of the fullness of its faith which it attains by celebrating it, faith lived out and expressed in spiritual life and prayer.³⁰ Though other theologians make a sharp distinction between worship and belief, Dulles follows Schlink and Congar. He sees the closest relationship. He says, "Whether the law of prayer governs the law of believing, or vice versa, it appears from all the cases here surveyed that the two finally coalesce and support one another."³¹ We may recognize that the language of prayer and

seventh-century theologians. The Assumption or Dormition of Mary was celebrated in certain Eastern liturgies as early as the sixth century. It was held as a "pious belief" through the centuries, even by the great Scholastic *doctores*, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. When Pius XII defined the dogma, he spoke of this doctrine as something already known and accepted by Christ's faithful. See Pius XII, "Munificentissimus Deus," quoted from *Papal Documents on Mary*, 308.

²⁹ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 208. See Schlink's essay, "The Structure of Dogmatic Statements as an Ecumenical Problem," where he calls attention to the differences between doxology and teaching. Edmund Schlink, *The Coming of Christ and the Coming of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 16-95.

³⁰ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 208-209. Dulles cites from Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985), 100.

³¹Ibid., 208.

that of dogma are distinct, the former appealing more to imagination and the emotions, the latter tending to be more conceptually precise, even frequently philosophical. The distinctive nature of each still should not affect their reciprocal relationship. He states, “As the Church prays, so it believes; as it believes, so too it prays.”³² And this strong link between worship and dogma should not be dissolved. Dulles emphasizes, “The maxim *lex orandi/lex credendi* needs to be put to work in both directions. We must interpret the liturgy in the light of the declared faith of the Church, and we must contemplate the dogmatic inheritance as an outgrowth of the Church’s corporate worship.”³³

The Extension of the Necessary Body of Beliefs

The influence of the Church’s worship and piety on the development of the Marian dogmas was significant. Furthermore, Dulles notes that the Marian dogmas and the infallibility dogma were instances of development originating not negatively for the purpose of defining a specific truth that had been under attack, but positively, as extending the body of necessary beliefs.³⁴ Under these circumstances, the papal encyclicals which gave these dogmas signal a new perception of dogmatic development. Dulles provides essential background to these papal initiatives. It was through the work of the Roman College Jesuit Giovanni Perrone that Pius IX was introduced to the notion of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Perrone, together with Carlo Passaglia,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 210.

³⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 48.

was a student of Johann Mohler and the Tübingen school. In the background were the new ideas of development advanced by John Henry Newman.³⁵ Thus, after several years of consultation with theologians and bishops, Pius IX in 1854 defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on his own authority. This bold unilateral action paved the way for the dogma of papal infallibility pronounced in 1870. Most significant, this action of Pius IX was a departure from the long held tenet that modern teachings of the Church went back to apostolic times. Pius IX not only introduced a new dogma. He gave impetus to a new perception of development in terms of an expanding body of beliefs promulgated for universal acceptance in the Church.

The Logical and Organic Theories of Development

These actions of Pius IX presented the theologians with the task of bridging the gap between longstanding perceptions of static irreformability and new notions of dogma and development. First, dogma once considered singularly identified with the apostolic corpus could now embrace doctrine independent of that corpus. Second, the process of development once limited to refinements in expression could now be understood as formulation comprised of new and distinctive terms, concepts, and meaning. The theologians grappled with this pointed question: How is it possible for the Church to receive new and binding dogmas which have no referent in either Scripture or tradition?

³⁵ Dulles relates how Newman came to Rome in 1846 to prepare for ordination as a Catholic priest. During his visit, he discussed theories of development with Perrone and Passaglia. As former students of Mohler and the Catholic Tübingen school, they had already acquired the view that Christianity, as a living faith, is subject to development and progress under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These theologians influenced Pope Pius IX. See Dulles's discussion, *The Resilient Church*, 46-48.

Many theologians took seriously the challenge to demonstrate in some manner how the new dogmas were contained in the original deposit. These theologians fall into two general categories—the logical and the organic.³⁶ The logical approach to development viewed the new truths as the result of syllogistic reasoning. The attempt was made to demonstrate that certain modern dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception had been pre-contained in propositional truths known in apostolic times. The result was an unwieldy impasse. According to Dulles, the logical approach was forced to admit something like new revelation or else to disguise the real novelty of modern dogmas, perhaps seeing them as latent within the original apostolic deposit.³⁷ Instead of attempting to prove by historical research that these dogmas indeed were primitive, the magisterium considered it sufficient to establish that the new dogmas were believed to be revealed by the Church today.³⁸

The magisterium notwithstanding, it was apparent that the Marian dogmas are not possible if revelation is confined to an irreformable base, the prophetic and apostolic Scripture or tradition. Moreover, Dulles saw exposed what he considered to be a fundamental flaw in the logical theories, namely, their assumption that revelation consists

³⁶ The logical theory draws heavily on the work of Counter Reformation Jesuit theologians such as Luis de Molina and Gabriel Vasquez. Concerning the “logical” explanation of the Marian dogmas, Dulles refers the reader to Chadwick, *From Boussuet to Newman*, chapter 2, 21-48; Hammans, *Die neueren katholischen Erklärungen*, sec. IV, 119-173; Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation*, chapter 7, 137-78. See Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49 and 202, n. 20.

³⁷ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

essentially of propositional truths. This assumption was both confronted and “rightly contested” by theologians of the other main school which he calls the organic. Revelation is the pivotal issue. Drawing on the earlier work of Mohler and Newman, the modern proponents of the organic theory—notably Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, writing in the 1950s—held that divine revelation was originally communicated not in the form of propositions but as an indistinct whole, known through a kind of global intuition. Dulles explains:

Revelation, as self-communication of the divine, inevitably exceeds the limits of what the human mind can comprehend in discursive thought or formulate in propositional terms. The development of dogma is thus a vital process in which faith unfolds under the interior guidance of the Holy Spirit, who implants in the hearts of the faithful an instinctive sense of what is, and what is not, a valid expression of revealed truth.³⁹

On this theory, the Marian teachings were both possible and viable, a point which Dulles affirms in this statement:

The Marian dogmas, on this theory, did not have to be derived from statements about Mary in the Bible or in apostolic tradition. They could be explained as fruits of the Church’s meditation on what was implied in the vital relationships between Jesus and his mother as concretely described and suggested in the Bible—the Bible itself being read and interpreted by the Church in an atmosphere of prayer and worship, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

One could not look for a more clear answer to the original question about new dogmas and their apparent origin chronologically independent of Scripture or apostolic tradition. It remains to be seen, however, if Dulles himself is entirely satisfied with legitimatizing new dogmas by the organic theory. Suffice it to say at this point that he is aware of the

³⁹ Ibid., 49-50.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

gravity of defining new dogma, which cannot ever be undefined or withdrawn. Any new dogma can only be explained, defended, and enforced. The very appearance of new dogma is, by the nature of the case, binding upon the whole Church under the pain of heresy. This is why notions of reformability and development are crucial for the life of the Church.

The Essentials of Dulles's Development Theory

The Imperative of Adaptation versus Traditional Unchangeableness

Dulles's development theory is grounded in his sense of urgency over the crisis of faith experienced by many Christians in his time. It is a critical time of necessary change for the Church in a new age. Dulles believes that the Church can remain her essential self in relationship to her Lord only by initiating measures of adaptation. That is to say, the unchangeableness of the Church's abiding essence, rather than preventing or prohibiting change, actually requires adaptive change if it is to be faithful to its originating constitution. If it is healthy, such change serves to actuate and express more vividly the true and permanent nature of the Church.⁴¹ Church life and organization, and even the

⁴¹ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 102. In the face of classical notions of church reform which have left no place for transformation or revolutionary change, Dulles suggests a schematization which has the advantage of fitting materially discontinuous change into the framework of a Church which has received its essential structures and its mission from Christ and the Holy Spirit. He is convinced that the concepts of continuity and mutability need not be seen as incompatible. See *A Church to Believe In*, chapter six, "Ius Divinum' as an Ecumenical Problem," 80-102. Classical notions of church reform resistant to transformation are documented, according to Dulles, by J. W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 573-601; esp. 595, 598-601.

propositions expressing Christian faith vary with the historical and cultural situation.⁴² If the Church resists meeting the contingencies of necessary variableness, a crisis of faith may develop.

Dulles advances a healthy tension between continuity and adaptability. First, the Church as the sign of Christ must be historically in continuity with the community of the first disciples whom Jesus gathered about himself. In Jesus Christ, “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), the Church has a stable reference point.⁴³ In his own way, Dulles relates continuity to this stable Christological base. What is unchangeable about the Church, he explains, must be viewed in relational rather than essential terms. Relatedness to Christ and relatedness to those to whom the Church mediates that presence of Christ are two inseparable priorities for the Church. In relatedness to Christ, the Church has to adapt herself as may be necessary in order to maintain in any generation that living relationship with its Lord. So, the Church remains faithful with respect to continuity by adapting her forms of life and speech to the people of various ages and cultures. In this regard, the abiding structures of the Church must undergo ceaseless modification, not in order to weaken or dissolve its bonds with Christ, but in order to keep them in tact.⁴⁴

⁴² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 33.

⁴³ Addressing the Christological stable reference point, Dulles shows how the Church recalls and mystically relives by sacramental re-enactment the paschal event from which it takes its rise. He continues, “Only by recapturing in its contemporary life the mysteries of Jesus’ death and resurrection does the Church bring its own members into a saving relationship with God.” *A Church to Believe In*, 95.

⁴⁴ Dulles is most articulate when he expresses this dialectic of Christ and Church in the world. He writes, “The church is constituted on the one hand by its relationship to Jesus Christ, and on the other hand by its relationship to those to whom it mediates the

Dulles uses an analogy in order to clarify this point. A growing child has to relate itself to his or her parents in constantly new ways, not in order to destroy the relationship the child formerly had, but rather in order to keep that relationship alive. So, too, the Church is to adapt itself as may be necessary to maintain a living relationship with its Lord.⁴⁵

Viewing the Church relationally in the manner here described, Dulles infers that reformulation and development are necessary. For example, the three sacraments, confirmation, marriage, and the anointing of the sick were deemed essential to the Church in later ages. Though not without biblical basis, these rites later reckoned as sacraments admittedly cannot be traced to the apostolic generation. Nevertheless, they became universally practiced because they were seen as expressing aspects of the Church's abiding nature. Dulles concludes that we can easily see how the introduction of certain new forms, and the deletion of certain old forms, might be divine imperatives for the Church.⁴⁶

Continuity and adaptability are in tension at the point of faith and the expression of faith. Unless the "forms" of faith remain changeable, the intelligibility and relevance of the gospel may be diminished and faith itself diluted. Dulles observes that faith is frequently made an unnecessary burden because it is mistakenly tied to the thought-forms and styles

presence of Christ. These two relationships cannot be in conflict with each other, for unless the Church were itself related to Christ it could not mediate his presence to others; nor could it mediate his presence without really being related to the people of each time and place." *A Church to Believe In*, 95.

⁴⁵ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 95.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-99. Dulles finds encouragement for flexibility and openness to change in statements from Vatican II which declare that God is at work in history and that he speaks to the Church through the "signs of the times." See *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 4 and 11; Abbott, 201-203; 209-210.

of an earlier age. He cites the mentality of Luther or John Calvin absolutized by Protestants as one example. Furthermore, Catholics often want to perpetuate faith forms suited to the intellectualism of the medieval university or to the curialism of the age that accepted the divine right of kings. To counter these traditionalist forms of faith, Dulles comments, "More positively, we may say that if faith is to do its job it must answer the deepest hopes, aspirations, fears, and anxieties of the contemporary world."⁴⁷ Because earlier forms of faith do not survive with vigor, Dulles presses for new forms adapted to the times. He acknowledges, however, that any new form will have to emerge from those which have previously existed. The Church cannot simply dismiss out of hand all past forms. Thus, Dulles strives to maintain a healthy tension between continuity and adaptability.⁴⁸ In so doing, he tacitly expresses openness to reformulation and doctrinal development.

Historical Situationism

A New Theory of Development

In former eras of the Church's life, the tension between continuity and adaptability was hardly noticed. When change was still very gradual, one could look on adaptation as a superficial accommodation involving minor adjustments by which the divinely given structures of the Church were made operational in particular times and places. Such low level accommodation did not in any way touch the very essence of the Church. Dulles

⁴⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

describes a different contemporary scene. A complexity of issues has given rise to new thinking about doctrine and development—the feeling against multiplying new dogmas, confusion over the meaning of dogmas already declared, rapid cultural changes and growing pluralism of recent decades, the more stringent scrutiny applied to linguistic formulations, the feeling that unassimilable formulas are a burden to the spirit resulting in preference for the basic Christian message on the simplest possible terms, in language that strikes home with the people, language having impact on lived experience and concrete behavior. These are some reasons Dulles gives for the current thinking about development which tends to fall into a pattern described by George Lindbeck as “historical situationism.”⁴⁹ Development, according to this view, is situationist in character. Lindbeck’s precise definition reads, “The Church’s doctrines are thought of as the products of the dialogue in history between God and his people and as the historically conditioned relative responses, interpretations and testimonies to the Word addressing man through the scriptural witness.”⁵⁰ Dulles interprets Lindbeck’s statement to mean that doctrine does not evolve by a process of “continuous and cumulative growth.” Lindbeck is not speaking about evolutionary development. Neither does he infer that doctrine remains fixed at some primitive stage. New formulations are needed to maintain old truths and give them relevance and credibility in new circumstances. The doctrine is not shaped passively by forces of secular history. It is shaped in process as the Church creatively

⁴⁹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 50-51.

