

REVIEWS

MODELS OF REVELATION by Avery Dulles, S.J. *Gill and Macmillan. 1983*
£6.50.

Father Avery Dulles is well and deservedly known for his most helpful book *Models of the Church*. He has now increased our debt to him by this study of revelation. In his preface he presents the questions: What is revelation, and how is it communicated? How does the Church find out what revelation is? What about matters concerning revelation on which the Church has not pronounced? He argues that we must go behind the Church's "doctrine of revelation" to fundamental theology; reminding ourselves, however, that "only revelation can speak well of revelation". His references to Polanyi are frequent, and he mentions Polanyi's distinction between "tacit" and "explicit" knowing; there is so much that we know without being explicitly and reflectively aware that we know it.

Along the same lines as his argument in *Models of the Church* (where he emphasised that the Church, as presented for example in Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, is a mystery which, because it is mysterious, cannot be exhaustively analysed and defined in scientific terms) he proposes that we should approach the subject of revelation by way of an examination of five different "models" of revelation; and in this connection he refers to the physicist Bohr's view that the physical datum of light could be "properly, though inadequately, understood with the help of two models—the particle theory and the wave theory—though these two models could not be systematically reconciled". But whereas in *Models of the Church* Fr. Dulles was content to let these models stand side by side, in his study of revelation he moves on from the five models to propose an understanding of revelation which encompasses the five models and, while benefiting from each of

them, rises above them and is offered as a quasi-Hegelian *Aufhebung* of them; a synthesis which goes beyond each of the models but profits from them all and, at the same time, criticises each of them so far as they offer themselves as a complete "theology of revelation".

The five current models are: Revelation as Doctrine; Revelation as History; Revelation as Inner Experience (or mystical intuition of God); Revelation as Dialectical Presence (with particular reference to the early Barth); Revelation as New Awareness (a position suggested or implied by Teilhard de Chardin). It is worth noticing that "Revelation as Doctrine" was taken up in neo-Scholasticism and approved by Pius XII in his celebrated encyclical *Humani Generis*; it is also typical of Protestant evangelical fundamentalism. Fr. Dulles appreciates the good points in each of these five models, but also criticises each of them.

His own view of revelation is summed up in the phrase: Symbolic Mediation, and he points out that it has support, with varying nuances, from Paul Tillich, H.R. Niebuhr, Rahner, Ricoeur, Gilkey, John Macquarrie, Louis Dupré, and Gregory Baum. "Revelation never occurs in a purely inner 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". A symbol "is a sign pregnant with a plenitude of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated". And to enter into the meaning of the symbol we have to become not detached observers but "engaged participants". And Christ, "the summit of revelation", is the supreme symbol of God, the

fullness of all revelation (Vatican II), and a symbol which embodies and conveys what it signifies.

If I have not misunderstood Fr. Dulles, and despite the fact that he concedes that the word "sacrament" usually refers not so much to revelation as to the "communication of grace and sanctification", it appears that a symbol which contains, expresses and conveys what it symbolises can well be called a sacrament. In this connection he appears to accept the modern usage whereby Jesus Christ is, as a realised and realising symbol, described as a "sacrament of God", while the Church, in its turn, is the "sacrament of Christ" (Fr. Dulles empathises with Vatican II). In their turn, the seven sacraments both symbolise and contain and convey that of which they are symbols.

The penultimate chapter of this most important book is entitled "The Acceptance of Revelation", or as we might say, faith as an act of adhesion to the Christian revelation. Fr. Dulles speaks of the "credibility" of revelation. Personally I would prefer the unpleasant but significant term, "*credentitas*". It may be agreed that the truth of Christianity cannot be strictly "proved"

to the satisfaction of the pure rationalist. But Fr. Lonergan offers some advice which seems to me to be completely correct: "Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible". An examination of the Christian data, assisted by intelligence, will lead to the position that to accept the Christian claim is, first, reasonable (Christianity is credible) and secondly an act which alone corresponds to genuine moral responsibility. In other words, a stage will be reached at which the acceptance of the Christian revelation becomes a moral obligation—and, as Kant reminded us, moral obligation is a "categorical imperative". That the resultant act of faith cannot occur without the promptings of divine grace can be readily conceded, since Christian faith, while confirming the natural experience, raises the believer to a supernatural level. One must of course add that there may be many honest and concerned people who fail to recognise that Christian faith is an obligation; but moral theology has plenty to tell us about what it uncomfortably described as "invincible ignorance".

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THE CROSS AND THE BOMB—CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE NUCLEAR DEBATE, edited by Francis Bridger. *Mowbrays Christian Studies*. 1983. pp 154

This book was conceived as a reply to *The Church and the Bomb* from a group of well-known pro-deterrence Christians: Dr Graham Leonard, Keith Ward, Richard Harries, Gerard Hughes S.J., Ulrich Simon, General Sir Hugh Beach and Francis Bridger. The first four offer pieces which are considerably improved on their earlier hasty entries into the Church and Bomb debate. None of them argues that nuclear deterrence *as now practiced* is morally right. But all of them argue that some kind of nuclear deterrence can be accommodated within Christian war reasoning—though only Keith Ward makes much of an effort to prove it. They are by no means agreed among themselves about how the case

should be argued and there are some considerable contradictions from one chapter to the next. Fr. Hughes offers us a version of the "moral paradox" argument: "by maintaining a credible deterrent it is possible to make nuclear wars less likely, and the more convincing the preparations the less likely they will ever be called into action". This means that the people in the chain of command are doing something quite moral, in that the proper description of their acts is "preventing nuclear war". To do this successfully they also have to have the intention to fire the weapons on orders. But this is morally necessary in view of the main intention. If they are wrong, it is not because they are doing something