

Has Father Dulles shifted to the theo-political right?

By Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Many have long regarded Avery Dulles, SJ, as the leading Catholic ecclesiologist in this country and as one of the church's front-rank theologians. His fine reputation has been well-deserved.

Something has happened to his public image in recent years, however. A number of his fellow theologians, even within the Society of Jesus, have expressed concern over his apparent lurch to the right. Those who deal with social-justice issues have been especially dismayed.

Father Dulles, now retired from his professorship at The Catholic University of America and currently teaching at Fordham, seems to have been drawn ever more

deeply into neo-conservative alliances. He lends theological support — and occasional book blurbs — to vigorous critics of the recent pastoral letters of the U.S. Catholic bishops on peace and the economy.

But his shift to the right may not be limited to social, political and economic issues — a move sometimes attributed to his blue-blood Republican upbringing. Father Dulles also seems to be placing his considerable reputation at the service of those who would restrict the activity and diminish the influence of Catholic theologians.

For the first time in almost 23 years as a columnist, I have begun receiving letters and clippings from ultraconservatives who cite Avery Dulles, of all people, in support of their attacks upon Catholic theologians.

Are they at all familiar with his theological writings? Have they read, for example, *Models of the Church*, *The Survival of Dogma*, *A Church to Believe In* or any of his scholarly articles in *Theological Studies*?

Almost certainly not. If these ultraconservatives had done so, they would be shocked and appalled by the positions he has consistently taken over the years — positions, it must be said, that are entirely mainstream, centrist and well-rooted in the Catholic tradition.

The ultraconservatives' knowledge of Avery Dulles' work seems limited instead to newspaper accounts of a lecture he delivered in March at Fordham on the topic "Freedom and Authority in the Church."

"The hierarchy," he declared in that lec-



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

ture, "has an inalienable responsibility to see to it that the Christian faith is transmitted without diminution or distortion." He continued: "It therefore has a right of supervision over theology, insofar as theologians engage in teaching Christian doctrine." Another wince over "Christian."

According to Father Dulles, a theologian's "first instance ... should be to accept and build on what is officially taught in the Church." Conceding that abuse of authority is always a real danger even in the Church, he concluded nonetheless that "it is not the greatest danger" today.

Rather, "Christianity is threatened by the demonic power of a public opinion that refuses to submit to the discipline of faith."

And then some red meat: "The hierarchical magisterium, generally speaking, has been more effective than the theological community in safeguarding the purity of the faith against the trends and fashions of the day."

But wait! Father Dulles also implied in the same talk that theologians may find it necessary on occasion to express criticism or dissent. Any right-thinking ultraconservative Catholic would deny that such would ever be legitimate.

Well, Father Dulles advises only that theologians should express their criticism or dissent in a "modest and restrained" manner and should avoid "bringing pressure on the magisterium by recourse to the popular media of communication."

Whatever the perceptions of Father Dulles' recent public stances, he remains a careful scholar who lives and works in a universe of nuances and distinctions, not of ideological broadsides and oversimplifications.

He insisted in the same Fordham talk that theologians "must have the freedom to follow the principles of their own special discipline."

More than that, he explicitly counselled the magisterium to "avoid issuing too many statements, especially statements that appear to carry with them an obligation to assent."

He also urged the magisterium to "consult widely with theologians of different schools," to "anticipate objections and seek to obviate them" before speaking, and to ascertain "the sense of the faithful" before issuing doctrinal statements.

That the magisterium's record — especially the Vatican's — hasn't been outstanding on any of these counts is obviously lost upon Father Dulles' latter-day supporters. Significantly, it hasn't been lost upon Avery Dulles.

Faithless Israelite leaders create earthly kingdom

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"I think I know why you are here," Samuel said to the leaders of Israel who came to his door. "It's about the widow in Beersheba. Joel should never have ruled against her in that case. I will talk to my son about it today."

"No, Samuel, it is finished," Nathan replied. "You will always be remembered by the people of Israel as a wise and good judge. Sadly, your two sons do not possess your sense of honor."

"It's not just this case either," Benjamin continued. "The people are tired of corruption. Your sons' decisions as judges are determined by the size of the bribe that is offered to them."

"Of what value is my own life if I have not taught my own sons properly?" Samuel asked. "I am an old man now. That is why I appointed Joel and Abijah to serve as judges in my place. It is finished as you have said. So let us appoint new judges for the people of Israel."

"No, Samuel, we have another idea, and that is why we have come to see you,"



THE BIBLE CORNER

Nathan replied. "We are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Ever since we settled here, the Philistines have attacked us. We want a king to rule us like other nations. A king can lead us in battle against our enemies."

Samuel was stunned to silence. This last statement wounded him more deeply than anything that could have been said about his sons.