⁵⁰ G. A. Lindbeck, “Doctrinal Development and Protestant Theology,” in *Man as Man and Believer*, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx. *Concilium* 21 (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 138-139.

interacts with its sociocultural environment. Dulles states, “New doctrines, therefore, should grow out of a ‘living exchange’ in which the message of the gospel is restated so that it has meaning for, and impact upon, the people of a given time and culture.”⁵¹

Dulles espouses Lindbeck’s “historical situationism.” This became apparent when he used the situationist theory of dogma in response to three pressing demands: to lighten the burden of assenting to doctrines handed down from the past, to find apt ways of expressing the heart of the Christian faith, and to speak more appropriately to presently pervasive errors.⁵² Dulles became convinced that the situationist theory more adequately met the expressed need for dogmatic reformulation in the late twentieth century than did either the logical or organic theories of development which we discussed previously. We turn attention to the particulars of the situationist theory of dogma.

Historically Conditioned Doctrinal Statements

The distinctive characteristic of development according to the situationist theory is that dogma develops in a historical situation as the Church creatively interacts with its sociocultural environment. In his own understanding of this theory, Dulles has stated that new doctrines grow out of living exchange in which the gospel is restated with meaning for a people of a given time and culture. Giving utterance to the divine truth, the pilgrim Church is obliged to make use of the terms and concepts at hand in a given culture and

⁵¹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 51. See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44; Abbott, 246.

⁵² Ibid. Dulles sensed these demands acutely in Roman Catholicism (and, in varying degrees, in some Protestant churches) in the late 1960s. See his comprehensive application of the situationist theory of dogma to these three demands in *The Resilient Church*, 51ff.

intelligible to people living in that culture. The ancient dogmas of the Church always have to be reconsidered from the vantage point of new cultural situations. Even in its infallible definitions, the Church is subject to human and historical conditions. And, it may be the duty of future theologians to distinguish between the actual dogma and the inadequate representational schema and the false interpretations by which the definition may have originally been surrounded.⁵³

From representatives of the *nouvelle theologie*, principally Henri Bouillard and Henri de Lubac, Dulles acquired the skill to apply historical situationism to dogma. It was Bouillard's view that historical theology manifested the conditioned nature of doctrinal affirmations, "the relativity of the notions, the evolution of problems, and the temporary obscuring of certain important truths."⁵⁴ This statement is from a longer passage of Bouillard's work which undoubtedly became foundational for Dulles's program of reformulation and development. In Bouillard, we note the presumed change in categories or frameworks. One may also sense a delicate balance between continuity and adaptability which befits Dulles's approach. Bouillard writes:

Christian truth never subsists in its pure state . . . it is always imbedded in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure. . . . History does not, however, lead to relativism. It enables one to grasp, in the midst of the theological evolution, an absolute. . . . Not indeed an absolute of representation, but an absolute of affirmation. If the notions, methods and systems change with time, the affirmations in them remain, even though they are expressed in different

⁵³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 205.

⁵⁴ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 149. Dulles is quoting from Bouillard's celebrated published doctoral dissertation, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d' Aquinas* (Paris, 1941), 211.

categories.⁵⁵

Because they are historically conditioned and because the truths they present are ultimately based on contingent notions, doctrinal statements cannot be binding constantly and forever. The frameworks or systems of notions for both meaning and expression of doctrinal statements constantly change. Christian truth is liberated from one system of notions by passing into another. Thus, there will be development of expression from the medieval dogmatic statement to articulation befitting the new and contemporary linguistic-cultural framework.⁵⁶

Culturally Conditioned Reinterpretation-Reconceptualization

Doctrinal reformulation is basically the recasting of revelatory truth in variable language both distinctive and indigenous to the current culture. But it is more extensive than variation in language or vocabulary. Such reformulation involves nothing short of reconceptualization. It is apparent that this view of reformulation challenges the assumed stability of dogma, i.e., the notion that once a dogmatic formula was hammered out

⁵⁵ Ibid. Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d' Aquin*, 220. Elsewhere, Dulles cites this same passage from Bouillard to demonstrate how the French Jesuit attempted to do justice to the necessarily conditioned character of all human discourse and at the same time to avoid the pitfalls of relativism. See *Survival of Dogma*, 194.

⁵⁶ Dulles marks the reaction to the "new theology." Notable is the criticism rendered by Father Garrigou-Lagrange. Dulles recounts how this venerable theologian energetically rejected Bouillard's contention that it was possible to change the notions contained in a conciliar definition while at the same time remaining faithful to the sense of the affirmation. See *Revelation Theology*, 152. A similar critique was registered on August 12, 1950 when Pius XII issued the encyclical, *Humani generis*, which censured those "innovating theologians," but still urged the Church's theologians to devote careful study to the new problems raised by modern culture. *Revelation Theology*, 152-154.

according to popular conception, it must remain forever. If it states revealed truth, why should it ever be changed?⁵⁷

The expected answer to such a question would be the obvious expressed need to update periodically the language of a formula. Dulles agrees that the right speaking of words depends upon a great many circumstances; and, the Church may at times be forced to change its canons of right speaking.⁵⁸ But he goes on to assert that reformulation has to do with more than words because revelation always comes to men within some sociocultural situation. And the situation affects the manner in which men articulate revelation conceptually.⁵⁹ Thus, taking into consideration the entire historical and cultural context of a doctrinal statement goes beyond vocabulary to substantial reconceptualization. Dulles writes, "To the extent that traditional statements of the faith are conditioned by a cultural situation no longer our own, they must be reinterpreted for modern man. Otherwise, they will seem meaningless, incredible, or at least irrelevant."⁶⁰ Understandably, therefore, Dulles empathizes with Catholics who are uncomfortable with some traditional formulations. They find the weight of tradition to be oppressive when it is apparent that formulations forged in situations that are radically different than one's own fail to be a source of enlightenment and guidance. He grants that more and more Christians suspect that it may not be necessary for every Christian to affirm personally all

⁵⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

that is “on the books” as a dogma or defined truth of faith. Dulles frames the issue in a question: “Can a failure to accept some canonized formulation of faith—some ask—be compatible with the acceptance of faith itself?”⁶¹

Searching for an answer to this question, Dulles resorts to his earlier assumption that revelation is the matrix of all development theory. He combines this assumption with the present thesis that dogmas are historically and culturally conditioned. His answer to the question is twofold: (1) the idea of revelation is transcendent, beyond specified propositional language; thus formulations representing differing positions even in tension with one another may still enjoy a common loyalty to the content of revelation itself, (2) because dogmas are culturally conditioned expressions of revelation, it may happen that as generations pass it will be necessary to reinterpret the defined dogma in accordance with the presuppositions, thought categories, concerns, and vocabulary of a later age.⁶²

In summary, Dulles’s development theory articulates reformulation in terms that extend beyond adjustments in language and vocabulary to the very reconceptualization of dogma. Development goes to these lengths because revelation is seen as coming to people within different sociocultural situations which affect their articulation of the revelation conceptually. Dulles reminds readers that Biblical peoples expressed their experience of God in terms of their own cultural concerns, with the help of concepts derived from their own physical and cultural world. Furthermore, the subsequent history of doctrine in the Christian Church has been deeply affected by the societal forms, the

⁶¹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 51-52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 52, 54.

customary attitudes, and the philosophical heritage of the Greek, Roman, feudal, and baroque worlds.⁶³ Then why should it be inconceivable, in the face of the distinctive cultural situation of today, that the Church should recast in concept as well as in language the coming of revelation, i.e., the divine meaning, to people in our present time? When the Church interprets biblical and ecclesiastical pronouncements today, reformulation in terms of “new dogmas” may indeed be required! In a nutshell, this is Dulles’s notion of dogmatic development!

The Hermeneutics of Historical Situationism

The Elements of a Situational Hermeneutic

The situationist theory of dogma and development may be explained in terms of a recognizable hermeneutic which has three distinct parts. This threefold treatment is our own configuration. Each part has been treated to some extent in earlier discussions. The three parts are brought together here in order to see at work a definitive hermeneutic which is crucial for Dulles’s situationist theory. First, his doctrine of revelation underscores repeatedly the finite character of any doctrinal statement. Even the ecumenical creeds and proclamations of the councils presumably are subject to these same human limitations. For Dulles, the finite character of all human statements casts a shadow of tentativity and perhaps also relativity over all attempts to speak divine truth incisively and finally. Moreover, due to the overwhelming elusiveness of divine mystery, dogmas cannot be more than partial encapsulations of divine truth.

⁶³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 164.

Second, dated biblical and ecclesiastical pronouncements must be reinterpreted for the modern age. Dulles points out that this process of reinterpretation cannot be a matter of stripping away the human conceptual vesture until one reaches some timeless and unquestionable kernel of pure divine truth. One's fundamental historicity prevents any such unconditional grasp of revelation. Dulles states, "We ourselves are just as historically conditioned as our ancestors and hence cannot hope to achieve supracultural formulations."⁶⁴ The historical conditioning of all statements requires the reconsideration of their validity at any time in the future.

Third, Dulles entertains a notion of doctrinal development beyond original statement and meaning in Scripture or tradition. Noting ten hermeneutical approaches to the use of Scripture by systematic theologians, Dulles points to what he calls authorial intention.⁶⁵ This method of interpretation is identified with Raymond E. Brown and others who assert that the meaning intended and expressed by the first author is not terminal. Historical-critical study presumably identifies trajectories of development within the Bible and thus points the way to later doctrinal developments in church tradition. Dulles expresses qualified agreement with Brown when he comments, "The Church may well insist on traditional and dogmatic meanings that go beyond the intention of the first author, but the original literal meaning, which was divinely inspired, can be used to correct

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 71-85. For authorial intention, see 79.

misinterpretations that may have arisen in a later time.”⁶⁶ These are the three major components of what may be called a situational hermeneutic for Dulles’s situationist theory of dogma and development.

The situational hermeneutic suggests a significant conclusion about church dogma. From the limitations of the human author in the face of transcendent mystery, from the historical conditioning of all doctrinal statements, and from the notion that even Biblical revelatory statements may point to later doctrinal developments, Dulles concludes that church dogma may no longer be considered irreversible, much less final. Even statements presumably “infallible” will necessarily undergo reinterpretation. When this hermeneutic is consistently applied, it consigns all past dogmatic formulations to limited historical value. In spite of Dulles’s expressed appreciation of past statements, the use of his situational hermeneutic infers that earlier formulations serve as guidelines for new doctrinal formulation in the present context. He writes:

By acknowledging the need for constant reinterpretation of the Church’s dogmatic heritage, the situationist theory of dogma, in my judgment, liberates the present generation from undue servitude to the past. It allows the past formulations to function as guidelines, while leaving ample room for creativity in the proposal of the Christian message for today.⁶⁷

Two Examples of Situational Reinterpretation

The situationist theory of dogma yields two specific examples of reinterpretation.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 79. See Raymond E. Brown, “The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) 24-49, especially 28-29.

⁶⁷ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 54.

The first is a change in the application of the time worn axiom, “Outside the Church, no salvation” (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Dulles observes that many exponents of this axiom in the Middle Ages understood it in a harshly literal sense. Today this ancient understanding is repugnant to practically all Catholics. Vatican Council II infers that there is plentiful salvation outside the Church.⁶⁸ The change here is not only one of attitude or language or vocabulary. The new approach to *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is essentially one of reconceptualization. Dulles explains that the formula must be changed because in the mental and social structures of the contemporary world there is no longer any room for an exclusivist concept of the Church as a society of the saved.⁶⁹ He makes this judgment consistent with the principle which he enunciates, “When men acquire new cultural conditioning and mental horizons, they have to reconceptualize their dogmas from their present point of view.”⁷⁰

A similar situationist reinterpretation must be applied to the notion of infallibility.

At the time of Vatican I in the late nineteenth century, infallibility was not a crucial

⁶⁸ The Catholic Church looks with respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings in other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism which often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. See the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate*, 2; Abbott, 662. The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. Many unacquainted with the biblical revelation may by the grace of Christ attain salvation if they sincerely follow the lights God gives them. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, reads: “Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.” *Lumen gentium*, 16; Abbott, 35.

⁶⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 165.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

problem. It was taken for granted by all parties in the Church that the supreme magisterium, as the decisive organ of revelation, must be able to speak infallibly in such a way that its pronouncements would be “irreformable.”⁷¹ Since Vatican I, the Church faced the effects of a cultural shift. In a changed cultural climate, the perception is that no religious statement in any age can have abiding authority. Does this expunge the notion of infallibility? Not necessarily. If the teaching of infallibility is understood in the light of its historical and cultural conditioning, it may yet be tenable even though on the surface papal infallibility is offensive to many.

