REVELATION AS METAPHORIC PROCESS

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THE CRUCIAL but unanswered question of contemporary theology is the relationship between the universal salvific will of God and the absolute uniqueness of Jesus. How we answer that question will depend on how we understand the foundation of all Christian theologizing: revelation. Cardinal Newman has said that "no people . . . has been denied a revelation from God."[1] Can we go further and say that all of human life is revelatory, so that, properly speaking, there is no such thing as "Christian revelation"?[2] Or must we hold, as is the case especially in many fundamentalist forms of Christian faith, that the only *true* revelation of God is to be found in Christianity, so that all of human life must be measured against this one absolutely unique revelation? Part of the problem is surely in the way we pose the question. Dichotomous either-or ways of thinking must give way to a more unitive both-and approach. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as already taking place in his historical ministry, yet the kingdom is still to come. The early Church proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and Lord, yet the messianic age has still to be realized. The unity of God's creation should not be rent asunder by Western theological abstractions. Whatever we say about "fulfilment" must be rooted in a divine creative intention that is all-embracing and all-inclusive, including revelatory experiences other than our own.

Can we hold in a tensive unity Christian claims to a particular, definitive revelation and all other claims to a unique revelation? Only, it would seem, if the Christian claim is not intended to be limited to *specifically Christian* experience, interpretation, and language. The natural move is toward a "limited human expression"[3] of what transcends and embraces all human experience. Difficulties arise when one's own expression is taken as normative for all. This essay proposes that there is a more unitive and universal ground for resolving such questions in

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[1] This was in a sermon at Oxford in 1830. See J. H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London, 1909); quoted in Aylward Shorter, *Revelation and Its Intrepretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) 1.

[2] This is the main theme in Gabriel Moran, *The Present Revelation* (New York: Seabury, 1972); see, e.g., 253–55.

[3] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 54.

the primary language of symbol, metaphor, and story. This involves a dialectical consideration that intertwines the specifically Christian and the universally human. I will consider first the Christian self-understanding as expressed in Avery Dulles' five models of revelation, then the universal human experience of symbolic communication. In that context I will again ask the crucial question for Christians: Is there a definitive, once-for-all revelation in Christ? That in turn leads to the final consideration: the legitimacy of revelation in the other world religions.

CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING: DULLES' MODELS OF REVELATION

Once again, as in his popular *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles has done a great service for all of us by analyzing from within the perspective of Christian faith five types or models—this time, of revelation. Following Stephen Pepper's use of "root metaphor," he maintains that what constitutes each model "is not the imagery but the structural relationships represented as obtaining between the revealer, the recipient, and the means of revelation."[4] Although a variety of images of God may be employed in any one model and, conversely, the same image may be used in different models, root metaphor implies that there is a basic or dominant analogy in terms of the particular structural relationships. This raises the question, given a plurality of theological models, as to whether the different models are mutually exclusive or compatible, contradictory or complementary.

In the course of his exposition Dulles offers numerous summaries of his models. Using his language, I summarize them here in the form of questions. (1) *Doctrine:* Is God an infallible teacher who communicates authoritative teaching in the form of propositions to a recipient who is expected to be attentive and docile? (2) *History:* Is God a transcendent agent who communicates by means of historical events to a community of faith (recipient) which must discern and interpret the signs given? (3) *Inner Experience:* Is God the divine guest of the soul who communicates by means of an immediate interior experience of His presence to a

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[4] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983) 33. While this is a useful way of describing what constitutes models of revelation, I would prefer to differentiate root metaphors as basic models from other models which are subordinate. Root metaphors are of a wider and more fundamental range. All models are metaphors with comprehensive, organizational potential, i.e., they mediate between primary, imagistic language and secondary, conceptual language; but root metaphors are even more fundamental and pervasive in that they express the most basic assumptions about reality. Root metaphors are constitutive of religious sensibility in such wise that to change the root metaphor would involve a radical shift in one's paradigm of religious understanding. See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 23, 27–28, 108–11. This distinction is important for the discussion that follows.

recipient who must be prayerfully open? (4) *Dialectical Presence:* Is God a merciful judge who communicates by means of a powerful, transforming word (proclamation) to recipients who must be obediently submissive in faith? (5) *New Awareness:* Is God a lure to the human imagination who communicates by means of breakthroughs in human consciousness to recipients who dare to dream new dreams and to build a fully human world? Another way of summarizing the models is to ask what is the "crucial moment" for the occurrence of revelation: In clear propositional statements? In the great acts of God? In privileged interior experiences of grace? In a transcendent word that both reveals and conceals? In the expansion of human consciousness?

In his chapter on comparing the models, Dulles enunciates the following principle: "A theory of revelation is sound and acceptable to the extent that it measures up to, and illuminates, the reality of revelation."[5] Since each model exhibits strengths as well as weaknesses, it cannot be a matter of simply choosing one model rather than another. Neither does simple eclecticism, which would use different models for different problems, nor simple harmonization, which would ignore the inherent contradictions, offer a solution to the problem of pluralistic models. What is needed is "integration into a larger complex." Dulles proposes symbolic communication "as a dialectical tool for bringing out the strong points and overcoming the weaknesses"[6] in each of the five models. "Symbolic mediation" (chap. 9) is pivotal for Dulles' entire book, but is it sufficient to say that it is a "pervasive category" that functions in each of the five models? What are the implications of the *primacy* of symbol for the interrelationships *among* the five models? I propose to explore the relationship of symbol-metaphor-story to other forms of language in order to show how the five models are interrelated in terms of primary and secondary language.

UNIVERSAL HUMAN EXPERIENCE: SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION

In an earlier work Dulles put the relationships succinctly: "Unlike historical or abstract truth, mystery cannot be described or positively defined. It can only be evoked."[7] The question of revelation is finally a question of *truth.* In terms of the models, it is a question of the interrelationship of propositional truth, historical truth, personal truth (in the sense of direct experience, whether immediate or mediated), transcendent

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[5] Ibid. 127.

[6] Ibid. 128. On pp. 141–54 he relates each model to symbolic communication, but does not discuss whether the models interrelate among themselves.

[7] Avery Dulles, *Myth, Biblical Revelation, and Christ* (Washington: Corpus, 1968) 1; also in Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington: Corpus, 1968) 20.

truth, and immanent truth. Such an interrelationship depends upon how one understands symbol as related to the language of metaphor and story (particularly myth and parable), on the one hand, and more conceptual forms such as simile, allegory, and analogy, on the other.[8] I suggest that an analysis of these relationships will affirm the primacy of story in the revelatory process, a primacy that reflects the narrative quality of all human experience.

