

COLUMNISTS

Does support of pope and Curia win the red hat?

Avery Dulles, the distinguished Jesuit theologian who will formally be inducted into the College of Cardinals at next week's consistory in Rome (Feb. 21), once pointed out that he had "backed into" ecclesiology as a field of specialization. After the Second Vatican Council, he was often asked to lecture on the significance of its teachings, mostly concerned with the nature, mission and ministries of the church. Some of these talks "escaped into print," as he put it.

Because ecclesiology is my own field of concentration, I have looked to Avery Dulles as both a mentor and a model of theological scholarship. Throughout his career as a Catholic theologian, Dulles' writings have been marked by clarity, objectivity, balance and honesty.

In recent years, there has been a notable change in his approach, which some, including a number of his fellow Jesuits, have described as "a lurch to the right." Where once he was prepared to criticize certain formulations of church teaching, raising questions about the teaching style of the hierarchical magisterium, he now defends most of the magisterium's initiatives, especially those of the current pope and Roman Curia.

Inevitably, he attracted the grateful attention of those segments of the church



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

where a top-down, chain-of-command theory of ecclesiastical authority is dominant. In the process, Avery Dulles became the favorite theologian of many U.S. Catholic bishops, including particularly the late Cardinal John O'Connor.

At least a few of Father Dulles' colleagues have been anticipating his appointment as a cardinal, not so much for his undeniable achievements and contributions as a Catholic theologian, but for his firm support of the Vatican's various doctrinal and disciplinary initiatives.

Many of his new friends, however, might not have so warmly embraced the theologian whose writings in the years before, during and immediately after the council had marked him as a progressive, independent-minded thinker.

In his *The Survival of Dogma* (1971), for

example, he acknowledged that increasing skepticism toward pronouncements of the bishops was due in some measure to the fact that the bishops do not rule by "the consent of the governed nor are they commonly noted for outstanding capacity in doctrinal matters" (p. 96).

"The present collapse of confidence in hierarchical teaching," he continued, "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" (p. 112).

In his *Models of the Church* (1978; expanded edition, 1987) he identified the institutional model (the one that emphasizes the church's hierarchical structure and teaching authority) as the one model of the five (later six) that "cannot properly be taken as primary" (p. 198). Among its "major liabilities" is that "it binds theology too exclusively to the defense of currently official positions, and thus diminishes critical and exploratory thinking" (p. 44).

In his *A Church to Believe In* (1982), he retrieved the Thomistic concept of the double magisterium: a teaching authority exercised from the cathedral chair by

the local bishop, and a teaching authority exercised from the professorial chair by theologians and other scholars (chapters 7 and 8). Few concepts proved less popular for many bishops than this one.

After the Council of Trent, Dulles pointed out, "many instances of teaching authority recognized in the New Testament and in earlier church history are in effect reduced to one — the hierarchical, which is itself progressively reduced to the single voice of the papacy" (p. 115).

Many Catholics looked to Dulles in the post-conciliar years as a voice of reason and of hope. In spite of his shift to the right, he remains for me a beacon of theological light and a sure guide for theological reflection. I can think of no ecclesologist, other than the late Yves Congar, OP, who has had a greater influence on my own work in ecclesiology.

Avery Dulles' forthcoming entrance into the College of Cardinals honors him personally, as surely it should. He believes, however, that his appointment is also "a gesture of encouragement for American theologians," with whom the Vatican is often in sharp disagreement.

Would that it were so.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Share God's generosity with others

7th Sunday of the Year (Feb 18): (R3) Luke 6:27-38; (R1) 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

One of the most successful musicals of the last decade has been "Les Misérables," based on the book of the same name by Victor Hugo. The main character is Jean Valjean. Orphaned as a boy, Valjean becomes responsible as a teen for his widowed sister and her seven children. One day, desperate, Valjean steals a loaf of bread to keep the children from starving. He is arrested and thrown into jail, where his young heart becomes hardened with anger and hatred.

After spending half of his life in prison, Valjean is released and is rejected wherever he goes. Finally he stumbles on the house of a kindly bishop who feeds him and allows him to spend the night. Valjean leaves the house, stealing the bishop's fine silver utensils.

The next day, soldiers come to the bishop's house with Valjean in tow. They have found the silver and are ready to throw him in jail. But the bishop greets Valjean with gladness and insists that he freely gave him the silver.

The soldiers release their trembling prisoner. Valjean, in disbelief, accepts the gift of the silver from the bishop. He



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

cannot understand why this man would tell a lie to save someone like himself. His answer comes when the kindly bishop announces, "Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to the evil, but to good. I have bought your soul for you. I withdrew it from black thoughts and the spirit of hate, and gave it to God." Jean Valjean leaves the bishop's house a changed man — changed by a man who treated him with kindness. Hugo's novel ends with the words: "To love another person is to see the face of God."

Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who maltreat you." He forgave those who hurt him, gave to those who asked of him, loved those who hated him and was

merciful and non-judgmental to his enemies.

Of a woman caught in the act of adultery, Jesus says, "Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone." (John 8:1-11)

A Pharisee is offended when a woman known in the town to be a sinner washes the feet of Jesus with her tears and pours perfume on them. Jesus defends her, saying, "Your faith has been your salvation. Now go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50)

Jesus had a spirit of mercy and compassion. He reached out to the sick and sinners. He was gentle with children. Even as he hung on a cross, he extended pardon to a dying thief. (Luke 23:43)

Of course such a spirit was out of step with the world. In the time of Jesus, mercy was a sign of weakness. A Roman philosopher said, "Mercy is a disease of the soul." Aristotle said, "Slaves were living tools and to be treated as such." A slave who grew too old to work could be disposed of like a broken hammer or a rusty plow. Babies were treated like slaves. The father of one born crippled or a girl, could expose it to the elements and allow it to die.

Jesus was out of step with the time. He is out of step with our time as well. For so often today, people are mean toward

others: the poor, the weak, the sinner, the downtrodden.

Generosity heals, as did the generosity of the father of the prodigal son. Generosity is the mark of a redeemed heart. The difference between a sinner and saint is mercy, compassion, generosity. Each one of us has been forgiven by a generous God. This fact should make it possible for us to be generous with others.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, February 19
Sirach 1:1-10; Mark 9:14-29

Tuesday, February 20
Sirach 2:1-11; Mark 9:30-37

Wednesday, February 21
Sirach 4:11-19; Mark 9:38-40

Thursday, February 22
1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19

Friday, February 23
Sirach 6:5-17; Mark 10:1-12

Saturday, February 24
Sirach 17:1-15; Mark 10:13-16

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