Dulles himself retains at least moderate confidence in the notion of infallibility. He affirms the principle that divine providence working through a multiplicity of channels will preserve the Church from error when through its highest teaching organs it defines a truth pertaining to revelation. But even these presumably “infallible” statements may necessarily undergo reinterpretation. In this regard, Dulles insists that everyone is now aware of the difficulty of pinning down the exact meaning of religious statements. No one can avoid the awareness of the ways in which words change their meanings according to the cultural situation and point of view of the reader.⁷² A related principle which Dulles enunciated earlier applies to infallibility as well. He stated, “But it may well be necessary, as the generations pass, to reinterpret the defined dogma in accordance with the presuppositions, thought categories, concerns, and vocabulary of a later age.”⁷³

⁷¹ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 124.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 124-125.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 54.

We have hinted that Dulles's respect for the magisterium leads him tacitly at least to qualify his situationist view with respect to the dogma of infallibility. A strict situationist would reject infallibility outright. Binding the Church always and everywhere to "infallible" doctrines that may have rather limited pertinence and comprehensibility would be untenable for the situationist. Dulles suspects that such a theologian would assess the dogma of papal infallibility defined by Vatican I as a time-conditioned response to the situation of Roman Catholicism in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Consequently the dogma would be viewed inappropriate for the present situation.⁷⁴

However, Dulles argues that Vatican I pronouncements on infallibility may be regarded as tenable if a proper understanding is achieved by sophisticated interpretation according to methods of modern hermeneutics, a process encouraged by the 1973 Declaration, *Mysterium ecclesiae*. The Declaration recognized the historically conditioned character of dogmatic pronouncements and called for attention to the need of updating them according to the exigencies of the times.⁷⁵ Dulles adds, "The process of reinterpretation is, self-evidently, an unending one. No one interpretation can be imposed as definitive for all future time."⁷⁶ Now Dulles turns the strict situationist argument in support of his notion of infallibility. The very qualities of tentativity and relativity

⁷⁴ Ibid. 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 116. See *Mysterium ecclesiae*, in "Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church," *Catholic Mind* 71 (October, 1973): 54-64, especially no. 5, 58-60.

⁷⁶ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 116.

touching even infallible statements of the magisterium become for him the rationale to affirm that infallibility is not entirely untenable. He explains, “Without contradicting Vatican I’s teaching on infallibility, therefore, one may admit that all papal and conciliar dogmas, including the dogma of papal infallibility, are subject to ongoing reinterpretation in the Church.”⁷⁷ Far from extinguishing former dogmas, reinterpretation retains them as tenable. Viewing the dogma of infallibility from a situationist view, Dulles is certain in his own mind that he has attained three things. In the first place, he has discovered how to maintain the flexibility of dogma necessitated by the basic notions of historical conditioning. In the second place, he has discovered how to retain confidence in the validity of past formulations without being bound hard and fast to their structures. Finally, he has left the door open for future reinterpretation and hence reconfiguration of dogmatic statements in later eras of the Church’s life and teaching.

The Non-Objectivist Basis for Development

A third and crucial element in Dulles’s development theory is the non-objectivist character of certain criteria for determining the validity of new dogmatic formulation. This involves such entities as the Holy Spirit, the Church as community, faith as the experience of grace, and to a limited extent Scripture and tradition, all contributing factors in the determination of Church teaching. In Dulles’s schema the Scriptures actually play a role secondary to the faith life of the Church, which validates doctrine by instinctual

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 125. Note, earlier in this same work, Dulles advances what appears to be his own private interpretation when he states, “Infallibility does not demand that a given formulation of the truth be always and everywhere imposed, but only that it be not directly contradicted.” 53-54.

discernment sustained by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. According to Dulles, this instinct of faith is the foremost criterion for doctrinal validation and development. His argument for instinctual faith arising out the Church's experience of grace reflects no little influence from the thought and theology of the Flemish Dominican, Edward Schillebeeckx.

Dulles highlights the major ideas in the epistemology of Schillebeeckx which relate to the status of dogma.⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx grounds the value of conceptual knowledge in the "objective dynamism" of reality. As this objective dynamism is encountered in experience, it provides the matrix for conceptual knowledge. Schillebeeckx argues that revelation cannot be considered as an objective datum external to the experience in which it is given. Thus, the great acts of God in salvation, reaching their unsurpassable climax in the Christ event of the first century, do not become revelation for us except as they have been interpreted and are made present to us through the word of God. About the use of Scripture, Schillebeeckx affirms that the inspired interpretation given by the prophets and apostles has been faithfully condensed in the written words of Scripture. But the full meaning of Scripture is not accessible to neutral, scientific exegesis. Only one who goes to the text in the light of a contemporary experience of God enjoys such access. Such a reader is in a position to grasp not only the superficial literal sense, but the profound meaning of the Bible—its *sensus plenior*. For him the biblical words have an "objective dynamic force" that unveils new and unsuspected depths. In the view of Schillebeeckx, the development of dogmas is a process of explication of meanings vaguely and latently

⁷⁸ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 165-166. The reference to Schillebeeckx is a two volume work containing his more important articles on revelation. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, 2 vols. (New York, 1967-68).

present in the Bible from the beginning.⁷⁹

Traces of this paradigm from Schillebeeckx are evident in Dulles's development theory. The theme running throughout is non-objectivist revelation discerned by faith's experience of God. In Dulles's theory, there is a sequence or even a ranking of factors, i.e., revelation, the Holy Spirit, faith's experience of grace, and discerning instinct using Scripture and tradition expediently. The self-communication of the divine is mystery, never fully objectified. On the promise of Christ, Jn. 16:13, the Holy Spirit gives to the Church an instinct of faith and discernment. By this experience of grace, the Church then knows how to ply the ancient documents [Scripture and tradition] to properly and correctly formulate doctrinal positions against the horizon of new presuppositions and concerns. The Holy Spirit does not reveal or give doctrine. Instead, the Spirit gives to the Church in every age a sure instinct for discerning the true bearing of the ancient documents upon the questions currently being asked.⁸⁰ Foremost is the instinct of faith validating new dogmas. The Scriptures serve as a source for reflection on how the new dogmas so validated instinctively by faith address current questions. The Scriptures seem not to be a norm for doctrinal statements in any sense. Scripture serves as a reliable reference, but it is not the criterion for making a final judgment on the acceptability of a dogma or its reformulation. That judgment is vested singularly with the Church and its

⁷⁹ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, 166. At the close of his summary of Schillebeeckx' epistemology, Dulles shares his observation that Schillebeeckx has offered a sophisticated method of restating the content of revelation in such a way that it can function existentially in the new contemporary self-understanding without diminishing in the least the ancient deposit of faith.

⁸⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 211.

instinct of faith. Only the man of faith—or the community of faith—can properly judge whether a new expression, interpreted in a particular sociocultural and linguistic context, is an acceptable articulation of the faith.⁸¹ In a related discussion, Dulles puts the matter in these words:

Revelation, as a self-communication of the divine, inevitably exceeds the limits of what the human mind can comprehend in discursive thought or formulate in propositional terms. The development of dogma is thus a vital process in which faith unfolds under the interior guidance of the Holy Spirit, who implants in the hearts of the faithful an instinctive sense of what is, and what is not, a valid expression of revealed truth.⁸²

The implications of this argument for the status of dogma are apparent. Dogmas become admissible, i.e., acceptable articulations of the faith on the authority of the Church's instinctive faith. For example, the Marian dogmas can be explained as a result of the Church's meditation on what was implied in the vital relationship between Jesus and his mother as concretely described and suggested in the Bible—yes, the Bible read and interpreted by the Church in an atmosphere of prayer and worship, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is to say, the Bible speaks on the authority of the Church's reading of the Bible when that reading is monitored by the Holy Spirit working interiorly in the community of faith. Presumably the Scripture text does not serve as a means for the Holy Spirit's speaking.

The canonical formulations handed down from the past are, however, an indispensable assistance. In numerous pastoral overtures, Dulles asserts that we may ever

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 49-50.

return to the Scriptures for renewal of our faith. But Dulles is clear when he states that what we have gained from these written sources is not dogma, not everlasting enduring formulation of dogma, but rather faith—that is to say, a living apprehension that cannot adequately be reduced to anything in writing.⁸³ To all appearances, Dulles subordinates Scripture to the Church's instinct of faith wrought in the experience of grace. The influence of Schillebeeckx is quite visible in Dulles's argument and conclusions which advance a non-objectivist basis for the development and validation of dogma.

The Extension of Dogma Beyond the Apostolic Deposit

The acceptance and validation of new dogmas by instinctual faith of the Church is one plank in the non-objectivist base for dogmatic development. Another foundational plank is the widely accepted view that the Church can infallibly define doctrines not formally implicit in the apostolic deposit of faith.⁸⁴ We have made reference to certain features of the Church's constitution—the monarchical episcopate, the sacraments of marriage and confirmation—which had not achieved historical actuality even by the end of New Testament times. To these could be added the Marian dogmas. Of interest is how Dulles himself accounts for the origin of these new dogmas. If he rejects the logical approach to development, and does not identify at every point with the organic approach, what is his position on dogmas developing beyond the apostolic deposit?

Dulles explains that it is a firm tenet of Catholic theology that all revelation was

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 90.

given, at least in embryonic form, before the end of the apostolic age; but the Church throughout the centuries has the task of meditating constantly in order to plumb the depths of the revelation already given. Again, it is assumed that such meditation by the Church in her worship and prayer life is accompanied by the Holy Spirit's guidance. With these dynamics at work, Dulles is confident about development beyond the apostolic age. He comments:

The closing of the deposit is a beginning as well as an end; it ushers in a new era of religious history in which the development of dogma occurs. Because we accept the principle of development, we are not compelled to seek, in the original fonts, fully formulated propositions matching every tenet of the contemporary Church.⁸⁵

Freedom from the original fonts is a liberty which the Church takes with the sacred text. It does this in spite of the fact that Biblical foundations are consulted when the Church makes her dogmatic definitions. Dulles notes that the Church often finds in a sacred text more than would appear to the eye of a scholarly exegete investigating the original meaning as understood by the sacred writer. He says, "The Church's interpretation of Scripture is not bound by the laws of merely philological exegesis."⁸⁶ According to Dulles, the Church possesses a unique gift of discernment. Speaking about the Church, he comments, "Having the mind and spirit of Christ, she can find in the Bible things that would not be discernible to the outsider."⁸⁷ Is such freedom with the Scripture text irresponsible? Dulles doesn't think so. For one, he argues that the Church's use of

⁸⁵ Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Instrumentorum, Inc., 1968), 76.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

the Bible is certainly no more free than the use which the New Testament authors made of the Old Testament. Second, though the Church's reading of a text may not in every instance meet the criteria of scientific exegesis, Dulles remains confident that the Church has good command of the Biblical message. He explains:

The Church may be said to have a charismatic sensitivity for what God intends to communicate by the book, and cannot be held to justify all her affirmations by reference to particular texts. This power of discernment is, no doubt, due to a special intimacy with the divine author of Scripture, who unceasingly guides the Church, and gives her a kind of instinct for the real meaning of the Bible. Scripture becomes, for her, the Word of God because she hears the divine Word speaking through it. . . . The same Spirit that descended upon the apostolic Church is ceaselessly at work in the Church of God, helping her to fathom the divine message.⁸⁸

In summary, three components come together to form a non-objectivist base for doctrinal development beyond the apostolic deposit: (1) the capacity for discernment residing in the Church's instinct of faith, (2) the assumed freedom with the Biblical text, and (3) the charismatic sensitivity for what God intends to communicate. Dulles answers the Lutheran question about an objective source. He seems to say: The Scriptures are a reliable source, but the forging of theological statements is accomplished by the non-objectivist instinctual discernment of the Church.

Development within the Current Course of Ongoing Tradition

Dogma develops beyond the apostolic deposit and the teaching of Scripture. Yet such extended development happens within the "tradition" of the Church. It occurs by the interior and sovereign and free action of the Holy Spirit in dialogue with the Church.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 79.

More precise, the source for extended development is the Holy Spirit related to the Church's tradition articulated by the magisterium. The latter, as Vatican II states, are successors of the apostles. They are "enlightened by the Spirit of truth," but they are not the sole authors of tradition to the exclusion of the faithful who continue to grow in their understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down.⁸⁹ With respect to tradition, Dulles should not be linked with the notion that extra biblical dogmas could be sourced from so-called "sacred tradition," meaning that they were known to the apostles and passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, or at least by some channel other than the canonical Scriptures.⁹⁰ Instead of this strict hierarchical view, Dulles adopts a "pneumatological" view of tradition. Vital and dynamic in character, tradition is the key to progressive development of the Church's doctrine.⁹¹

A statement from the Second Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation may be welcomed, says Dulles, for helping Catholics to account for the dogmatic teaching of their own Church. Making substantial suggestions that tradition grows or develops, linking

⁸⁹ *Dei Verbum*, no. 8, par. 2; Abbott, 116. cf. Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 90.

⁹⁰ Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 75.