What follows is a schematic outline of my proposal:

MYSTERION → SYMBOL = WORD (dialectical) ↔ FAITH (consciousness)

PRIMARY LANGUAGE

	SYMBOL (root metaphor)		METAPHOR (rich variety)		STORY (context/meaning)
Israel:	YHWH	*is*	God of your fathers	*who*	saves His people
Jesus:	KINGDOM	*is*	a prodigal Father	*who*	embraces His son
Church:	JESUS	*is*	the beloved son	*who*	dies with a loud cry

SECONDARY LANGUAGE

DEFINITIONS: abstract, propositional

DESCRIPTIONS: historical, experiential

⟩subordinate but indispensable

Symbol has the power to evoke mystery. Mystery ultimately lies in God's intention and power,[9] but mediately in human history and experience. Mystery connotes the inexhaustible and limitless character of "knowledge-in-process."[10] It is present in both theology and science

[8] Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 133–34, does refer to the need to relate "literary symbols" to other forms such as analogy, metaphor, myth, allegory, parable, and ritual. He offers a brief analysis but does not go into their relationships to one another. He also points out that symbol cannot be restricted to the literary sphere. Symbols can be "cosmic or natural" (the sun), "personal or historical" (King David), and "artistic" (the temple).

[9] See Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968). The prevalent notion of mystery in the NT is God's wisdom, or will, hidden in God, revealed in Christ, and announced in the gospel, i.e., made known to the whole of creation through the Church.

[10] Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell, *Metaphoric Process* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian Univ., 1984) 186–89. The thesis of this book is that science and religion are one in the "nascent moment" of discovery through the metaphoric act. Their understanding of the metaphoric process begins with the premise, "In encountering the world, we constitute it" (169). On the level of experience, this involves both asserting "a certain pattern of the way of being human" and recognizing that there are limits to the pattern. Schillebeeckx, *Christ* 34–35, speaks similarly of the fact that we project and reality rejects. He points to "the refractoriness of reality" as the basis of revelation which demands a dialectical approach to experience. "Experience is supported and constrained by a permanent reference to the inexhaustibility of the real."

insofar as "... some theories point beyond themselves to a totality residing within and at the same time transcending our ordinary everyday experience and understanding."[11] Symbol has power to evoke mystery because it addresses itself to the whole person—to the imagination, the will, and the emotions, as well as to the intellect—and because it is deeply rooted in human experience and human history. One cannot simply invent true symbols. They emerge from the depths of human consciousness, both individual and collective, and they last as living symbols only as long as they continue to evoke those depths.

God's self-communication is always mediated through language, the Word, for human beings because of their embodied nature and historical rootedness are symbol-making animals. The thesis presented here is that language on the level of symbol-metaphor-story is primary, and language on the level of description and/or definition is secondary, subordinate but indispensable to the primacy of symbol. Symbolic experience that comes to metaphorical expression is the primordial way of being human, because it touches upon and seeks to give expression to that which is rooted in the deepest mysteries of life, including our relationship to God, to self, to others in society, to our bodies, and to the whole of nature. We live within symbol as the prelinguistic bonding of ourselves to the cosmos.[12] Yet, this symbolic rootedness in life (*bios*) must come to expression, the level of articulation (*logos*), as metaphor. Symbolic infrastructure and metaphorical superstructure are intertwined.[13] "Symbols need metaphors, for without them they are dumb; metaphors need symbols, for without them they lose their rootedness in life. Metaphor articulates symbolic richness, making distinctions, suggesting alternative interpretations, insisting on the tension in which we always exist in relation to reality."[14]

Metaphor constitutes us in our humanness at a most basic level (and, indeed, the metaphoric act is what both constitutes and unites science and theology[15]). It is the simple ability to associate one thing with

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[11] Gerhart and Russell, *Metaphoric Process* 176. The authors make a strong case for the interdependence of science and theology; both are involved in "mystery as knowledge-in-process."

[12] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 119–22, commenting on the insights of Paul Ricoeur.

[13] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian Univ., 1976) 65: "Everything indicates that symbolic experience calls for a work of meaning from metaphor, a work which it partially provides through its organizational network and its hierarchical levels. Everything indicates that symbol systems constitute a reservoir of meaning whose metaphoric potential is yet to be spoken."

[14] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 120.

[15] Gerhart and Russell, *Metaphoric Process* 177–92.

another, to see the unfamiliar through the familiar, to discover new relationships and possibilities. A metaphor quite simply says A = B. It is not reducible to an ornamental rhetorical device, replaceable by some other type of speech. Nor is it a simile (A is like B), which tends to soften the sense of identity and tension. Rather, it places two active thoughts in a tensive interaction, such that the understanding of each term is affected by the other. The instinctive reaction to metaphor is to say both yes and no, to affirm and deny the identity, e.g., "war is a chess game" (Max Black). If the metaphor is living, it will tease the mind into active thought, seeing new possibilities in the tensive interaction of the two thoughts. The association of war and chess provides new insights into each, while at the same time blocking out other aspects. On the other hand, a metaphor dies if it is literalized, becoming so commonplace that the shock to the imagination is no longer noticed, e.g., "time flies." Finally, metaphor requires participation in its referent. One must actively enter into and live the experience of the game of chess at least to some degree—the deeper the personal involvement the better—in order to understand how it illumines war. A game is a kind of story. In the final analysis, one cannot understand a metaphor unless one knows the story (or game) that gives the metaphor its context.[16] This is based in the narrative quality of all human experience.

Human experience is always interpreted.[17] We can speak of direct experience that is immediate (the knowledge of objects as "bodies," i.e., in their relation to the self), and mediate (the knowledge of objects as "things," i.e., in their relations to one another).[18] Human experience in the mature sense is always "mediated through meaning" (Lonergan), i.e., it implies as prior to all sense experience "the primordial, pervasive experience of the self as a self: active, in process, feeling, embodied, intrinsically social, radically related to all reality."[19] Hence it implies the theoretical activity of human minds, both of the human community that precedes and surrounds us and of our own theoretical and imaginative capacities. There is no substitute for one's own experience (immediate in the sense of personal appropriation), yet experience is transmitted (mediate in the sense of tradition). The complexity of human experience

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[16] Terrence W. Tilley, *Story Theology* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985) 3 ff.

[17] Schillebeeckx, *Christ* 31–36.

[18] Gerhart and Russell, *Metaphoric Process* 13–35, employing a distinction from Bernard Lonergan. They also speak of indirect experience as "instrumentally mediated" (18–19). This would correlate with the use of models in science and theology.

