

# Art of moral persuasion hinges on listening

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Father Avery Dulles, SJ, a theologian of the first rank, noted in one of his books, *The Survival of Dogma* (Doubleday, 1970), that "The present collapse of confidence in hierarchical teaching would seem to be attributable, in great part, to the growing discrepancy between the current style of operation of the Catholic magisterium and the decision-making processes that have come into general usage in modern secular society" (pp. 111-112).

"Unless the style of the magisterium is reshaped to meet the demands of our time as effectively as it has met the demands of

other times, we may expect the present loss of credibility to intensify," he continued. "Contemporary techniques of government, teaching, and communications would seem to harmonize at least as well with the demands of the Gospel as do the feudal and absolutist patterns of the past" (p. 114).

Among the contemporary techniques of teaching and communications is that of listening. "The bishops, if they are to be true to their calling," Father Dulles argued, "must seriously consult before they decide. They cannot effectively say the last word unless they have allowed competent persons, in full freedom, to say

the next-to-last word."

I returned to Father Dulles' *The Survival of Dogma* after reading a brief, insightful essay by Sister Susan Maloney, SNJM, "Catholic Bishops and the Art of Public Moral Discourse," which appeared in the May 9 issue of *The Christian Century*.

Sister Maloney's article was in response to the U.S. Catholic bishops' recent announcement that they would spend 3 to 5 million dollars on a public relations and advertising campaign to market more effectively the Church's teaching on abortion.

Although she defends in principle the bishops' right to enter the public square as



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active participants in the debate over abortion, Sister Maloney notes that "the real problem for the bishops and for the devotees of the public square ... is the dominance of men" in this debate.

"It is almost trite to write that only women can have abortions. However, as a Church and society we seem to miss the obvious. In the public moral dialogue more women need to participate, especially those women who find themselves at the tragic juncture of their lives where abortion becomes an option."

Sister Maloney points to the example of Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland, who recently conducted a series of listening sessions with women throughout his archdiocese.

"The art of moral persuasion rests upon the ability to listen, really to hear the other person. The stories, the struggles and choices of women must be heard before the media campaign is undertaken.

"The people the bishops hope to persuade are not only in the public square," she concludes, "they are in the pews."

Her final words remind one, in turn, of the pointed observation Brooklyn's Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sullivan made during the 1984 U.S. presidential election campaign.

"The major problem the Church has is internal," he said. "How do we teach? As much as I think we're responsible for advocating public policy issues, our primary responsibility is to teach our own people. We're asking politicians to do what we haven't done effectively ourselves."

Not only Archbishop Weakland but the whole body of U.S. Catholic bishops as well have set a new example for the teaching church. Before issuing their pastoral letters on peace and the economy in 1983 and 1986, they first listened to experts and ordinary people on all sides of the issues.

And we still recall the dramatic pictures of Pope John Paul II in Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco during his second pastoral visit to the United States in 1987 listening attentively to others — laity, priests, nuns and bishops — as they shared with him openly their own (often critical) reflections on Catholic faith and life in late-20th century America.

Teachers teach by *how* they teach as much as by *what* they teach.

# An evil queen earns harsh punishment from God

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"Do you think there will ever be peace again in Israel?" one of the soldiers asked General Jehu as they sat together in the camp.

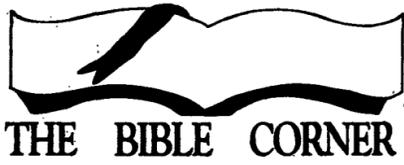
"Peace will not occur until the king who rules us destroys all of the false gods of Baal," General Jehu replied. "It all started when Ahab married that wicked Jezebel. Their son, King Joram, is no better than his father was."

As they continued to discuss these things together, a stranger arrived and said to Jehu, "I have an important message for you. Please come inside where we can speak in private."

As soon as Jehu entered the room, the stranger took a flask of oil and poured it over the general's head. "I anoint you king of Israel," he said. "It is time for the prophecy declared by Elijah long ago to be fulfilled. The house of Ahab will be destroyed. None of his descendants will ever rule in Israel again."

Before an astonished Jehu could say anything, the stranger ran away leaving him standing there.

"I think that man was crazy," Jehu said when he rejoined his companions. "He told me that I was going to be the next king



of Israel."

"That man was one of the prophets who assists Elisha. So what he has told you must be true," one of his friends told Jehu.

Then several of them began to shout together, "Long live the new king! Jehu is king of Israel!"

General Jehu set out at once for Jezreel where King Joram, Ahab's son, lived. While he was still a long way off, the king saw him approaching from his watchtower.

"Hitch up my chariot," King Joram told his servant. And he went out to meet Jehu.

"Have you come here in peace?" he called out to the general when he was in earshot.

"Who are you to talk of peace?" Jehu shouted. "Your own mother, Jezebel, has brought disaster on Israel with her idol worship. Because of her actions, an innocent man, Naboth, was murdered. The land we are standing on was stolen from him by your father!"

King Joram turned to flee, but the general had already taken aim with his arrow. He hit the king squarely in the heart. Ironically, King Joram's dead body fell from his chariot onto the land which had

once been Naboth's vineyard.

General Jehu was already en route to see Queen Jezebel when one of her servants informed her of Joram's death.

"I despise all of those ridiculous prophets of Israel. Elijah is long since dead. There is nothing to that prophecy he made," she cried.

Queen Jezebel painted her face and nails and positioned herself defiantly by a palace window where she waited for Jehu's arrival.

"What do you want, you murderer?" she said to Jehu as he came riding up. "Do you really think I believe some stupid prophecy that Elijah made about me?"

Jehu ignored her remarks completely. Instead, he looked up at her two servants who attended her. "Throw this evil woman down in the street where she belongs!" he called out to them.

Before she could stop them, the servants tossed Jezebel down from the palace window where she was trampled by the horses of a passing chariot.

A short time later, Jehu ordered his own servants to go back and bury Jezebel's body. But they returned to him saying, "There was nothing left to bury except for her skull, feet and hands."

The final part of the Lord's prophecy concerning the judgment on the house of King Ahab had been realized: "Dogs will devour Jezebel by the walls of the city."

After that, Jehu destroyed Baal worship and ruled as king of Israel for 28 years. As for King Ahab and his house, he was known for all time as the worst king who ever ruled Israel.

Scripture reference: 2 Kings, Chapters 9 and 10.

Meditation: "Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished." Proverbs 11:21.

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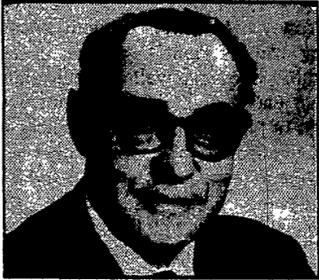
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