⁹¹ Dulles follows the lead of Vatican II. He refers especially to a speech at the third session of the Council by the Melchite Archbishop, Edelby, who called attention to the value of the Oriental conception of tradition, identified with the Church itself insofar as the Holy Spirit empowers it to understand Holy Scripture in the light of the Risen Christ. Dulles adds the commentary of the Council: "This tradition which comes from the apostles, develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. . . . For as the centuries succeed one another the Church constantly moves toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her." *Dei Verbum*, no. 8, par. 2; Abbott, 116. Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity*, 89.

tradition to the Holy Spirit as transcendent subject, and distinguishing it from *traditions*, the council legitimized the program of renewal and reform that was at the heart of Vatican II. Dulles highlights the actions of the Council which made Catholics more accepting of recent developments of dogma and practice. He comments:

It [the Council] liberated them from the burden of feeling obliged to justify all their present beliefs as having come down unchanged from the apostles, or even as being logical deductions from what the apostles had taught. It thus made room for rather striking developments of dogma and practice. As a result of the council, Catholics can now cheerfully admit that some of their dogmas would have been unknown and even unintelligible to Christians of earlier centuries. A new dogma such as the Immaculate Conception may emerge in the course of centuries with only the slenderest apostolic warrants and yet be “traditional” insofar as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who remains continuously active in the Church.⁹²

Dulles could not be more clear about his own views of development. He attests to growth of dogma within the tradition, i.e., new dogmas doubtlessly unrecognizable by the apostolic church, yet legitimized as “traditional” because the teaching is declared dogma by the Church and its magisterium through whom the Holy Spirit is continuously active. The setting for the growth of dogma is within tradition as process according to the new understanding advanced by Vatican Council II, tradition that is vital, realistic, and forward-looking.⁹³

Development Explicated by Symbol

Transymbolization

⁹² Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 99. Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 7 to 10; Abbott, 114-118.

⁹³ The former view of tradition held at the time of Vatican Council I would not sustain the notion of growth of dogma. See the discussion in chapter three of this study, p. 119ff. and especially p. 123.

Another aspect of Dulles's development theory is the symbolic character of dogma.⁹⁴ Though symbols are concrete phenomena, they are historically conditioned and may undergo transformation. If the symbols are dogmas, transymbolization will result in change or development of dogmas. Dulles acknowledges that some symbols of Christian revelation are unalterable. Yet accommodations are needed in order to make the gospel accessible to a given people in later historical situations. Dulles believes that the gospel can be communicated only by making use of transitory languages and cultural forms of particular peoples. With this need in mind, he agrees with those who encourage the framing of new symbols. He adds one conditional stipulation. The new "must not obscure the unity of the universal Church, its abiding identity, and its constitutive relationship to Jesus of Nazareth as its living Lord."⁹⁵

In a single passage from *Models of Revelation*, Dulles discusses how the Church may proceed proactively in framing new doctrines which articulate aspects of the meaning of the symbols.⁹⁶ He expounds the relationship between revelation as symbol and the flexibility of dogma, and the prospect this relationship holds for development. Revelation, he posits, comes into being through symbolic persons and events. And revelation is

⁹⁴ Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 108. Dulles cites from the International Theological Commission on the hermeneutics of dogma. Dogmatic proclamation, according to this document, takes concrete form "as a real, symbolic expression of the content of faith" and "contains and makes present what it designates." See, "On the Interpretation of Dogmas," C.III.3; *Origins* 20 (May 17, 1990): 12.

⁹⁵ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 238.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 274-275. Chapter 16, "Revelation at Its Present Value," part 6, "The history of doctrine."

expressed initially through symbolic forms of communication, e.g., language of Scripture, creeds, statements of councils, etc. In a later time and different age, the Church carefully reflects on these originative expressions. The Church may formulate doctrines which articulate aspects of the authentic meaning of the time-honored symbols. The caveat is, such formulated statements will never be exempt from human or historical influences. By constant critical reflection, the Church determines which traditional assertions remain acceptable in their original form. The crux of development is the Holy Spirit's continuous supply of creativity in order to reexpress, in the conceptuality and language of a new age, the revelatory meaning of the earlier formulations. The community of faith is assured that it will not err in the reformulation of dogmas because the Holy Spirit guides the whole process of reformulation for a different time and age. Dulles comments on this process of transymbolization:

That Christian doctrine should exhibit certain historical fluctuations is thus neither scandalous nor surprising. The relative stability of the doctrinal tradition, which continues to uphold definitions handed down in the early centuries, invites confidence in the dogmatic teaching of the Church of modern times. Even within shifts of language and conceptuality, an intelligible content perdures.⁹⁷

The perception of dogmas as symbols and how they are to be understood and expressed anew in any age represents an advancement in thinking about development. The propositionalism of the rationalistic age did not consider seriously the symbolic nature of dogma. The notion that dogma as symbol may communicate more than what is contained in clear concepts was unknown. The propositional view comprehended dogma akin to a picture or scale model that could be substituted for the reality to which it

⁹⁷ Ibid.

referred. In contrast, Dulles pictures dogma as symbol with multivalent meaning. What corresponds is assumed flexibility in dogmatic expression. He says, “Dogmas should never be allowed to become objects in which the understanding comes to rest. They must function disclosively.”⁹⁸ Dulles is prepared to say that dogmas are “fluid axioms”—fluid not in the sense that they can be made to mean anything, but in being ever open to greater refinement, enrichment, and renewal in the light of the further manifestations of God. “Forged under the impact of revelation,” says Dulles, “they [dogmas] are structures through which God’s truth can disclose itself in new and surprising ways.”⁹⁹ Because he views dogma symbolically, it is possible for Dulles to suggest flexibility in dogma which is essential for his theory of development.

Revision as New Understanding

Dulles’s development theory treats dogma as symbol and asserts flexibility in dogmatic expression. How does Dulles reconcile this notion of development with traditional Catholic teaching that revelation came complete in apostolic times? Dulles attacks the question with a distinction between the “completeness” of God’s revelation in Christ and the apostles, and the “incomplete” understanding of it.¹⁰⁰ According to Dulles, we may assume that Christian revelation was not “exhaustively understood” in the apostolic period. Therefore, it is not likely that the expression of that revelation in

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226-227.

¹⁰⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 207. “incomplete” is our term.

doctrinal statements from the early Church could be sufficient for later times when “understanding” was greatly enriched. Hence doctrinal development is the expected result. Moreover, neither the “understanding” nor the “expression” of that understanding in any given age can be regarded in any sense final. According to Dulles, there is an element of provisionality in every statement, even that which asserts an “eternal truth.”¹⁰¹

Dulles carries his argument another step. In view of the dialectic between “complete revelation” and the yet-to-be-achieved “exhaustive understanding,” he suggests that reflection on the original revelation in any era may be assisted by new kinds of secular and religious experience and knowledge that become available as the human race enters new states of cultural evolution.¹⁰² Contemporary experience and new knowledge assist the Church to discover implications of the original revelation which heretofore were either unknown or inapplicable. If new understandings result from such assisted heuristic reflection, then new formulations of dogma may be the expected outcome.

Dulles seems to be saying that new understandings cannot be fitted to old

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 204.

¹⁰² Reformulation of terminology or conceptual language will unquestionably result in the statement of new things, but not in terms of “completeness,” a category reserved for the original revelation in Jesus Christ. Dulles refers to new formulations within the category of expanded “understanding” in later eras of the Church’s life. The implications of the original revelation can be drawn out in the course of time in both secular and religious experience. Thus, the implications for the Medieval Church or the Church after Vatican II would not be available or accessible or necessarily so in the apostolic period. He states, “The event of Jesus Christ must be seen anew in the light of our contemporary concerns for peace, for justice, for freedom, for community, for a responsible use of resources, and for personal experience of the transcendent. New creeds, framed in the light of these concerns, might be introduced into the liturgy.” *Survival of Dogma*, 201. Cf. the larger discussion, 213f.

formulations. This does not nullify or even diminish the older formulas. They were sufficient for the level of understanding in a former age. Today we have the same “deposit” with understandings both old and new, each with its respective formulations. That the new formulations differ from older formulations should not raise the suspicion that the new statements are incongruous with the “deposit.” In Dulles’s view, such an assertion would be both unfair and untenable. Differences between old and new formulations properly exist because new understandings follow upon the old understandings. This is expected because the first century Church could not exhaust the “understanding” even though they were holders of the complete revelatory “deposit.”

Taking his argument to these lengths, Dulles exposes something of duplicity on his part. On one hand, his present argument leads us to believe that new dogmatic formulations can be reconciled with the traditional Catholic teaching that revelation came complete in apostolic times. Elsewhere, however, he considers the cultural revolution through which the human race is presently passing. And he argues that teachers in the Church must be more than usually open to new formulations which may be irreconcilable with earlier expressions. He says, “We must be prepared to consider the acceptability of new formulas of faith not evidently reconcilable, in pure formal logic, with others long venerated in the Church.”¹⁰³

Even if one grants the validity of his argument for the reconciliation of new understandings with the old, the question remains: can there be new understandings without new self-communication of the divine, i.e., without new revelation beyond the

¹⁰³ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 212.

original “deposit?” Furthermore, was “understanding” in the apostolic era incomplete? Many scholars and theologians have pursued a quest for the Early Church because they thought that the “understanding” of the apostles and their successors was more enriched and complete than in any successive age. For these students of the Early Church, Dulles’s notion of revision in terms of new “understandings” may not satisfactorily reconcile new dogmas and development with the notion of complete revelation coming in the apostolic era.

Revision in Terms of the Reversal of Earlier Doctrinal Positions

Development is about formulations arising from new understandings, while respecting both former understandings and formulations. But development is also about the reversal of doctrinal positions previously held. This factor must be recognized with candor. Discussing changing attitudes in the Church toward dissent, Dulles cites numerous actions of Vatican II which reversed earlier positions of the Roman magisterium on a number of important issues.¹⁰⁴ In biblical studies, the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, is accepting of a critical approach to the Bible. This represents a reversal of the position taken by earlier decrees of the Biblical Commission.¹⁰⁵ The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, was an example of openness to the ecumenical movement, putting an end to the hostility enshrined in Pius XII’s *Mortalium animos*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 108-110.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 109. See *Dei Verbum*, 12, 19; Abbott, 120, 124.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* See *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3, 4; Abbott, 345-350.

Concerning church-state relations, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*, abandoned the former view that the state should formally profess the truth of Catholicism. It accepted the religiously neutral state.¹⁰⁷ The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, adopted an evolutionary view of history and a modified optimism regarding secular systems of thought. This ended more than a century of vehement denunciations of modern civilization.¹⁰⁸ The list of altered positions may be longer. One thing is apparent from this limited number of examples cited by Dulles. When dogmatic statements give expression to a reversal of the Church's earlier teaching and practice, the modification or revision exhibits the reformulation of church dogma.

Reformulation

The Tension between Old and New Formulations

Revision lends itself to the reformulation of dogma. Furthermore, the tensions between old and new frameworks demand reformulation. Dulles is fully aware of the tension, and for this reason he advocates not only flexibility in dogmatic statement, but also pluriformity.¹⁰⁹ He is convinced that the word of God cannot be totally identified

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 109-110. See *Dignitatis humanae*, 6; Abbott, 683-685.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 110. See *Gaudium et spes*, 4 to 8; Abbott, 201-206.

¹⁰⁹ This is not to say, however, that any and every human attitude or expression is consonant with the gospel of Christ. Dulles attests to an arduous process of "discerning the spirits" through which the People of God in every age and locality must constantly labor to find what is an apt manner of incarnating the gospel in their own sociological situation. Furthermore, there must be recognizable continuity between the present

with any particular expression. By no means do past formulations have a corner on adequacy of expression! Furthermore, it seems that Dulles heightens the tension when he makes the assertion cited above. To repeat, he emphasizes that we must be prepared to consider the acceptability of new formulas of faith not evidently reconcilable, in pure formal logic, with others long venerated in the Church.¹¹⁰ The tension, then, is not only between modern and ancient formulations. It is fundamentally a tension between frameworks and their respective concepts. Yes, it is a dual tension in terms of the plurality of concepts and the pluriformity in expression.

Dulles argues his case for plurality of concepts and to some extent for pluriformity in expression on the basis of statements in Scripture which are, in his view, in tension with each other. His argument tacitly contributes to the case for reformulation and development. He views the Old Testament as a harbinger of contrasting ideas which sometimes reflects tensions between different schools, such as the priestly, the royal, the prophetic, the apocalyptic, and the sapiential. Sometimes the multitude of ideas gives rise to doctrinal developments achieved over the course of time. Dulles sees similar conceptual plurality and tensions in the New Testament. He supports Ernst Kaesemann's notion that the variability of the kerygma in the New Testament is an expression of the fact that in primitive Christianity a wealth of different confessions were already in

proclamation of the gospel and the original heralding of the faith in New Testament times. *Survival of Dogma*, 91.

¹¹⁰ *Survival of Dogma*, 212. This does not negate the fact that at times Dulles wrestles with attempts to reconcile new dogmas with the traditional Catholic teaching that revelation came complete in the apostolic period. We have treated those notions of reconciliation in the previous section.

existence, constantly replacing each other, combining with each other, and undergoing mutual delimitation.¹¹¹ For instance, Dulles sees contrasted the apocalyptic thinking of Revelation and the Markan apocalypse (ch. 13) with the “realized eschatology” of the Fourth Gospel. He sees a definite contrast between the “faith without works” of Romans so difficult to reconcile, on the conceptual plane, with the “works-righteousness of James. He sees a contrast between the “adoptionist” Christology of the early chapters of Acts not so easily harmonized, theologically, with the high Christology of the Captivity Epistles of Paul.¹¹²

The plurality of authentic Christian sources, in Dulles’s view, has implications for the individual believer and for the Church as a whole. It protects the individual from being crushed by the weight of any single authority and encourages him to make his own distinctive contribution to understand the faith in a way proper to himself. And it provides the Church with the flexibility it needs to operate in different parts of the globe and in a rapidly changing world. Dulles states that the “word of God” is best heard when one maintains a certain critical distance from any given expression of that word. To recognize the historically conditioned character of every expression of faith is not to succumb to relativism, but rather to escape imprisonment within the relativities of any particular time and place.¹¹³ The plurality of concepts and the pluriformity of expression, tensions

¹¹¹ Ibid., 88. See Ernst Kaesemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*. Studies in Biblical Theology 41 (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964), 103-104.