[19] David Tracy, "The Particularity and Universality of Christian Revelation," in E. Schillebeeckx and Bas van Iersel, eds., *Revelation and Experience* (Concilium 113; New York: Seabury, 1979) 109. Gerhart and Russell make the same point.

demands that we keep in tensive unity both concentrated event (concrete, intensive) and unfolding process (universal, extensive).[20] Its narrative quality is grounded in the processive and durational character of our experience. The present "moment," if isolated from the ongoing movement of experience for the sake of analysis, is an abstraction from the "inherently durational" character of human experience.[21] Rather, there is a continuing dialectic between past, present, and future. The future is not so much a matter of prediction as it is of new possibilities that are opened up through a deeper appropriation of what is most authentic in the heritage of the past. The prophet brings that past into the present in new and unforeseen ways and so creates new possibilities for the future. This is what Jesus did as a prophet to Israel. Hence, if human experience is in fact basically durational, the best (but not only) way to talk about it is to tell stories.

Religious stories can take various shapes. *"Myths* are stories that set up worlds. Their polar opposites are *parables*, stories that upset worlds. Between these are *actions*, realistic stories set within worlds."[22] Myths provide stability. They give us a sense of who we are and where we stand, i.e., a sense of identity in relation to the world. Their primary function is to reconcile contradictions, or at least to convince us that such mediation is permanently possible.[23] Myth has been analyzed into a fourfold function: as religious, it structures our relation to transcendent mystery; as cosmological, it shows where the world came from and where it is going; as moral-social, it undergirds the social order; and as psychological, it provides individuals with their own space or role within society.[24] For Christians, the story of Jesus is fundamentally the myth that structures our world in this fourfold relationship.

Parables subvert the world created by myth. They challenge the assumptions of our myths and call us to change. "You have built a lovely home, myth assures us; but, whispers parable, you are right above an earthquake fault."[25] Parables are only possible in relation to myths. One

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[20] Dietmar Mieth, "What Is Experience?" in Schillebeeckx and van Iersel, *Revelation* 40–53, discusses the complexities in greater detail.

[21] Tilley, *Story* 23–26.

[22] Ibid. 39, following J. D. Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Niles, Ill.: Argus, 1975), who also includes *apologues* that defend worlds, and *satires* that attack worlds.

[23] Crossan, *Interval* 53.

[24] Tilley, *Story* 42–44, employing the analysis of Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York: Penguin, 1976). Cf. William M. Thompson, *The Jesus Debate* (New York: Paulist, 1985) vi: "The Jesus event as the disclosure of a new vision and praxis of our relations to God, to self, to society, and to the world (= Christology)...."

[25] Crossan, *Interval* 57.

can live in myth without parable, but parables live only in the tension created by subverting myth. Parable is not another myth, an antimyth. Parables show the limits of our myths, their relativity. They shatter worlds. They generate new possibilities for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Clearly, the metaphoric act properly issues in parables, which can be described as narrated metaphors.

We need both myth and parable, both harmony and tension, both the "Catholic sensibility" of continuity, order, and participation and the "Protestant sensibility" of discontinuity, tension, and iconoclasm.[26] We need to tell stories that structure our world, and other stories that warn us against turning our constructions into idols and/or killing them through literalization. We also need stories that explore our world, halfway between myth and parable. These are actions. Most of our stories are of this type. Some are factual (history, biography, autobiography) and some are fictional (novels, short stories, allegories), but they all have this in common: they tell us how things go in a world. They give us the opportunity to explore, to rethink, to stretch the imagination. The story of Jesus takes all these shapes and we must attend to them all: "A narrative theology of myth without parable would be stifling; of parable without myth would be baffling; of action alone would be boring."[27] Yet, Jesus is primarily the parable of God. His story challenges our assumptions and calls us to rethink our commitments.

In sum, symbol-metaphor-story, while distinct, form an inseparable unity. Every symbolic experience must come to metaphorical expression if it is to emerge in human consciousness in an accessible way. If one metaphor becomes a root metaphor, dominant within the communal consciousness, it will inevitably seek further metaphorical expression in a rich variety of images, no one of which can express in a definitive and exhaustive way the depth of the originating symbolic experience. The metaphors in turn must inevitably come to narrative expression (primarily as parable) if they are to make sense, for it is only in story that they take on their full contextual meaning as human experience. This analysis of symbolic communication is intended to express universal human experience. The schematic outline above proposes its exemplification in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as a way of understanding revelation. The proposal is that each epoch (Israel/Jesus/Church) has a root metaphor that has come to further metaphorical expression in narrative (= parable).

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[26] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 13. She sets these sensibilities in opposition to one another.

[27] Tilley, *Story* 53.

Revelation is always a radical challenge to contemporary images of God. What H. R. Niebuhr says of Christian revelation is applicable to all revelation: "So we must begin to rethink all our definitions of deity and convert all our worship and our prayers. Revelation is not the development and not the elimination of our natural religion; it is the revolution of the religious life."[28] Revelation is a metaphoric act, the creation of new possibilities. "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition" (Exod 2:24–25 RSV[29]). The great discovery of Israel is that the absolutely transcendent God—from whom there is no flight, for He is Creator of all—is also immanent, intimately involved in and profoundly affected by the historical journey and suffering of His chosen people. This God can be described as one who "used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exod 33:11). And Moses, who desires to know God's ways and God's glory, can boldly ask: "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?" (Exod 33:16).

The dominant image (root metaphor) that emerges from this metaphoric experience is the name YHWH. ʾehyeh ʾǎšer ʾehyeh (Exod 3:14), which was codified into the sacred tetragrammaton (eventually so sacred that it was never pronounced but the vowel pointing for ʾǎdōnāy was used with it in the Masoretic text), can be translated as "He will be who (or what) He will be." God seems to be saying to Moses and the people: "You will only discover who or what I am (my Name) in the actual unfolding of our story together, i.e., as I journey with you in your many trials." YHWH is the God of their fathers who is known in the story of the Exodus through all generations. "God also said to Moses: 'Say this to the people of Israel: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Exod 3:15; RSV translates YHWH as LORD). In contrast to magical attempts to control the Deity through knowledge of the Name, Israel's God is free, absolutely transcending human attempts to control Him, able to be known only in the actual unfolding of Israel's story in the process of history. This was truly a revolution in human consciousness.

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[28] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1941) 138.

[29] All direct biblical quotations are from Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1973, 1977).