"God is our ruler and king!" he answered shrilly. "We have his commandments as our laws to govern us. And he has been our help since the day he led us out of Egypt to the Promised land. Our have you forgotten all of this?"

"We do not dispute this," Nathan said. "It's just that a king will give our enemies a more visible sign that Israel is a nation to be reckoned with!"

"So your solution is to become like other nations!" Samuel shouted angrily.

The leaders of Israel continued to try and reason with Samuel about their desire for a king. But he was too distressed to speak to them anymore. As soon as they had gone, he began to pray to God.

"Samuel, ever since I brought these people out of their slavery in Egypt, they have turned away from me to worship the false gods of their neighbors," the Lord told him. "I want you to go back to the leaders of Israel. Give them their king, if that is what they want. However, before you do, tell them how this king will treat them."

A large crowd of people had gathered with the leaders of Israel to hear Samuel speak. "I have come here today so you will know what having a king to rule you will

mean," he began.

"A king has the right to make your sons soldiers in his army and your daughters cooks and servants to wait on him. Not only will he take your very best fields and vineyards for himself and his officials, but you will also have to give him a portion of your own harvest each year. That is, if you have any strength left to work in your own fields. First, you will have to plow your king's fields, harvest his crops and make his weapons."

Samuel paused and scanned the crowd to see if any of them had changed their minds about a king. "How is what I have told you any better than being Pharaoh's slaves back in Egypt? And when all of this happens to you because of your king, don't think you can go before God and complain. This is your decision and he won't be listening. What do you say now about having a king to rule you?"

For a brief moment, only a couple of people answered Samuel's question. The response from a few was quickly picked up by the rest of the crowd until it became a great roar of everyone shouting together: "Give us our king! Give us our king!"

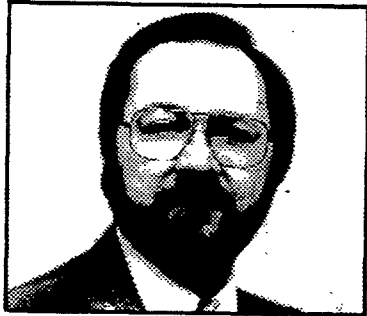
Scripture reference: 1 Samuel, Chapter 8.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, teach us to rely only on You for our lives.

Please...

Tell them you
saw their ad
in the
Catholic Courier

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



EDWIN SULEWSKI
FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Can drugs be used to manage grief?

Grief is best managed by talking about it and expressing our feelings to those we trust. Drugs, including alcohol, limit our ability to face grief openly and serve only the non-productive goal of hiding or masking our feelings. There is no question that feelings of grief are painful and will often be difficult to face. Instead of drugs find good friends who will listen and support you as you express your feelings of grief. If you have been taking drugs and you feel you cannot go on without them, see your physician, or a mental health worker who knows about grief. If you find yourself drinking more than usual or suffering severe stress seek help from professionals.

*We purchase all forms of insurance to protect our family & assets, not because we expect the worst to happen, but to be prepared. Doesn't it make sense then to prepare for what will happen. Let our trained counselors assist you with the many options available in planning for a worry-free future.

**SCHAUMAN-SULEWSKI
FUNERAL HOME**
2100 St. Paul St. 342-3400

Fit by Five

**SUMMER
REGISTRATION
NOW OPEN**
Four Summer
Sessions Available

FALL
Registration Now Open

Fit By Five Extension
For Children 5-7 Years Old
Registration Now Open for Fall

Penfield
586-7980

Irondequoit
544-4890

SERVICES for SENIORS

Call 254-8788
Personalized to meet your needs:

- Companionship
- Light Cleaning
- Senior sitting
- Transportation
- Shopping
- Household Chores

**Reasonable Rates!
Fully Insured. Bonded.**

Te

By Fatt

Courier
The r
know is
Paso, T
the past
sistant
whose r
visitors.

In the
is given
of the S
entitled:
tidbits th
tion wer

1. The to

2. Ac

writer 1

archdioc

priests a
though i

3. R

governm

"the nea

Pa

By Fatt

Courier

Sund

7:36-8:3

(R2) Ga

In a p

hospital

teacher

cuse.

The v

began h

have bee

up to the

wrestler

like ilk.

"So,

ing to tr

real herc

Well,

forgiven

of adult

forgives

might be

of the g

Paul (R2

Paul v

Gamalie

city far

phers. E

won hir

low Jew

though l

that one

influenti

was a R

import.

But or

rag-tag

zareth h

Paul hac

that sex

stoned,

his own

with Ch

have ad

Even

pect; be

persecut

Inpat

in ne

Genes

tion, w

care in t

cade, is

vice thi

service.

Hospi

terminal

supports

and ber

GRH

in volur

Call 1

coordin

tion.

Thursd