¹¹² Ibid., 88-89. “adoptionist,” Dulles’s term.

¹¹³ Ibid., 89.

notwithstanding, make reformulation not only welcome, but something of a necessity in today's world.¹¹⁴

Reformulation, the Task of Theology

Reformulation is the task of theology exercised by the Church's theologians. Dulles expectantly places theology in the service of the magisterium. To the extent that it reinterprets the tenets of faith, theology will turn to the hierarchical magisterium for confirmation of the acceptability of the reinterpretation.¹¹⁵ Placing theology in the service of the magisterium, Dulles also encourages freedom for the theologians. He seeks freedom from the propositional verbal-conceptual formulations that are regarded as divinely revealed and thus operative and normative, according to some members of the magisterium still influenced by a neo-Scholastic framework. The theologians must enjoy a measure of freedom because theology has, on one hand, a critical task to expose deficiencies in past and present formulations; and on the other hand, theology seeks better ways of expressing the ancient revelation for a new age. Dulles comments, "In seeking to perform these functions, theologians must give closer consideration to the experience of contemporary Christians than the propositional model [of revelation] encourages them to

¹¹⁴ Since Vatican II, Catholic theology has attempted to break away from neo-Scholasticism and enter into fruitful contact with other traditions of thought—pragmatism, existentialism, and process theology. Catholic theology is dealing with new questions. Therefore, Dulles observes that many of the ancient doctrines of the Church seem to demand translation into new terms and concepts if they are to retain their intelligibility in new frameworks. Statements cited earlier from such theologians as Henri Bouillard advocating by implication the necessity of reconceptualization and reformulation seem prudent and moderate to Dulles. See his argument and appeal, *Survival of Dogma*, 193f.

¹¹⁵ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 127.

do.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, performing these functions, theologians help to nourish the faith of the Church by the better formulation of that to which all are committed in Christ.¹¹⁷

The Ways and Means of Reformulation

Understandably, the press for reformulation of doctrinal statements occurs in an age markedly distinct from the original community which first gave rise to particular truth statements. New conceptual-linguistic frameworks require new formulations. And theologians discover ways and means to shape these formulations. We repeat an earlier emphasis. For Dulles, the discovery of new shapes for formulations does not summarily dismiss formulations devised in different frameworks than our own. The former doctrinal expressions have continuing value in that they stand witness to how the Church must react to the kinds of questions and threats which have occurred and continue to occur throughout the course of history. Speaking of the binding nature of former formulations, Dulles comments, “They remain binding to the extent that similar, or analogous, questions continue to arise.”¹¹⁸

But he adds this caveat: while we may take guidance from the ancient statements, we are not necessarily bound to accept the conceptual-linguistic frameworks within which they were formulated. Dulles adopts a view expressed by W. Norris Clarke who stated that if the present experience and frameworks of oneself or one’s community are vastly

¹¹⁶ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 51.

¹¹⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 186.

¹¹⁸ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 209.

different so that the original truth statements now appear too alien or narrow-visioned to be fruitfully assimilable by oneself or one's own community, one has the right and duty to be exercised with the respect and reverence appropriate to the subject matter, to creatively rethink and re-express them in one's own most adequate frameworks.¹¹⁹

When determining the adequacy of frameworks for doctrinal formulation, Dulles refers theologians to the "signs of the times," a term with biblical origins (Mt. 16:3-4). Pope John XXIII applied the term more broadly to ". . . authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this People [of God] has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything. . ." ¹²⁰ The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, reads, ". . . the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel." ¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 209-210. See W. Norris Clarke, "On Facing up to the Truth about Human Truth." Presidential Address. *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1969): 11.

¹²⁰ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 235. In an extended footnote, Dulles documents carefully the use of this term by the Holy Father. It is best to quote the entire text of this note. Dulles states, "The term 'signs of the times' was first used by Pope John XXIII in his Apostolic Constitution, *Humanae Salutis*, of December 25, 1961, convening Vatican Council II. He wrote: 'We make ours the recommendation of Jesus that one should know how to distinguish the 'signs of the time' (Mt. 16:3), and we seem to see now, in the midst of so much darkness, not a few indications which augur well for the fate of the Church and of humanity' [W. M. Abbott (ed.), *Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 704, trans. modified]. John XXIII returned to the theme in his opening allocution at Vatican II (October 11, 1962); cf. Abbott, 712-713), and yet again in the headings of the modern-language versions of his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963) in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice*, ed. J. Gremillion (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), pp. 209-232." See *Models of Revelation*, 322 n. 25.

¹²¹ See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4. Abbott, 201-203.

The “signs of the times” play a significant role in helping theologians to discover adequate frameworks for doctrinal reformulation. On one hand, many voices of our age represented by the “signs of the times” are put to the test by the divine word. On the other, the Church’s dogmatic statements are put to the test of contemporary cultural-linguistic expression which the theologians are obligated to engage so that the gospel may be proclaimed in current frameworks. Thus, the proper use of the “signs of the times” is a two way street, so to speak. Dulles is more interested in the one direction, i.e., assistance provided by the “signs of the times” for determining appropriate frameworks in which to express doctrine today. Reexamining the notion of infallibility, he expresses concern about the impact of the cultural situation and the point of view of the reader when it comes to comprehending the gospel. He writes, “We are aware, likewise, that the truth of the gospel is never definitely given, but that it must be won anew through continual efforts to reread the gospel with the help of the “signs of the times.”¹²² Whatever else he may be saying in this statement, Dulles avers that theologians will devise ways and means in order to discover cultural-linguistic frameworks suitable for reformulation of doctrinal expression in the present time.

The Supplement of Images

Reading the “signs of the times” and considering conceptual-linguistic factors, theologians shaping reformulation will profit from the discovery and the use of new images. “In a healthy community of faith,” says Dulles, “the production of new myths and

¹²² Dulles, *Resilient Church*, 124.

symbols goes apace.”¹²³ Many traditional images lose their former hold on people. Dulles sees that supplements to the traditional images may speak more directly to our contemporaries. He acknowledges that discovering adequate images may be difficult because our experiences of the world have become, in many respects, secular and utilitarian. Day-to-day life provides few objects that qualify as images, i.e., few having numinous overtones that would make them obvious sources for new religious imagery—though Dulles finds some brilliant suggestions for new imagery in the writings of Paul Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.¹²⁴ The availability of new images from such sources presents new possibilities for reformulation. “The manufacturing of supplemental images goes on wherever the faith is vital,” says Dulles.¹²⁵ In this same connection, he explains that images which deepen theoretical understanding of a reality become what is called a “model.” Models may also contribute to the task of reformulation. Dulles would surely agree with this assertion.

Reconceptualization

Dogma and Reconceptualization

Dulles’s development theory moves beyond notions of revision and reformulation to reconceptualization. Doubtless, in the minds of some theologians the reformulation of dogma can be termed development only to the extent that reconceptualization actually

¹²³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 192.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

occurs. To what lengths, then, does Dulles carry reformulation? The answer to this question is found in his sparse yet significant references suggesting alteration, not only of language, but also of the very concepts at the heart of church dogma.

Dulles defines reconceptualization in these terms, “When men acquire new cultural conditioning and mental horizons, they have to reconceptualize their dogmas from their present point of view.”¹²⁶ Reconceptualization is a process in its own right. Dulles goes on to name current initiatives in which the very conceptual structure of certain dogmas are undergoing modification. He writes:

There are signs that this process is now going on with respect to many Catholic dogmas, such as original sin, transubstantiation, and perhaps the virginal conception of Jesus. This prompts us to ask whether those doctrines which have traditionally divided the Churches might not be capable of an equally radical interpretation.¹²⁷

It is clear that Dulles is not speaking here about changes in terminology or language only. He advocates change in concepts as well. He is not satisfied merely to update certain expressions. This updating would amount to little more than revision, hardly reformulation. He has concluded that the updating of dogmatic statements must be more incisive. The very framework of meaning and understanding emanating from the period of neo-Scholasticism of the late nineteenth century calls for nothing less than the reconfiguration of concepts. Expanding the passage cited previously, Dulles emphasizes:

In principle, every dogmatic statement is subject to reformulation. At times it may be sufficient to reclothe the old concepts in new words that, for all practical purposes, have the same meanings. But in other cases the consecrated formula

¹²⁶ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 166.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

will reflect an inadequate understanding. In order to bring out the deeper and divinely intended meaning, which alone is inseparable from faith, it may be necessary to discard the human concept as well as the words of those who first framed the dogma. When men acquire new cultural conditioning and mental horizons, they have to reconceptualize their dogmas from their present point of view.¹²⁸

Again Dulles addresses more than change in the language or the imagery employed by dogmatic statements. He advocates recasting the very conceptual structures of dogmatic statements. This is apparent in his reflections on reconceptualization and its impact upon the notion of infallibility. He states:

The content of the Christian message is in danger of becoming stale unless it is restated in a challenging way for every time and culture. Such restatement involves changes not only in language and imagery, but also in the conceptual structures underlying older formulations. Such changes are in no way contrary to infallibility. On the contrary, as Gregory Baum points out, "The gift of infallibility means that the Church is able to remain faithful to the past and is yet free to reformulate Christian teaching as Good News for the contemporary world."¹²⁹

The Hegelian Paradigm for Reconceptualization

Dulles amplifies his argument for reconceptualization by engaging a modified Hegelian process. In the interest of recasting the gospel anew for every generation, Dulles seems to advocate only new dogmatic formulations. He argues, "It is not enough to repeat the verbal formulations of an earlier time or even to translate them, one by one, into a new idiom."¹³⁰ Dulles saw humanity in the 1970s moving into an age that differed

¹²⁸ Ibid., 165-166.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 121. The quotation is from Gregory Baum. *Faith and Doctrine* (Paramus, N.J.: Newman, 1969), 133.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 190.

radically from anything before. He stated forcefully that refocusing the Christian message in a way that would speak immediately and directly to this new age could not be achieved by simply finding new equivalents for old terms and formulas.¹³¹ Dogmas formulated in an earlier time, important as they were, may be overshadowed by the need for new dogmas that speak anew to contemporary man. Dulles says:

In restating the Christian message for our day we need a system of dogmas that develops organically out of what our faith has to say most urgently to contemporary man. Some dogmas that were very functional and important for systems based on a different perspective will perhaps have less prominence, although they will not be directly contradicted, in new, dynamic restatement of the faith.¹³²

Certainly Dulles calls for a critical stance toward formulas handed down to us from the past. Such critical scrutiny is necessary, he believes, in order to keep the doctrine, as Anselm Atkins puts it, “dialectically alive.”¹³³ In the administration of such constructive scrutiny to former dogmas, Dulles suggests making use of the Hegelian triad: affirmation, negation, and resolution. Of older dogmas, he says, “The defined dogma may not be directly negated in the precise sense in which it was asserted, but a qualified negation, in terms of a new sociocultural context, may lead to a further development, or resolution, on

¹³¹ Dulles underscores this assessment when he states, “Merely to parrot the words of an old definition in a new situation is a false and inauthentic form of orthodoxy. When the sociocultural context has changed, further progress is demanded in order not to lose sight of the truth conveyed by an earlier formula.” *Survival of Dogma*, 206.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 206. See Anselm Atkins, “Doctrinal Development and Dialectic,” *Continuum* 6 (1968), 3-23, esp. 18.

a more comprehensive level.”¹³⁴

The use of this Hegelian triad calls for scrutiny. Strictly applying the triad, it is apparent that the resolution or synthesis is something new, in this instance new dogma. Dulles seems to be comfortable with such a projection. The reformability of conceptual language prepares for the statement of new things, even new teaching.¹³⁵ If development is resolution on a “more comprehensive level,” it appears that he espouses altogether “new dogma.” Even if the negation of a defined dogma is a qualified negation, the resolution, it seems, represents the extinction or disappearance of both the affirmation, the former dogma, and the negation, the modern variation or substitute. The end result is new dogma for a new time. In the process, the older dogmas, it seems, are in a precarious position. Is this what Dulles wants? No. He would not apply this triad to dogma in a careless manner. But he does maintain that critical scrutiny of older formulations is necessary for the purpose of arriving at reconceptualized dogmatic statements.

The Religiohistorical Hermeneutic of Dogmatic Development

We have seen that reconceptualization finally results in new dogma altogether. Though Dulles is not uncomfortable with the notion of new formulations, he does not want to be known as a proponent of new dogma. Though he resists the notion that any

¹³⁴ Ibid., 206-207.