By the time of Jesus, there were strong expectations that God would act soon and decisively on behalf of His people. A more popular form of this expectation was the nationalistic hope for a warrior hero from the house of David who would destroy the enemies of Israel. A more esoteric form of it was the apocalyptic hope for the divine destruction of the present evil age and creation of a new age to come. Jesus, as prophet to Israel, employed the root metaphor "kingdom of God," but invested it with a metaphoric meaning that was intended to challenge the expectations of his contemporaries in the light of what was deepest and best in the heritage of Israel.[30] "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Lk 17:20–21). When Jesus says the kingdom of God *is* a sower who went out to sow (Mk 4:3–9 par.), he is inviting his listeners to enter into *this* experience in order to enter into the kingdom of God. And this experience is the parabolic world created by Jesus. The parable does not exhaust the reality of the kingdom, but the kingdom of God *is* this reality, the world in which we live seen now through the eyes of Jesus' creative imagination. Jesus' stories are remarkable in that they focus upon the ordinary, everyday experiences of his contemporaries. Jesus invites his listeners to enter ever more deeply into their life experiences, and precisely at the point of greatest familiarity he reveals a new and unfamiliar way of seeing those same realities: an extravagant, superabundant harvest, a "good" Samaritan, a "prodigal" father. The ability to identify the kingdom with these unfamiliar and unforeseen images provides a shock to the imagination that reveals new and creative possibilities of seeing and acting for those who are willing to enter in.

For the disciples of Jesus (and the Christian churches to follow), the supreme metaphoric act is the identification of death and life (cross–resurrection): life *in* death. I will return to the absoluteness of this metaphor. Its transformative effect evident in the NT is that Jesus has now become the parable of God, displacing his own parabolic teaching (changed in form to similes) by shifting the focus to the story of Jesus as the embodiment of God's kingdom. Mark's Gospel, for example, can be understood as parabolic in form. Mark employs various titles to identify Jesus, especially Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man. But it is not the titles that interpret Jesus; it is rather the story of Jesus' way to the cross that gives new meaning to the titles. Thus the definitive confession of faith can only take place at the end of the story when the

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[30] For a fuller analysis of Jesus' prophetic mission to Israel, see Michael L. Cook, *The Jesus of Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1981) 35–72.

centurion, *seeing how he died*, said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39). The metaphoric process has thus created yet another revolution in religious consciousness.

To return to Dulles' models, revelation on the level of primary language is to be found in the interaction between model 4 (dialectical presence) and model 5 (new awareness). That is, revelation is primarily a correlation between word and faith. The correlation is important, for word as analyzed by many dialectical theologians can leave God completely uninvolved in human history and experience, while faith as interpreted by some proponents of model 5 can seem to subordinate the divine initiative in revelation to the human experience of expansion of consciousness. A fruitful image is "the God who dialogues."[31] The absolute free divine initiative always calls for a free human response, which in turn evokes a divine response. The definitive example would be Jesus' death and resurrection. The initiative of the Father in sending His Son into the world was not that he die on the cross but that he proclaim the depth of the Father's love. The free human response was twofold: on the part of Jesus, it was to remain faithful to his mission by identifying himself with sinful humanity; on the part of many of his contemporaries, it was to reject that offer of love by crucifying God's Son. The divine response was to remain faithful in love even in the face of such rejection by raising Jesus, embracing him in his identity with sinful humanity and so embracing all of us as well in our sinfulness. The point is twofold: the initiative is always God's (this is what it means to call God Creator, Alpha and Omega), but God's initiative is always mediated through the free response of His creatures. Revelation occurs in this dialectical unity and comes to expression primarily as narrated metaphor.

"The word of God, as described by dialectical theologians, has a structure similar to that which we have attributed to symbol. As the self-expression of the revealing God who addresses his creature by means of it, the word 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."[32] Word in the narrower sense of that which comes to specific linguistic expression in metaphor can be called the prime analogue of symbolic communication. In the broader sense, that would be inclusive of any communication of meaning, whether by speech or by action, word is simply identical with symbolic communication. On the universal level, all symbolic communication is revelatory to the degree

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[31] John H. Wright, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues," *TS* 38 (1977) 450-77.

[32] Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 151.

that truth is communicated.[33]

As Dulles points out, there is a close correspondence between symbolic communication and the new consciousness model. This model sees symbolic communication as the prime bearer of revelation, and so would be closest to the basic thesis of this essay. The value of this model is that it emphasizes the immanence of divine revelation, i.e., that God does not intervene "from outside" but works from within the creative process (which should be understood as a unitive, dialogic process of divine initiative and human response). But this model cannot stand without giving priority to the divine initiative. It only makes sense if it is seen as correlative to the dialectical emphasis upon the absolute transcendence of God. Only the absolutely transcendent can be fully immanent, i.e., creatively present and self-communicating to the whole of the process without being reduced to a simple identity with the process itself (pantheism) or to a significant part of the process (as much process theology seems to imply). A theory of revelation adequate to the reality of revelation (Dulles) must hold in tensive unity (vs. any dichotomy) absolute transcendence, the gift character of revelation, and complete immanence, the gift as always mediated through human experience and human language.

At this point it is important to emphasize what has been done to Dulles' fourth and fifth models of revelation. We have placed the key image in each of them into a tensive interrelationship to elicit the root metaphor (i.e., the basic or paradigmatic model) of Christian revelation.[34] This is the level of primary language. The outer three models (propositional, historical, and experiential) are thus seen to be subordinate models which move further in the direction of secondary conceptual language but which must always be funded by the primary images. The logical sequence is from metaphor to analogy (models) to concept.[35] Whereas metaphor creates new meaning, analogy seeks to extend that meaning

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[33] On the identity of God's Word with the communication of truth, see Gerhard Ebeling, *God and Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 22–25, 40 ff.; also Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutics," in *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) 305–32.

[34] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 108–11, likewise speaks of the root metaphor of Christianity as a new quality of relationship between the human and the divine expressed in Jesus' use of the kingdom of God and the early Church's identification of Jesus as the parable of God. Theological models are seen in relationship to this root metaphor as "dominant metaphors with systematic, comprehensive potential for understanding the many facets of this relationship" (125).

[35] Gerhart and Russell, *Metaphoric Process* 115–17, speak of three possible "outcomes" for a metaphor: it can maintain its tensive character (God is Love); it can die through literalization (God is Father); and it can become an analogy, which is already a legitimate and necessary move toward a second-order level of discourse.

by locating it within a field of meaningful relationships. "The metaphoric act distorts a world of meanings in such a way as to make possible an analogical relationship between one known and another known, an analogical relationship that was not possible before the metaphoric distortion took place."[36] Metaphorical, or dialectical, thinking focuses on the tensiveness of contradiction and transformation, whereas analogical thinking moves toward progressive development and fulfilment. It is basically an expansion or enlargement of knowledge through the identification of similarities and relationships. Models are analogical devices that seek to mediate between metaphors and concepts. Metaphors need conceptual clarity and precision; concepts need multivalent complexity. Hence models are seen as necessary to mediate what metaphors alone and concepts alone cannot do.[37] Nonetheless, there is a natural move toward abstract conceptualization. Concepts are on a continuum with the metaphoric process. Their function is not to replace metaphors with clear and distinct ideas but to appropriate the meaning of metaphors in a critical way that is responsive to the questions human beings ask in order to satisfy the desire to know.

