

# COLUMNISTS

## The pope of Vatican II ... or not

Our new cardinal-theologian, Avery Dulles, insisted during various television interviews on the day before the recent consistory that John Paul II is the pope of the Second Vatican Council. Dulles expressed disagreement with those who say that the pope has rolled back or slowed down the conciliar renewal in the hope of restoring some, if not most, of the structural, liturgical and devotional elements of pre-Vatican II Catholicism.

Some years ago, Avery Dulles himself would most likely have taken the position that there is truth to be found on both sides of this argument.

First, there is the truth that Cardinal Dulles himself articulates, which is that the current pope has advanced the council's agenda in various ways.

Vatican II emphasized in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) that the church must take a more active role in society, as a voice and an agent of social justice, human rights, and peace.

Few popes in history have been more vigorous exponents of Catholic social teaching than John Paul II. His major social encyclicals (*Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*), his many prophetic speeches given in various regions of the world, and his per-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

sonal role in accelerating the breakup of the Soviet empire are cases in point.

Vatican II insisted in its Decree on Ecumenism that the Body of Christ includes churches and ecclesial communities beyond the Catholic Church and that the quest for Christian unity is an ongoing responsibility for us all.

Until the pontificate of John XXIII (1958-63), the papacy was more wary than supportive of ecumenism. Under John Paul II, however, that commitment has been broadened and intensified.

From the outset of his pontificate, he has extended the hand of friendship to Orthodox Christians (thus far unsuccessfully) and has taken major steps toward bridging the gap between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. He has joined two successive

archbishops of Canterbury in public prayer services, and invited the current archbishop, George Carey, to join him in the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's to inaugurate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

Vatican II widened that ecumenical vision to include dialogue with non-Christian religions as well, especially Judaism. Again, although John XXIII was the pioneer in this cause, no pope has been more thoroughly committed to reconciliation with the Jews than John Paul II.

He is the first pope to pray at Rome's great synagogue and marked the 50th anniversary of the Holocaust with a symphony at which he sat alongside and on the same level as the city's chief rabbi.

At an unprecedented jubilee service in St. Peter's last March, the pope publicly asked forgiveness from the Jews for the sins church members had committed against them. Later, he stood in silent prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and visited the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem to honor the victims, embracing some of those who had survived.

In 1986 he invited leaders and representatives from most of the world's religions to a peace conference and has actively promoted dialogue with Islam and other non-Western religious traditions.

The list could go on. Cardinal Dulles is right: John Paul II is the pope of Vatican II — as are John XXIII and Paul VI.

But there is another side to the debate. There has been a re-centralization of authority in the Vatican and an increase in the power of the Curia over bishops. Many bishops have complained — most privately — that their pastoral authority as bishops has been eroded over the past two decades or so and that collegiality is the principal casualty of this pontificate.

This is most evident in the pattern of appointments to the hierarchy. The leading figures in the U.S. conference of bishops in the 1980s included pre-John Paul II bishops Joseph Bernardin, John Dearden, John Roach, John Quinn, Thomas Kelly, John May and James Malone. Their progressive leadership produced the bishops' great pastoral letters on peace and the economy.

But many of the bishops appointed by John Paul II would probably have lined up with the defeated minority at Vatican II in opposition to renewal and reform. That is why some question this pontificate's commitment to Vatican II.

There is truth on both sides.

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

## Failure merits compassion, not judgment

5th Sunday of Lent (April 1): (R3) John 8:1-11; (R1) Isaiah 43:16-21; (R2) Philippians 3:8-14.

The scribes and Pharisees were out to discredit Jesus. They brought to him a woman taken in adultery. In Jewish law this was a serious crime deserving of death (Leviticus 20:10).

They thought they could gore him on the horns of a dilemma. If he said that this woman must die, he would become a criminal in the eyes of the Roman government that forbade Jews to pass or carry out the death sentence. If, however, he decided that the woman should be pardoned, then he would be breaking the Law of Moses and condoning, even encouraging, people to commit adultery.

"Jesus simply bent down and started tracing on the ground with his finger." Maybe he wanted to gain time to gather his thoughts. Maybe he wanted the scribes and Pharisees to repeat the charges so that they might realize the sadistic cruelty which lay behind them. Maybe Jesus was seized with an intolerable sense of shame at the prurient crowd and the heartless cruelty of the scribes and Pharisees. Or maybe Jesus was writing on the ground the accusers' sins.

Whatever the reason, the scribes and



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Pharisees insisted on an answer — and they got it. "All right! Stone her! But let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her." They drifted away one by one, beginning with the elders. They left Jesus (*miseriordia*) alone with the woman (*miseria*). He said to her, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she answered. "Nor do I condemn you," answered Jesus, "Go, but from now on, avoid this sin."

This incident shows vividly the cruel attitude of the scribes and Pharisees to people. To them, this woman was not a person at all but simply a pawn to be used to destroy Jesus. It is a terrible thing to regard people as things. The Bible thinks of people, not as things, but as persons. That is why there are whole

pages of names in the Bible. The proper name is a symbol of the person.

The minute people become things, the spirit of Christianity is dead. To God no person ever becomes a thing. If we remember this, then we shall try to understand and always at least try to heal and mend and cure the person who has made a mistake.

This incident tells us a great deal about Jesus and his whole attitude to the sinner. First, he stated that only the person without fault has the right to judge the fault of others. He said that one who judges sees the speck in his neighbor's eye and not the plank in his own. So many condemn faults in others that are glaringly obvious in their own lives. Second, Jesus felt that the first emotion toward anyone who had made a mistake should be one of pity and kindness. When we meet one who has made a mistake, our feeling should be not one of judgment, but one of "What can I do to help?" As we would wish for compassion should we fall, so we ought to render that same compassion to others.

Finally, we ought to understand just how Jesus did treat the adulterous woman. He didn't just forgive her; he said, "From now on, avoid this sin." It is

as if Jesus said to the woman, "I know you have made a mess of things; but life is not finished yet; I am giving you another chance." Jesus was interested not only in what a person had been, but especially in what a person could be. Jesus believed that, with his help, the sinner can become a saint, like Magdalen.

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

### Daily Readings

Monday, April 2

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41C-62; John 8:1-11 or John 8:12-20

Tuesday, April 3

Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

Wednesday, April 4

Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42

Thursday, April 5

Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59

Friday, April 6

Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

Saturday, April 7

Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-57



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