¹³⁵ Dulles cites several concepts from the New Testament which he considers examples of reconceptualization. The concept “Son of Man” tied to the Jewish apocalyptic background gradually gave place to a new concept such as “Lord.” He suggests that “sin of the world” may replace “original sin.” The Church may well search hard and long for a new term which will do for modern man what “transubstantiation” did for medieval man. *Survival of Dogma*, 199-200.

dogmatic statement could be the bearer of the “content” of Christianity once, and for all time, he leaves the matter where things are at the close of his work, *The Survival of Dogma*. Here, he believes that we should be content if it is granted us to state the content of Christianity, in a meaningful and credible way, for men of our time. He states his position clearly in these words:

No one generation can capture the abiding content of the faith in a “chemically pure” state, so as to commit all future generations to repeat its formulations. With regard to the future we can say only that however men may see fit to reinterpret the gospel, they may not legitimately ignore or cancel out what previous generations of Christians have seen and, in a culturally conditioned manner, proclaimed.¹³⁶

We should indeed be hesitant to conclude that Dulles is a proponent of new dogma. Yet this conclusion is quite inescapable considering his tendency to locate reconceptualization within the orbit of history and culture. Dogmatic development is essentially hermeneutical in that reinterpretation flows into reformulation and reconceptualization. At the initial point of reinterpretation, it is quite apparent that the religiohistorical context of doctrinal expression is for Dulles the key factor among many.

Notice that it is data external to the Church and its theology that seem to bolster Dulles’s argumentation for reformulation of dogmatic statements. Certainly, the intrinsic instinctual discernment of the Church is foundational for his development theory. Still, the extrinsic factors in the historical and cultural situation are the principal factors. We stated the importance Dulles attaches to the intrinsic entities, Scripture and tradition together with the sound judgment of the faith community. Still, extrinsic factors are dominant in

¹³⁶ Ibid., 212.

Dulles's thinking about reformulation and development. To clarify this point, Dulles provides two examples. The first is a reference to the Church's originative statements about the Person of Christ. The second example is the changing face of "saving faith," a comparison of dogmatic sayings in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

First, consider the Christological example. It is a working principle for Dulles that concepts and terminology have a history and are culturally conditioned. He recognizes that such conditioning would be a concern with respect to the great Christological formulations of the ecumenical creeds. Dulles is candid when he asserts that there can be no guarantee that the Church, having said at one time that the Son is "of the same substance" as the Father, may not at some later time say that the Father and the Son are different in substance. Recognizing that such a radical change in formulation is a distinct possibility, Dulles seems to suggest that the primary factors in determining the Christological formulas in any age are historical and cultural.¹³⁷ It is quite apparent that a dominant extrinsic hermeneutic is at work here.

This point is supported when Dulles addresses objections to the possibility of such a change in Christological formulation. One objection is stated as follows: If the Church at a later time in history should indeed declare that the Father and the Son were different in substance, would not this in effect erode the contents of the Church's teaching and emasculate the anathemas by which heresies have been struck down?¹³⁸ Dulles's answer is twofold. First, he grants to the magisterium the right and duty to anathematize formulas

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

that do not suitably express the revelation of Christ. Second, he qualifies this statement when he asserts that condemned propositions are anathematized only within a given field of discourse. Furthermore, the truth of an anathema stands if only one of the possible meanings of a proposition is unacceptable. To discern which of those meanings is unacceptable, one may have to ponder the original anathema in the light of the total religiohistorical development through which the Church was passing at the time the anathema was declared. With this determination in mind, the Church, from the standpoint of a later stage, may be able to retrieve a true meaning within the anathematized proposition.¹³⁹ Notice that the religiohistorical context is the primary factor. Presumably, the Church in a later and different religiohistorical context may affirm what once had been anathematized, making obsolete its judgments in an earlier and different religiohistorical context. Clearly, this is an example of development driven by extrinsic religiohistorical factors.¹⁴⁰

Dulles continues his argument with a second example which utilizes the principle enunciated here that from the standpoint of a later stage one may be able to retrieve a true meaning within an anathematized proposition. He suggests that a Catholic of the sixteenth century, giving a certain understanding to the term, "faith," might deny that man was saved by faith alone. Today, says Dulles, with a wider understanding of the same term, he might affirm the proposition then denied. "The two statements would not be really

¹³⁹ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 208.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. In this discussion, Dulles relies on the argumentation of Anselm Atkins, "Religious Assertions and Doctrinal Development," *Theological Studies* 27 (1966): 523-553, especially 532-533.

contradictory, for the meaning of one of the terms would have been changed.”¹⁴¹ The different meanings of “faith” for a Catholic in one age and then another demonstrate how powerfully the religiohistorical and cultural factors serve reconceptualization. Again, the conclusion is apparent. A hermeneutic for development comprised foremost of extrinsic factors results in radical reformulation which is essentially the production of new dogma.

It is important to recognize that Dulles utilizes a hermeneutic for doctrinal development, one which he articulated a few years after publication of *The Survival of Dogma*. In the work *The Resilient Church*, published in 1977, he went so far as to assert:

For present purposes, it may suffice to recall that dogmatic statements are not immune to hermeneutical treatment. They need to be reinterpreted so as to bridge the gap between the era when they were written—with its own concerns, presuppositions, conceptuality, and literary and linguistic conventions—and the interpreter’s own era, in which all of these variables will have changed.¹⁴²

The dominant influence of the religiohistorical context for the formulation of doctrinal statement is supported by one additional reflection on dogmatic pronouncements. Dulles adds, “The process of reinterpretation is, self-evidently, an unending one. No one interpretation can be imposed as definitive for all future time.”¹⁴³ One concern may be raised at this point. If the hermeneutic for development is driven by religiohistorical factors, is there a danger that Scripture and tradition may be effectively marginalized as

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 115. Dulles finds support for such hermeneutical treatment of dogmatic statements from the 1973 declaration issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, titled, *Mysterium ecclesiae*. This declaration, says Dulles, recognizes the historically conditioned character of dogmatic pronouncements and calls attention to the need of updating them according to the exigencies of the times.

¹⁴³ Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 115-116.

referents for this hermeneutical task? Those who involve themselves in this delicate subject of doctrinal development will have to answer if, and to what extent, new dogma resulting from the factors cited here keeps faith with the core Christian faith.

Specific Nuances of Development

Provisionality and Mutability of Dogma

The application of an extrinsic hermeneutic for development is complemented by three additional nuances peculiar to Dulles's development theory. The first of these is the provisionality and mutability of dogma. Provisionality grows out of a perception of the Church as a pilgrim community renewing itself by creative interaction with its changing environment. Through interaction, the Church's thoughtful members will bring helpful criticism from the outside. In this way the Church discovers discernment of the gospel and its meaning for the present time. Furthermore, the interaction has implications for the status of dogma. Depicting the interactive role of the "pilgrim church," Dulles concludes, "Faith, then, is not simply a matter of accepting a fixed body of doctrine. More fundamentally, it is a committed and trustful participation in an ongoing process."¹⁴⁴ He deduces that the dogma of the "pilgrim Church" in continuous interaction with the changing world must necessarily remain provisional and mutable. He points out, "In the course of responsible discussion, certain previously accepted doctrines will be

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 112.

modified.”¹⁴⁵

Dulles is aware that advocacy of the mutability of dogma encounters vigorous opposition from some corners of the Catholic Church. One vocal opponent was Cardinal Bea whom Dulles numbers among the camp of archaists.¹⁴⁶ At the Roman Catholic–Protestant Colloquium held at Harvard in 1963, the Cardinal stated, “First and foremost the fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church will not be changed. Compromise on points of faith which have already been defined is impossible.”¹⁴⁷ The Cardinal called attention to dogmatic decrees drawn up at the Council of Trent which he stated will never reverse or withdraw. And he asserted that the Church would not revise the dogmas of the primacy or the infallibility of the Pope. He concluded, “The Church has solemnly proclaimed all these doctrines to be of faith, that is to say, truths revealed by God himself

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 62. Abbott, 270. Dulles argues that the Second Council grants to the faithful, clergy and lay, lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought. With such freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence, there will be responsible discussion. Dulles is certain that in the course of such discussions, previously accepted doctrines will be modified. This is a positive expectation from the Church’s interaction with the world. But it is something of a generalization. In this particular reference, he does not specify which doctrines will be modified.

¹⁴⁶ Dulles notes that the magisterium has throughout its history had to defend against two adversaries: 1) the archaists who maintain that the apostolic faith set forth in the Bible admits of no further evolution, and 2) the evolutionistic Rationalists and Modernists, who contend that the native power of human intelligence to achieve progress in all fields demands that the Church not commit itself to any past revelation as permanently normative for the present and the future. *Survival of Dogma*, 192-193.

¹⁴⁷ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 155. Dulles cites the Cardinal’s remarks from Samuel H. Miller and G. E. Wright, eds., *Dialogue at Harvard* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1964), 63-64.

and necessary for salvation.”¹⁴⁸

Respectfully, Dulles suggests that on the basis of the current reassessment of dogma, the views of Cardinal Bea are unacceptable. His strong reply is:

It is far from obvious that the dogmas of the Church, having been “revealed by God himself,” cannot be revised by the Church, or that they are unconditionally “necessary for salvation,” or that they can in no sense be subject to compromise. Our findings suggest that the Catholic dogmas as presently formulated and understood may be significantly changed and that positive acceptance of all the dogmas may not be absolutely necessary for communion with the Roman Church.¹⁴⁹

Here Dulles asserts that dogma is mutable. This is evident, he argues, when one considers that if the Church was today in a position to speak for the first time about the institution of the sacraments, it would not be likely to declare without qualification, as the Council of Trent did, that the seven sacraments of the New Law “were all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹⁵⁰ Again, were the Church today for the first time speaking of the origins of the papacy, it would unlikely use concepts and terms of Vatican I, which forbade anyone, under pain of anathema, to deny, “that Blessed Peter the Apostle was constituted by Christ the Lord prince of all the apostles and visible head of the entire Church militant.”¹⁵¹ Dulles pleads that Catholic Christians should not be bound to formulations such as these which,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 168-169.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 169. The quotation is from DS 1601. In this connection, Dulles notes that a contemporary scholar familiar with modern biblical and historical studies would see the need of important distinctions that would scarcely have occurred to a sixteenth century theologian.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. The quotation is from DS 3055.

in his opinion, reflect the religious “style” of the baroque Church and the exegesis of an age less sensitive to historicity.¹⁵²

For Dulles, all dogmatic statements are tentative and mutable. The most venerable formulations from previous centuries must not be venerated. They must be distinguished always from revelation itself. The same must be said of contemporary statements. They may have to be corrected at a later date. At best, provisional and mutable dogmas are human vehicles of a divine truth that lies beyond all formulation.¹⁵³

Culturalization - the “Principle of Incarnation”

A second nuance in Dulles’s development theory is the principle of culturalization or “incarnation.” According to this principle, the gospel demands to be realized in distinctive ways in different social contexts. Christian history, Dulles observes, can be divided into a number of major eras—such as the apostolic, the patristic, the medieval, the early modern, and the contemporary. Then he comments, “Each major cultural shift has brought about innovations in doctrine, in ecclesiastical structures, in modes of worship, and in ethical patterns.”¹⁵⁴ The Church is alert to these major cultural shifts.

Culturalization suggests that the Church speaks according to the culture for the purpose of

¹⁵² Ibid. 169.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 170. For his position, Dulles looks for agreement from the Lutheran theologian, Carl Braaten. Dulles cites Braaten who presumes to speak for a large segment of Lutherans when he states: “Neither the trinitarian and christological dogmas, which we share with Roman Catholics, nor the papal and mariological dogmas, which we do not share, are exempt from new interpretations in an age of radical historical consciousness.” See Carl E. Braaten, “Reunion, Yes; Return, No,” *Una Sancta* 23 (1966): 32-33.

¹⁵⁴ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 87.

communicating doctrine to the people of our time. And culturalization signifies something more. It signifies understanding Christianity in the light of new scientific advances.¹⁵⁵

Surfacing again is the dominance of historical and cultural factors in Dulles's hermeneutic of doctrinal development.

Pluriformity in Dogmatic Statements

Pluriformity, or pluralism in doctrinal formulations, is a third nuance peculiar to Dulles's development theory. Consistently, Catholic theologians have taken for granted the supposed universality of dogmatic formulas, namely, that once a formula is sufficiently authenticated, it ought to be professed by all believers everywhere. Dulles is so convinced about the inadequacy of this position that he builds a carefully constructed case for dogmatic pluralism which implies the non-finality of dogmatic statements. More significant, the notion of dogmatic pluralism implies the possibility of variety in doctrinal expression, also additions to the Church's corpus of dogmatic statements. It suggests the modification of some dogmas and in some instances the deletion of other dogmas. Furthermore, Dulles argues that the Church at various junctures in her history has been positive about pluriformity of dogmatic expression. He finds support for his case in select historical data which he sets forth in, *The Survival of Dogma*.¹⁵⁶

1. The New Testament displays a proliferation of creedal affirmations traceable to various segments of the primitive Church.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 121. See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 58. Abbott, 164.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 166-167.