What is important is to recognize that this process is both indispensable and subordinate to the primacy of symbol. In Ricoeur's famous phrase, symbols give rise to thought. The linguistic creation of new meaning that is metaphor creates an energy that moves toward philosophical disclosure.[38] The process of interpretation as a creative engagement or conversation between the text of a tradition and contemporary experience involves a threefold movement for Ricoeur.[39] First, there must be an initial openness to what the text might say or the questions it might raise in the light of the interpreter's own experience. This is a precritical and unreflective experience of symbol. The second step seeks to move from the vagueness of a merely subjective sense of the symbol or text to a critical explanation of it by employing various methods. Such methods are those employed, for example, in biblical criticism: historical, psychosocial, philosophical, comparative religions, literary, etc. All of these methods involve the move to some form of conceptualization: either definitions that are abstract and propositional, or descriptions that are experiential and historical. Here is where I would locate Dulles' first three models: propositional, historical, and experiential. As indispensable, they are intrinsic to revelation as metaphoric process; but as subor-

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[36] Ibid. 119.
[37] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 103, 125.
[38] Gerhart and Russell, *Metaphoric Process* 105–6, employing an insight of Paul Ricoeur.
[39] Thompson, *Jesus Debate* 80–84, summarizes Ricoeur's approach.

dinate, they can be perceived to be revelatory only in relation to the primacy of symbol.[40] There is a natural and necessary move of the human mind toward definitions and descriptions, but the danger is to think that our human conceptualizations and systems have grasped or exhausted the content of the mystery. Thus, Ricoeur's third step is a return to the symbol as primary. Once we have gone through the process of critical appropriation and have been transformed by a new comprehension, we experience the symbol ever anew with a second, postcritical naiveté. This process is a continuous spiral, as the new experience of the symbol (or text) will give rise to new thought, etc.

If this description of symbolic communication is not limited to Christian revelation but is applicable to *all* human experience, have we not relativized the specifically Christian claims? Schillebeeckx offers a good generic description of revelation: "So for believers, *revelation* is an *action of God* as *experienced* by believers and *interpreted* in religious language and therefore expressed in human terms, in the dimension of our utterly human history.... *In* our human experiences we can *experience* something that transcends our experience and proclaims itself in that experience as unexpected grace."[41] Is it still necessary to maintain that there has been a definitive, once-for-all revelation in Christ? Could there be definitive revelations in other religions as well?

IS THERE A DEFINITIVE, ONCE-FOR-ALL REVELATION?

In the light of our discussion so far, one could as well ask: Can there be a definitive or absolute metaphor?[42] The NT, at least in the Pauline writings,[43] claims such a metaphor in the resurrection of Jesus. The

[40] Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 141–50, makes this point in his analysis of the relationship of these three models to symbolic communication. I am not only trying to make explicit what is implicit in his analysis, but also to move beyond it by proposing a definite relationship of primary and secondary levels among the five models. Thus the propositional, historical, and experiential models could never be the dominant or paradigmatic models of revelation, and the dialectical and awareness models can only be accepted as belonging together in a tensive interrelationship.

[41] Schillebeeckx, *Christ* 78; italics his.

[42] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 187, employs the language of "absolute metaphor" as meaning "the sole appropriate expression for a definite subject matter ... neither interchangeable with other images nor reducible to a separate, rational kernel. The Christian Easter message itself rests on the absolute metaphor of the resurrection of the dead, as well as the proleptic element that provides the basis of doxological statements about the God revealed in Jesus, which are metaphorical in structure in their own way."

[43] Certainly the metaphor of resurrection is central in the NT as a whole, as Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) 316–21 and passim, has shown, but since there is a diversity of interpretation in the NT I will confine myself to Paul for the purposes of this article. In any case, Paul is the only NT author who gives us a firsthand account of his experience of the appearances as revelation (cf. Gal 1:1–2:10; 1 Cor 15:1–11).

central and determinative metaphoric act of Jesus' disciples, encoded much later in a variety of textual witnesses, was the identification in Jesus of a reality simply contrary to what was known or expected. To the literal mind, Jesus died a failure: condemned as a blasphemer, crucified as a rebel, forsaken by God in the very moment of death, he was certainly cursed by God (Gal 3:13).[44] Only the metaphoric mind can see the curse of God as the blessing of God, life *in* (not after) death. Mark later expressed this by uniting cross and parousia in Jesus as the Son of Man who must suffer and be killed and who will come in clouds with great power and glory. Paul does the same by uniting humiliation and exaltation in Jesus (Phil 2:6–11), who thereby reverses Adam's sin as "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:20–22, 45–50; cf. Rom 5:6–14). Such metaphoric acts are grounded, according to Paul, in a unique revelatory disclosure that is final and definitive (= eschatological) for the whole of creation.[45]

To understand what this means, it will be helpful to distinguish revelation in a generic and in a strict sense.[46] In the *generic* sense, which includes most of biblical revelation, God is revealed in and through what we "know," i.e., in and through the ongoing realities of nature, history, personal experience. Such revelation can be called cosmic, historic, prophetic. The prophetic would include Moses and Jesus (in his earthly ministry). For example, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in parables is revelatory of the divine activity in the midst of our ordinary, everyday human experiences.[47] In the *strict* sense, which can occur only at the end of history because it embraces the whole of creation, God is revealed in that which is contrary to what we "know," i.e., in the paradox of absolute reversal (in death, life), which includes but transcends our normal experience and can only be known through a specific communication of meaning from God alone. Such revelation, which is once-for-all, can be called eschatological or apostolic. It is the revelation given to

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[44] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 126–53.

[45] Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 34–38, speaks of Mark's Gospel as a primordial myth that employs archetypal imagery. Similarly, James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 119–21, speaks of the image of the two Adams as involving archetypal choices. Archetypes evoke human experience as a meaningful whole that includes past, present, and future.

[46] The traditional distinction, employed in the doctrinal model, is to speak of general and special revelation (Conservative Evangelicals) or of natural and revealed religion (Neo-Scholasticism); see Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 177–79. The latter distinction in each case is considered to communicate truths necessary for salvation. This distinction, based in a propositional notion of truth that is reductive, is being called into question here.

[47] See Cook, *Jesus of Faith* 42–46.