2. Heinrich Denzinger's *Enchiridion*, in the opening page, will show, the several churches were content to possess their own local creeds. At least until the conversion of Constantine, when Christianity became the general law of the Roman Empire, the recitation of identical creedal formulas was not considered essential to Christian fellowship.
3. In the Middle Ages the Latin West, excessively isolated its own theological world, began to make additions to the ancient creeds and to formulate new dogmas without regard to the rest of Christendom. Dulles cites and discusses the example of the addition of the *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed, one of the major factors leading to the tragic schism between East and West.
4. The Council of Florence (1438-1445) temporarily patched up this schism in the fifteenth century, and showed thereby an exemplary breadth of understanding. It affirmed that the unity of the Church should be built not on particular doctrinal formulas, but rather on the cornerstone, Christ Jesus, Who will make both one. In the union then decreed, there was no question of compelling either Church to accept the devotional practices of the other. Both Western and Eastern Churches were allowed to follow their own liturgical calendars and to worship their own saints.
5. An agreement based on mutual tolerance was reached regarding the crucial question of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Both East and West were permitted to follow the long-standing tradition of their own Churches.

In a prolonged discussion of the Council of Florence and its resolution of the *Filioque* controversy, Dulles bolsters his case for the pluralism of dogma. He observes that the issue was not language or vocabulary, i.e., the Latin retention of the term, *Filioque*, and the Greeks' adherence to the more ancient usage, the formula "from the Father through the Son."¹⁵⁷ As Dulles views the discussion at Florence, the issue could be framed in a tersely worded question: How much diversity could unity tolerate? In the end, the intention was to permit each church to retain its own formula. This action implied that

¹⁵⁷ The difference in terminology, according to Walter Kasper, was rooted in irreducibly diverse forms of thought. Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 167. See Walter Kasper, "Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen?" *Stimmen der Zeit* 179 (1967): 401-416.

diverse thought-forms, as well as diverse modes of speech, could be tolerated without impairing the catholic unity of the Church. On the basis of discussions at Florence, Dulles demonstrates that his notion of pluriformity is an ancient principle, certainly not a modern invention. He writes:

The Eastern and Western formulas were different in their formal conceptual content and hence not synonymous, yet, according to the council, they designate, under different aspects, one and the same divine mystery. If “dogma” is taken to mean “dogmatic formula,” one may say that the Council of Florence implicitly rejected the equation “one faith-one dogma.” It acknowledged that conceptually diverse formulations may co-exist in different sections of the Church. The mere fact that a formula, rightly understood, is true and orthodox does not necessarily mean that it should be imposed as a confessional test upon all members of the Church.¹⁵⁸

It should be noted that diverse formulations may co-exist in different sections of the Church. This implies that one true and orthodox formula should not be imposed as a confessional test upon all members of the Church. In Dulles’s view, this is a classic instance of dogmatic pluralism.

Encouraged by strong historical precedent carefully documented, articulated, and interpreted, Dulles holds fast to the principle of pluralism in dogmatic statements. Convinced of the validity of this principle, he will consider the possibility that one and the same faith may be expressed in formulas that stand in tension with each other and may even be found to be contradictorily opposed. Answering those who are apprehensive about notions of pluriformity, he deduces that some who appear to contradict a definition of faith may not as yet have “made shipwreck of the faith.” In such cases, he urges exploring carefully what theologians mean by their suspect statements. We must see if

¹⁵⁸ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 167.

they are indeed at variance with the mystery of revelation itself.¹⁵⁹

Early in *The Survival of Dogma*, Dulles had articulated the implications of pluriformity for the Church and its dogma. We may summarize those points in this discussion. First, Dulles asserts that Christianity is to be constantly rethematized; its message translated into the patterns called for by new sociocultural contexts. Second, pluriformity is permitted and demanded by the pilgrim status of the Church, not yet arriving at its destination, but still groping its way through the vicissitudes of history. "It must therefore adapt its forms of thought and expression to the successive situations in which faith finds itself."¹⁶⁰ Third, pluriformity is encouraged by the diversity and mutual tension among authoritative organs of revelation. God's self-revelation in Christ comes to man as refracted through different agencies, all of them humanly conditioned.¹⁶¹ These dimensions of pluriformity, in Dulles's view, suggest possibilities for reformulation and development of church dogma.

Summary

This chapter opened with the question, "Is there development of dogma?" Dulles gives a positive answer to this question. In his view, dogmatic reformulation and development is without question a necessity. This is so for a number of reasons which appear at times unrelated to each other. For Dulles, the Church's dogma is at best an

¹⁵⁹ Dulles, *A Church to Believe In*, 143.

¹⁶⁰ Dulles, *Survival of Dogma*, 88.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

inadequate human expression of divine truth. The revelation of the transcendent God cannot be encapsulated in human thought and words. The limitations of finite human attempts to express the mystery only serve to underscore the non-finality of dogmatic pronouncements. Furthermore, linked as they are to specific points in time, these human expressions unavoidably bear the limitations of their own historicity. The usefulness of time-bound formulations depends upon openness to alteration and correction in the light of the Church's task of communicating the gospel to the world's people in every age. This task is essentially dialogic and interactive with the culture. Proactive Church reform in the light of external interaction with the culture suggests the need for reformulation of dogmatic expression. According to Dulles, Vatican Council II encouraged such initiatives.

Various factors intrinsic to the life of the Church contribute to responsible reformulation and development. For instance, the Church's prayer and worship life play a significant role. This was most apparent in the development of the "new dogmas," the Marian doctrines in particular. The possibility of new dogmas within a longstanding tradition is pivotal. When the Church is viewed relationally in the setting of its own times, certain teachings not contained in the original apostolic deposit may be incorporated in the Church's faith and life. This can be done without resorting to arguments which would rationalize their latent and tacit pre-existence in that apostolic corpus. The Marian dogmas and infallibility are examples. The appearance of new dogmas requires appropriate validation. The Church performs this task effectively because the Spirit gives an instinct of faith for discernment or judgment relative to dogmas, their development and validation. This instinctual discernment by the interior working of the Holy Spirit in the

community of faith is foundational.

But this foremost intrinsic criterion for reformulation and development of dogma is complemented by powerful extrinsic factors. Dulles focuses principally on the historical and cultural situation in which the Church finds itself. New doctrines expectantly grow out of a “living exchange” in which the gospel is stated with meaning for the people of a given time and culture. This process moves beyond revision and reformulation. The task is essentially reconceptualization. And the hermeneutic for the reconfiguration of concepts palatable to frameworks identified in the culture is an extrinsic interpretation of the “signs of the times” in the light of the gospel. Thus, the religiohistorical context for communicating the gospel drives the reformulation and development of dogma. Hesitant as we are to say that Dulles is a proponent of “new dogma,” we are compelled to recognize that the consistent application of a situational religiohistorical hermeneutic to the Church’s doctrinal expression in each succeeding generation finally results in development that is the formulation of new dogma. In their own way, the provisionality and mutability of dogma advocated by Dulles also contribute to the possibilities of such development. And the plurality of dogmas as well as the pluriformity in doctrinal expression are logical and complementary consequences of that development.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been the analysis of Avery Dulles's theory of dogmatic reformulation and development. While his theology surfaces frequently, this work is not an attempt to embrace all the themes of his theology. The study does present the major lines of his thought and theology pertaining to development. It marks the extent to which Dulles advocates reconceptualization, serving the Church's communication of the Christian faith to new frameworks of thought peculiar to the late twentieth century.

Care was exercised to demonstrate where Dulles is dependent on official Roman Catholic teaching and where his own work is distinguished from that doctrine. Influenced significantly by the Second Vatican Council, he distances himself from neo-Scholasticism. Avery Dulles is a post-Vatican II theologian who was determined to implement openness and *aggiornamento*. Some of his assertions about development move beyond the council's statements. Notwithstanding, when Christian theologians and thinkers frame the Christian message for the twenty-first century world, they will discover in Dulles's treatment of dogmatic development approaches which merit attention.

Findings

The formation of Dulles's development theory was dependent on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. His differences with neo-Scholasticism, his view of divine revelation as symbolic mediation, and his preference for tacit knowing are the primary intrinsic factors.

His writings reveal intentional abandonment of the longstanding neo-Scholastic notion that dogma is static and that development is little more than variation of doctrine once handed down from the Apostolic era. Contradistinctive to neo-Scholasticism, Dulles views dogma as the dynamic expression of revelation by the Holy Spirit's continuous gracious interior working in the community of faith. According to Dulles, divine revelation is mediated through a paradigm of symbols, whose meaning is apprehended in a tacit manner. Symbols, principally from the biblical corpus and from within the Church's life and worship, but also from within the world at large,¹ serve the communication of meaning. Apprehension of that meaning occurs in terms of the encounter with truth evoked by symbol. Truth in this instance is the transcendent God revealed in the Incarnation. The communication is symbolic and the apprehension is personal and existential. The expression of revelation and its meaning in such a paradigm will be flexible and adjustable or subject to change. Neo-Scholastic notions of dogma as continuous propositional statement give place to discontinuous dogmatic expression that is reformable as it is adaptable in the interest of communication.

Equally significant as his revelation theory for dogma and development is Dulles's existential epistemology. Here, he distances himself from the Thomistic view that by unaided reason one may arrive, though incompletely, at the knowledge of God. He

¹ Dulles affirms the symbolic mediation of revelation in the world at large. In this he adopts Vatican II's concept of "signs of the times" (*Gaudium et spes*, Art. 11 [see Abbott, 209]), viz., "authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this People [of God] has a part along with other men of our age." Such signs or symbols are, however, always interpreted in the light of the gospel in which the revelation is fully given.

prefers the Augustinian-Anselmian formula, "faith seeking understanding." But he focuses particularly on "tacit knowing" and inchoate knowledge by informal inference. As a post-critical thinker and theologian, Dulles embraces the tacit dimension of rationality. Tacit knowing of revelation is distinctive from static rational agreement with propositional revelatory statements. Fixed and enduring statements give place to the flexible and adaptable articulation and expression of what is known in a tacit manner. The abrogation of certain old forms of expression and the introduction of certain new forms is to be expected.

Extrinsic factors also contribute to Dulles's development theory. One of these is the Church's interaction with its external environment. Dulles sees implications for dogma in the change since Vatican II from a monologic view of the Church to a dialogic outlook. The latter implies that the forms and structures of the Church must be revised constantly in view of the shifting human environment in which the Church lives and carries out its mission. Similarly, the Church's dogmatic expression must remain flexible. Irreformability in either structure or statement of belief is no longer adequate for the Church's dialogic interaction with the world. Formerly, development was little more than refinement of original irreformable teaching. Dogma for the present and future ages must be reformable because only by flexible expression can the Church communicate the faith in these times.

Related to the influence of a dialogic outlook on development is the historical and cultural conditioning of dogmatic statements, a second extrinsic factor important for Dulles's development theory. From a situationist view, dogma develops in the historical

situation when the Church creatively interacts with its sociocultural environment. Dulles showed how this situationist view differs from earlier notions of development. One theory held that doctrine evolves by a process of continuous and cumulative growth, i.e., evolutionary development. An opposite view suggested that doctrine remains fixed at some primitive state. According to this theory, new formulations merely maintain old truths and give to them relevance and credibility in new circumstances. The notion that doctrine is shaped passively by the forces of secular history was another view. By contrast, the historical and cultural conditioning of dogmatic statements is anything but passive and reactive. Such conditioning is emphatically dynamic and proactive. Dulles interprets this view to mean that revelation comes to persons within a sociocultural situation which influences and shapes their articulation of revelation conceptually. In this instance, doctrinal expression will be similarly historically and culturally conditioned. Dulles asserts that traditional statements of faith have value for the present only if they are reinterpreted in accordance with the presuppositions, thought categories, concerns, and vocabulary of the present generation. The result is a plurality of concepts which suggests the possibility of pluriformity in dogmatic statements. Newly developed dogmas which are not formally implicit in the apostolic deposit of faith are expected. They arise within new or changing historical and cultural situations.

Development and History

In response to these findings, we look for ways in which Christian theologians outside the Roman Catholic Church may dialogue with Avery Dulles. There are specific

topics, in our opinion, which warrant serious attention. In the first place, we suppose that Dulles's development theory is much too dependent on one extrinsic factor, the influence of historical situationism. The nuances of Dulles's program of development working out of the historical and cultural situation certainly resonate with Peter Brown's estimate of late third century Christianity. Brown refers to two generations in the late third and early fourth centuries during which time Christianity experienced a conversion to the culture and ideals of the Roman world.² This observation prompts a question which may be framed this way. Do cultural adaptation and historical situationism provide a true reading of the circumstances which gave rise to the great dogmas of the Church? To what extent does development of dogma represent the Church's adaptation to culture? Or did dogmatic development in the early centuries principally represent the Church's response to heresy and correction of heretical teaching? When these questions are directed to the early ecumenical councils, it seems apparent that the fathers were motivated principally to recover the apostolic teaching in the face of heterodoxy. To be sure, there was a historical situation peculiar to the early conciliar actions and the contest between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, a situation replete with conflict and power struggles. But these struggles are not worthy of comparison to the monumental production of the great Trinitarian and Christological formulas deposited and kept in the three Ecumenical Creeds. The historical situation notwithstanding, these dogmas reflect an overriding constraint of the fathers to state correctly, confess openly, and defend vigorously the once-for-all apostolic teaching.

² Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 25.

The intense and valiant confessional posture of the fathers may be a positive witness in this time when *aggiornamento* and adaptation are placed high on the church's agenda.

Development, Dialogue and Revelation

Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors shaping Dulles's development theory have additional implications for dialogue between Rome and other confessing churches of Christendom. These discussions will doubtlessly focus on substantive doctrinal issues. When searching for ways to speak as one Christian voice, Rome together with other Christian churches may consider development as a starting place. However, the dialogue will proceed directly to the subject of revelation where most of Dulles's beliefs and assertions about dogmatic development are grounded.

Among numerous facets of revelation that are fruitful for dialogue, this study identifies two principal *foci* of Dulles's development theory. The first is his notion of revelation as non-propositional communication apprehended personally and existentially, opposed to revelation comprehended as divine communication in human thought and language, i.e., words. The second topic is Dulles's notion that the Holy Spirit continues giving revelation to succeeding generations in a manner that is historically and culturally conditioned, versus the notion that divine revelation is supracultural, i.e., given once-for-all through the prophets and apostles.

In his writings, Dulles repeatedly challenges the notion that God reveals Himself in propositional statement because human thoughts and words are incapable of the mystery of the transcendent God. Others counter any such notion of *finitum non capax infiniti*

with respect to divine revelation. A possible rejoinder is one Lutheran theologian's discussion of the authority of Scripture. In an article published in September, 1956, Dr. Norman Nagel asserts, "When God speaks to us, He uses our language. We may not be more 'spiritual' or clever than that."³ Then Nagel does something interesting. Using a category familiar to Avery Dulles, Nagel employs the Sacrament as a model for what God is doing when he addressed humanity in the words of Scripture. He asserts that on one hand the Lutheran confessors of the sixteenth century had to defend the integrity of the bread, and on the other, the integrity of the body. The defense of Scripture is similar. If the Scripture is transubstantiated, says Nagel, then God's gracious coming all the way to us through an earthly thing, the verbal medium, is denied. Nagel also uses a second model, one that is Christological, specifically, the Incarnation and its surroundings. He argues that to take geography and history out of the words of Jesus is to make a docetic Christ who is not our Brother and Savior. Similarly, we may not docetize the Scriptures or the bread in the Sacrament. God deals with us through bread and through human words.

Nagel has brought forward an alternative to Dulles's notion of divine non-propositional revelation apprehended personally and existentially. Any fruitful dialogue of which we speak must necessarily deal with these differing positions. This study articulates Dulles's position. The counter-position is that, however humble and humbling is God's self-disclosure through the vehicle of human thought and language, it is not for us to

³ Norman Nagel, "The Authority of Scripture," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 27 (September, 1956): 702.

docetize divine disclosure by employing such notions as *finitum non capax infiniti* with respect to divine transcendency and revelation. Not even the radical contrast between finite humanity and infinite deity should lead us to hesitate, much less to question, God's communication of His Word in both conceptual meaning and intelligible language, though the mystery communicated is beyond human comprehension rationally, empirically, and existentially.

The second inescapable point in any serious dialogue between confessing theologians of Rome and others in Christendom is a reluctance to attach supracultural status to dogmatic statements. We are speaking about Dulles's reluctance based on his existential notion of divine revelation. Though he holds steadfastly to the Three Ecumenical Creeds and their doctrines, Dulles considers the possibility of framing new creedal statements. It is not that the ancient creeds are outdated altogether. Rather, Dulles believes that the Church is free to consider new expression of doctrine because the Spirit continues to give revelation anew existentially within the community of faith. Such communication of revelation through symbolic mediation is essentially non-propositional. According to Dulles, the Bible, too, may be viewed as a revelatory symbol. The events recorded by the Bible and its very language are symbolic. He asserts that the majestic symbolism of the Bible points beyond itself to mystery in ways superior to explicit language and concepts. Furthermore, in every age, the historically-conditioned Church is the recipient of the Spirit's gracious ongoing work so that expression of the faith for the times is also historically conditioned. By necessity, therefore, any notion of dogmatic formulation which statically rises above historical relativities, meaning the articulation of

faith in so-called timeless formulas, is a concern to Dulles. As a result he does not attach supracultural significance to the biblical corpus, though Scripture serves as a reliable touchstone, an instrument for evaluation and assessment of new dogmas.

Dulles's assertions about the non-finality of the Scripture witness is a concern. And the manner in which he sets forth his case is suspect. His argument that even in biblical times there was no "freezing" of revelation in ideas and expressions that would be valid always and everywhere is hardly convincing to many in Christendom who affirm, for example, the supracultural validity and longevity of the Lord's commands cited in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20), the apostolic commission to Timothy and Titus (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:3), the Pauline particularization of the one Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), and the Johannine everlasting Gospel (Rev. 14:6). Dulles concurs with the Catholic point of view that the Bible, taken as a whole, is the word of God, the fundamental document of Israelite and Christian revelation. As the historical witness to the Gospel events, the Bible is the source in which the church's declarations must have their ultimate foundation. But he qualifies this viewpoint, convinced that Scripture alone was never intended to be, and has not proved to be, a self-sufficient rule of faith. The church is the ongoing *locus* where the Holy Spirit speaks through persons who have lived since Christ and the apostles. This viewpoint is a concern to those in Christendom for whom the biblical corpus is durable, applicable, and normative in every age.

Dulles's post-critical views of revelation seem to support a position on the nature and authority of Scripture that is distinctive from the position of other confessing Christians. The conflict over authority for doing theology goes unabated among the

churches and their theologians. Roman Catholics and Lutherans together with other Protestants surely tire of the centuries-long debate. The feeling is that the theologians never move beyond the old lines drawn in pre-Vatican II discussions. In this setting, the work of Avery Dulles may add an important ingredient. An exponent of post-Vatican II theology, he has effectively moved the debate to a new level. He challenges participants in the continuing dialogue to involve themselves with the mindset and outlook of multiple nations, ethnic peoples, races, and cultures. He challenges participating theologians to conduct their discussions with a window toward the world of the twenty-first century. Beyond comparing dogmas and their intricacies among the longstanding traditions of Christendom, the circle of discussion must be expanded to include the input of the multi-pluralist world society in which the Church finds itself today.

Development and Authority

Dialogue with Avery Dulles and his fellow Catholic theologians could be quite lively in view of positions adopted by some participants. For instance, many Lutheran theologians have little interest in discussing the development of dogma. Furthermore, some Lutherans are unaware of situational changes within the Catholic Church. They tend to engage post-Vatican II Catholic theologians as if the playing field were still post-Trent or post-Vatican I. They enter the dialogue thinking that the lines are still drawn over Scripture and tradition. And the Lutheran side presses the doctrine of Scripture, especially the authority of Scripture. Dulles, we surmise, would not engage in such dialogue, which he regards passé. He has moved the debate in new directions. Scripture

and authority questions are *a posteriori* issues for Dulles. His development theory has all the marks of a debate shifted from Scripture and authority to the *a priori* questions surrounding the Holy Spirit and revelation. If there be a core issue for Dulles, it is not what Scripture states, nor even the status and authority of Scripture. For him, the rudimentary issue is where and how the Holy Spirit is at work. He is convinced that the originating and organizing principle of dogmatic theology is not Scripture but revelation, the divine self-communication by the interior working of the Holy Spirit. Dogma for Dulles is closely related to the Spirit's interior revealing just as dogma for Lutherans is normed by Scripture termed the *norma normans* of all doctrine and doctrinal statement.

To be sure, Lutherans relate the Holy Spirit to Scripture when they argue the case for inspiration of the Bible and then inerrancy. But the dialogue with Dulles may be more fruitful if it begins with Christology followed by pneumatology. His position is clear. Consistently, he posits the surpassing revelation of God in the Incarnate One, our Lord Jesus Christ. On the basis of John 16:13-14, Dulles affirms that the Incarnate Lord gives to His Church the Holy Spirit. The revealing Spirit communicates to persons graciously in symbolic mediation. The symbols evoke the tacit encounter with truth, the transcendent God. Then follows expression in statements made within the community of faith, statements which become dogmas under the oversight of the Church's magisterium. These are the general lines of Dulles's position set forth in this study. Scripture is a historically and culturally conditioned witness to the Spirit's gracious interior working and revealing action.

In dialogue, Lutherans may question whether or not this paradigm – Incarnation, Spirit, revelation, apprehension and dogmatic expression is consistent with the Incarnational theology of the four Gospels. The Incarnate Christ and His reference to the Scriptures should not be overlooked. The post-resurrection Lord attests to the Scriptures of the Old Testament which speak of Him (Lu. 24:44-48; cf. John 5:39). He promises that the Holy Spirit would glorify Him and would take what is His and declare it to the Apostles (John 16:14). What the Apostles preached and taught was nothing other than what the Spirit took from Christ and gave to them, i.e., what the Spirit heard first (John 16:13). In the early church, the Apostles speak not as mere witnesses, their sayings historically and culturally conditioned. No, they speak as the Holy Spirit leads them into all truth and gives them utterance (cf. John 16:13; 1 Thess. 2:13). The Incarnate Lord as well as the Incarnational theology of the Gospels attest clearly to the prophetic and apostolic Word, the Holy Scriptures. We offer the bold suggestion that Dulles's emphasis on the Incarnation as the primary revelation supports a high view of the inscripturated prophetic and apostolic Word regarded by Lutherans as the *norma normans* of dogma and doctrinal statement.

Direction for Development

Closing comments properly draw attention to Dulles's assertion documented by this study that church dogma does develop and must develop. The student of Avery Dulles's theology may expect him to demonstrate in detail several instances of actual development. We may look for new conceptualizations of key doctrines with the modern

mindset in view. Such is not the case. Dulles provides few and scattered concrete examples of possible reconceptualized dogma. He does not demonstrate what dogma is when it is reformulated for outlooks peculiar to existentialism, pragmatism, process thought, phenomenology, and evolution. Rather, he is quite cautious and virtually non-communicative when it comes to designing dogma for new frameworks. We do not find in Dulles's writings a work similar to *New Paradigms for Theology*, exploratory studies collected by Hans Küng and David Tracy. Dulles's major work, *Models of the Church*, would seem to be a reformulated doctrine of the Church with recommendations for a new and adaptable ecclesiology. But no such recommendations are forthcoming. Because the Church is mystery, Dulles does not attempt to formulate even a synthesis of models.

The absence of real examples of dogmatic reconceptualization in Dulles's work should not be interpreted as timidity on his part. Actually, such a perceived deficiency is the mark of strength or solidarity, and especially responsibility. Dulles faces honestly the herculean task that implementation of his development theory would entail. Also, he recognizes that such work on the frontier of theological communication in a new era is not a task the individual theologian may accomplish alone. Ultimately, dogmatic development is the responsibility of the Church. Dulles is a faithful son and theologian of the Church. He is not about to take up work that only the Church and its councils can do properly.

Throughout his theological writings, Avery Dulles alludes to the frank realization that reconceptualization for communication in a pluralistic age may run counter to the faith at numerous points. How can the Church's theologians maintain the integrity of Christian dogma while attempting to reconceptualize the faith in a manner palatable to

theologies or -isms whose assumptions or presuppositions are hostile to this faith? Individual theologians may explore the frontiers like scouts looking ahead for a moving army. But the army and its top generals must confer and then determine the direction. That the Church may accord faithful, responsible and timely attention to its dogmatic heritage with a view to moving into the future, the theologians are servants. One has to be impressed with Avery Dulles's consistent servant role in all of his endeavors toward dogmatic reformulation and reconceptualization in the interest of updated and timely speaking of the faith. Always he defers ultimately to the Church as he articulates the most recent attempts to reach the world in the name of Christ via pronouncements of the Second Council. Since that council, almost forty years have passed. Could Dulles be understood to suggest that in view of the intensifying rapid change affecting cultures and peoples today, the Church may act more incisively than century long intervals between councils will permit? Does the forward-looking work of Avery Dulles anticipate a Third Vatican Council in the early decades of the new millenium?

This question does not imply an endorsement of Dulles's theory of dogmatic development. The critique offered above from the vantage of others outside Rome, including confessing Lutherans, must stand. Nevertheless, Lutheran theology may learn from Avery Dulles to look beyond ecclesiastical walls to the larger horizon where Christianity should by all means engage many cultures and peoples in dialogue. This must be done for the sake of the Gospel. Dulles's development theory reviewed in this study impresses upon Lutherans the need to reconsider ways and means to communicate their own strong sixteenth century confessional heritage. Today confessional Lutherans must

be equally intentional about communicating the Gospel substance of their heritage, as they have been intent on preserving that heritage against heterodoxy. In addition to practical methods of evangelization in the local congregation, Lutheran theologians stimulated by the thought and work of Avery Dulles may frame Lutheran confessional theology in terms that challenge the thought centers of the culture with the Gospel's claims. To begin such a task, the Lutheran theologians may explore the relationship of sixteenth century form and expression to the substance of that Reformation confessional heritage. They may consider alternative forms and expression suitable in the present millenium. The nineteenth century paradigms of dogmatic expression which served Lutheran theologians through the twentieth century may well undergo some amount of reconfiguration in form serviceable to theological dialogue with post-critical theologies in a post-modern society. For a task of such magnitude, Lutheran confessional theology may look to those churches and theologians who have already begun similar efforts in their traditions. One helpful reference is the development theory of Father Avery Dulles.

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