Peter and Paul and all those alluded to in 1 Cor 15:5–8.

Paul's own account of the resurrection appearance shows two things: that it was a unique revelatory disclosure that could only come from God and not from what we "know," and that it revealed the uniqueness of Jesus as decisive for the whole of creation insofar as it was "associated with the singularity of the resurrection of Jesus as an eschatological event that occurred prior to the eschaton."[48] In the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul is emphatic in his insistence that he has received his gospel "through a revelation of Jesus Christ." It was a revelation that came not through any other human person but only from God, who "was pleased to reveal His Son to me." His insistence upon the lack of other human mediation means that it was a revelation in the strict sense, i.e., not known through any reflection upon nature, history, or personal life-experiences (Paul is emphatic in contrasting it to his former life as a persecutor of the Church in Gal 1:13–14; 1 Cor 15:9–10), but only through the divine initiative communicating a new and unforeseen meaning that was simply contrary to human experiences and expectations.[49] Paul does not attempt to describe his experience, because the focus of his concern is not upon himself but upon the one who was revealed to him, i.e., Jesus as the one he was persecuting. The paradox of absolute reversal lies not in the general expectation of a final resur-

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[48] Perkins, *Resurrection* 393. Ricoeur has attempted to ground the idea of revelation in a hermeneutic of testimony: "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" and "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 73–118, 119–54. According to Ricoeur, example favors general rule, and symbol can lack historic density. But absolute testimony in concrete singularity "confers the sanction of reality on ideas, ideals, and modes of being that the symbol depicts and discovers for us only as our most personal possibilities" (122). Testimony invests a moment of history with an absolute character. The absolute manifests itself (content) and calls for an interpretation (judgment) by a finite consciousness that has no absolute knowledge. Revelation of the absolute expresses itself in a great variety of originary discourse (prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, hymnic), which is prior to propositional discourse. This makes revelation "polysemic and polyphonic." This poetic discourse is the objective side of revelation, the manifestation of a world previously unthinkable. Testimony is the subjective side. It involves a letting go of the sovereign consciousness to the point of giving one's very life in witness (*martus*). Testimony would seem to be a viable way of grounding the singularity of the resurrection as revelatory, while poetic discourse would allow us to embrace the full meaning of the resurrection in all its irreducible diversity. However, contra Ricoeur, I do not think it necessary to hold that revelation as "the possibility of hope in spite of..." (87) excludes *every* form of finality and teleology. For a use of Ricoeur's idea as applied to the resurrection, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 29–46.

[49] See the discussion of Paul's experience and the parallel to Peter at Mt 16:17–19 in Cook, *Jesus of Faith* 86–88.

rection from the dead but in the concreteness and particularity of Jesus: condemned as a blasphemer, crucified as a rebel, forsaken by God at the moment of death. The metaphoric "shock" to the imagination, which was a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1 Cor 1:23), was that this crucified man Jesus had been raised from the dead. This has implications for the whole of creation.

"The power of God to give life brings about the resurrection (Rom 4:17; 2 Cor 1:9). Seen as the eschatological power of God, resurrection is not a miracle by which God merely intervenes on behalf of Jesus but is the beginning of God's renewal of all things."[50] Resurrection is not an isolated event for a particular individual. The dynamics of the resurrection symbolism evoke the transformation of creation as a whole[51]—a new creation. Yet, such a transformation is inseparable from the person of Jesus, who as risen is the revelation of the very essence of God.[52] To say in the light of the resurrection that Jesus *is* the Son of Man is to identify the person of Jesus with the final and definitive activity of God for the whole of creation. For the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, God is fully revealed only at the end of history. This logically includes the whole of history from beginning to end, since all things form a single great unity moving toward this final consummation. Christians claim that this final and definitive revelation has taken place in the person of the risen Jesus, who is thus constitutive of God's relationship to creation in an ontological sense.[53]

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[50] Perkins, *Resurrection* 318.

[51] In discussing Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the cosmic Christ, Perkins remarks: "Teilhard has grasped the dynamics of the resurrection symbolism whether or not his ontological conclusions can be defended. The risen Christ represents the transformation of creation, not a mere continuity of creation" (ibid. 407).

[52] Pannenberg, *Jesus* 115–58. See the discussion of his position in Cook, *Jesus of Faith* 164–71.

[53] For Pannenberg, this involves a concept of essence that is contrary to the Greek philosophical tradition: "for thought that does not proceed from a concept of essence that transcends time, for which the essence of a thing is not what persists in the succession of change, for which, rather, the future is open in the sense that it will bring unpredictably new things that nothing can resist as absolutely unchangeable—for such thought only the future decides what something is" (*Jesus* 136). Perkins, *Resurrection* 400, in discussing the question of reality, points to theologians who maintain the "ontological difference" that the resurrection makes either in anthropological terms (definitive act of human freedom) or in cosmological terms (decisive breakthrough in human consciousness) or in historical terms (decisive revelation of liberation and justice). While agreeing with the transformative power of resurrection in terms of human freedom, consciousness, and liberation, I would want to claim more objective density. Insofar as resurrection is understood in Paul as a "new creation," it has an ontological import that includes but transcends (as final *transformation* of all things) the original divine act in creating the world.

Pannenberg decribes the resurrection as the proleptic anticipation of the end of all things. This is not adequately understood as an objective datum simply removed from the ongoing processes of history. The original apocalyptic context expects resurrection to be the beginning of the renewal of all things. Yet, we proclaim resurrection "in a world where nothing appears to have been transformed except Jesus. . . . What is the 'reality' to be attached to resurrection in, or with reference to, a world where nothing appears to have changed?"[54] In opposition to any form of dualism, whether an apocalyptic expectation of a divine intervention from outside to destroy the present world or a Platonic focus on the immortality of the individual soul as a way to escape "imprisonment" in the bodiliness of this world, the contemporary importance and power of the resurrection metaphor is that it calls us ever more deeply into involvement in this world and it focuses not so much on the fate of the individual as on the transformation of the whole of creation.[55]

The most pressing theological question in the contemporary context of world history and culture is whether one can understand the definitive, once-for-all revelation given in the risen Jesus apart from a profound dialogic encounter with other world cultures, especially in their religious manifestations. Here again the importance of metaphor is underlined; for it allows us to hold in tensive unity the specificity of the originating revelatory experience in all of its intensity, concreteness, and particularity and a certain indeterminacy with regard to new and unforeseen possibilities of a more extensive and universal character in the larger semantic field. "In predication, the metaphor brings to the inchoate experience a domain which has at once a known focus and a larger, uncharted semantic field within which to map out the intellectual and affective terrain of the experience."[56] If there has been a revelatory experience that is truly eschatological, final, and definitive for the whole

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[54] Perkins, *Resurrection* 398.

[55] "Resurrection is acknowledged to be about the saving transformation of the world, bodies, and persons and not about a transfer out of the world to some realm projected by the human imagination" (ibid. 399). See the famous discussion of resurrection and immortality in the Ingersoll Lectures at Harvard 1955–59 in Krister Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

[56] Robert Schreiter, "The Specification of Experience and the Language of Revelation," in Schillebeeckx and van Iersel, *Revelation* 60. In his analysis of the metaphoric bond, Schreiter says that it "could provide the beginnings of a new paradigm for understanding the role of revelation as constitutive of a community" (64). However, he seems to imply that the originating experience is not already revelatory but only becomes so once the community accepts it as adequate in faith. Nonetheless, his article is most suggestive with regard to the unfolding of revelation within a community and at least leaves open the possibility of semantic innovation beyond the community.

of creation, as Christians claim in the resurrection, then its metaphoric potential cannot be limited to specifically Christian expressions of faith. For the resurrection of Jesus reveals a God deeply and personally involved in the processes of this world, especially wherever human creativity is manifest.

CAN THERE BE DEFINITIVE REVELATIONS IN OTHER RELIGIONS?

"John answered: 'Master, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us.' But Jesus said to him: 'Do not forbid him, for he that is not against you is for you'" (Lk 9:49–50; cf. Mk 9:38–41). This story of the "strange exorcist" catches well the spirit of Jesus. His proclamation of the kingdom in parables is a prophetic way of evoking the reality of God at the very center of ordinary, everyday human experiences which belong to all of humankind without exception. This is what is meant by revelation in the generic sense. If one does not accept the propositional or historical models of revelation as paradigmatic, there seems to be no great difficulty today in accepting God's self-communication through nature, history, and personal experience outside of as well as within Christianity.

The difficulty comes in the claim to absolute finality. Does Christianity possess a revelation that no one else has? The answer seems to be both yes and no. Christianity would lose its self-identity if it ceased to make claims for the absolute uniqueness of Jesus (which must include his historical particularity). On the other hand, like the disciples who were arguing among themselves "as to which of them was the greatest" (Lk 9:46), Christianity equally loses its self-identity when it turns from service in and for the world to imperialistic claims for its own superiority. Finality need not be equated with superiority. To claim the final and definitive revelation in Christ need not and should not lead to claims of exclusivity. Such claims are contrary to the spirit of Jesus, who proclaimed the kingdom of God for all, including most emphatically those outside the community of faith.[57]

Rather, it would seem that Christianity must be open to the *possibility* of equally final and definitive revelation in the strict sense outside

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[57] Michael L. Cook, "The Call to Faith of the Historical Jesus: Questions for the Christian Understanding of Faith," *TS* 39 (1978) 679–700; also in *Jesus of Faith* 35–72. The correlation between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom in parable and his healing ministry in faith reveals a focus upon human life and experience wherever it may be found.

Christianity.[58] Whether there actually are such revelations depends on the types of claims made in other religions. The question as posed is admittedly put in Western cultural terms, but the hope it expresses is that Christians can move beyond the level of viewing other religions as a *problem* for Christian theological reflection (Rahner) to encountering them as a *resource* that is intrinsically constitutive of any valid theology (Pannikar).[59] Western Christianity, while it must reject the idolatry of self-serving absolutism, will always seek coherence, i.e., given that truth is one, all claims to revelation in the strict sense cannot contradict the definitive and final revelation given in Christ. Yet, that coherence need not be couched in the particular cultural language of Western Europe. More likely, it will come to expression in the spirit of Jesus' *koan* (given in response to the Greeks who requested to see him): "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24).

The death and resurrection of Jesus is a metaphoric experience that has built into it an unceasing openness to new and unforeseen possibilities. The attempts of various Christian theologians to articulate what that means in relation to world religions elicit, it seems to me, at least five principles. The first two are valid for all religions, while the last three refer to the question of specifically Christian self-understanding in relation to other religions.

1. *Praxis has a foundational priority over theory.* William James concludes his exhaustive empirical analysis of religious experience as follows: "When we survey the whole field of religion, we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there; but the feelings on the one hand and the conduct on the other are almost always the same, for Stoic, Christian, and Buddhist saints are practically indistinguishable in their lives. The theories which Religion generates, being thus variable, are secondary; and if you wish to grasp her essence, you must look to the

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[58] Thompson, *Jesus Debate* 388 ff., proposes the formula of "complementary and critical uniqueness," which is based in a kenotic view of the divine action, whereby God works within the particularity of each religion in an affirmative but critically interactive way. Sometimes the question is put in reference to the Incarnation: Why only once? In principle, God *could* become incarnate more than once. The answer must appeal not to the possibility but to the fact, i.e., to the concrete instance as contained in testimony (Ricoeur). Christianity does make such a claim for the person of Jesus based on the resurrection as definitive revelation. This is why Jesus' concrete particularity is identical with Christian self-understanding.

[59] Lucien Richard, *What Are They Saying about Christ and World Religions?* (New York: Paulist, 1981) 35.

feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements."[60] Praxis is generally considered to include both mysticism (or contemplation) and ethical action. Both are indispensable to religious experience and must be viewed as inseparable in a tensive interaction that precludes withdrawal on the one hand or mere activism on the other.[61] Praxis on both levels is the primary and foundational meeting-ground of the world religions that must move us from "self-absorption in the particulars of separate cultures and religions to a concern and love for all on the planet."[62] This brings us to the second principle.

2. *Universal care and concern for being is the point at which all religions converge.* John Dunne puts the contemporary challenge in striking terms: "The holy man of our time, it seems, is not a figure like Gotama or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time."[63] Other authors speak of "cosmic consciousness" (James), "transcultural consciousness" (Thompson), or "intercultura- tion" (Shorter). Dunne suggests that the starting point of religions may well be an expansion of consciousness back to the beginning (birth) and forward to the end (death), in which this dual encounter with nothingness transforms both thinking and living into a universal care for being, not in itself but in each and every particular being. If the sage goes beyond

[60] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier, 1961) 390–91. On the priority of praxis, see also Matthew Lamb, "Dogma, Experience and Political Theology," in Schillebeeckx and van Iersel, *Revelation* 79–90; Shorter, *Revelation* 190–93; J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

[61] Schillebeeckx, *Christ* 60–61, sees both as indispensable but prefers the mediation of ethical existence as having greater "density of reality." James Douglass, *Resistance and Contemplation* (New York: Dell, 1972) 69–70, sees the "contemplative yin and the resistant yang" as "co-ordinate powers of change which reinforce each other on a single way of liberation...."

[62] Perkins, *Resurrection* 405, in the context of her discussion on the need to move beyond the "recognition that religions are embodied in narrative and practice" (Metz) to real and mutual dialogue (Cobb) to the question of universal concern for the future (Teilhard de Chardin).

[63] John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) ix; cf. James, *Varieties* 313 ff., esp. 329. Variations on the notion of cosmic consciousness can be found in Teilhard, Pannikar, and Rahner. See also William M. Thompson, "The Risen Christ, Transcultural Consciousness, and the Encounter of the World Religions," *TS* 37 (1976) 381–409; Shorter, *Revelation* 30–31 (referring to Metz), 190–93 (referring to Zaehner, Metz, and Pannikar), and esp. 237–42, 246 ff. Shorter's thesis is that we must move beyond mere adaptation and one-sided inculturation to interculturation: "Revelation continues in the process of interculturation..." (238).

sharing insight with others to laying down his life for others, and if God raises him from the dead as in the story of Jesus, then the destiny of human life "is revealed as a becoming headed towards being rather than nothingness." Yet, this involves a continuing dialectic between final destiny (judgment) and the ongoing experiences of human life (journey). Referring to the experience of Mohammed the prophet, Dunne remarks: "When a man is confronting God, he tends to believe that he has the definitive revelation; when he is on a journey with God, on the contrary, he tends to believe that no revelation is final."[64] This journey with God includes both memory that preserves past identity (and so can be "dangerous") and imagination that opens up new and unforeseen possibilities for the future. It is narrative in form, but each story has universal import.

3. *The full reality of the risen Christ cannot be understood apart from the encounter with other religions.* While it is true to say that the reality of the risen Christ will only be made known and kept alive in the contemporary world to the extent that Christians, both individually and communally, embody it in their lives, still the very dynamics of resurrection demand that Christians pass over to other religious experiences in order to come back to their own with insight that is not only new but essential to Christian self-understanding. As with all truth, the resurrection is not just for those who make claims about it but for all people everywhere. Therefore its truth can only be fully known and understood insofar as it resonates with and embodies the manifestations of truth in the totality of human experience. For Christians, as Pannikar points out, this necessitates an internal (*ab intra*) conversion, a process of death and resurrection, through intrareligious and intrahuman dialogue. "The encounter of the world religions is constitutive of Christian theological reflection."[65]

4. *Jesus transcends and challenges all religions, including Christianity.* This is a common motif to be found in many authors. As Dulles puts it, "As living, incarnate symbol Jesus Christ fulfills what is sound and challenges what is deficient in every religion, including Christianity."[66] Such a view confirms the basic thesis of this essay: Jesus as symbolic reality simply transcends any attempt that we can make, whether in the NT itself or in the theological and conciliar tradition or in contemporary interpretations, to bring him to expression. This includes both definitions that are abstract and propositional, and descriptions that are historical

[64] Dunne, *Way* 119; cf. 71 ff., 101–3, 204–6.

[65] Richard, *Christ* 36, summarizing Pannikar's position (35–39).

[66] Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 191. Cf. Shorter, *Revelation* 192: "Other religions are incomplete, but so is Christianity."

and experiential. Such a view implies that the purpose of any and every Christology is to articulate in explicit but culturally conditioned terms the mystery of God's salvific will for all people, a mystery which Jesus personally embodies in his relation to the God whom he called *Abba* in the power of the Spirit and which is always open to indigenous expression outside Western cultural forms.[67]

5. *Jesus in his death and resurrection is constitutive of salvation in a causal sense.* What is distinctive about Christianity is not any generic or universal claim in itself but the radical particularity of Jesus, whose historical life and ministry culminated in the eschatological event of his death and resurrection. Indeed, true universality always appears in intense particularity.[68] A Christianity divorced from this Jesus would cease to be true to itself and would lose its ground even as symbolic. Mere normativity, which tends to evoke a "type" or "model," is not enough. "Constitutive" demands a grounding in the concrete and particular.[69] It is this man Jesus who transformed the human condition by entering freely and fully into the depths of human sinfulness, even unto death on a cross, thereby reversing Adam's disobedience (Phil 2:6–11). This transformation did not come by way of a divine intervention from outside but by a free human response to the divine initiative from within. It is in Jesus' human freedom that God realizes the liberation of creation as a whole. The resurrection, as the divine response to Jesus' fidelity on the cross, is the indispensable act of divine creativity, comparable to but surpassing the original creation, whereby God re-creates the world. The risen Jesus constitutes and makes available God's love to all humankind. God both embraces Jesus' freely-given obedience in a final and definitive

[67] Cook, *Jesus of Faith* 5–7, 107–8, 202–8. On the possibility of a Christology truly indigenous to Latin America, see Michael L. Cook, "Jesus from the Other Side of History: Christology in Latin America," *TS* 44 (1983) 258–87.

[68] Tracy, "Particularity and Universality" 106–16.

[69] For these terms see Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 37 (1976) 545–66: "To say that Jesus is the constitutive mediator of salvation is to say that he is not only normative but the indispensable one. Without him there would be no salvation. He is the efficient cause or the condition apart from which there would be no saving grace in the world. The name 'Jesus Christ' indicates that this saving event is constituted not by the eternal Logos but only because the Logos became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. 'Constitutive,' therefore, means that without this historical incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, no person would be saved" (552–53). I am suggesting that Jesus can be constitutive but not normative for humankind as a whole. Normative implies an intra-Christian tradition that moves from the historical Jesus through the NT and its historical interpretations to contemporary experience. On the question of normativity, see also Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 318 n. 3, 319–20 n. 13, 321–22 n. 25.

way (judgment) and continues to invite each and every person in the concreteness and particularity of his or her own life (especially in a communal and global sense) to bring to realization the liberation of creation as a whole (journey). In this tensive interaction of fulfilment and continuing participation, the eschatological event of Jesus' resurrection is truly "the realm of the symbolic."[70]

[70] Richard, *Christ* 64. See his whole discussion on the relationship of the historical particularity of Jesus to the symbolic (61–70). A final note: Paul Knitter, in his informative and challenging book *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), passes over the eschatological significance of Jesus' resurrection too easily (182) and focuses on resurrection simply as a conversion experience that is thus open to other religions (197–200). It is interesting to contrast this with Metz, *Faith* 73–77 and passim, who precisely emphasizes the importance of "essentially apocalyptic praxis" that focuses upon imminent expectation (God acting definitively and decisively) as opposed to constant expectation (based on an evolutionary understanding of time).