

In Honor of Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. Priest, Scholar, and Living Memory

ROMANUS CESSARIO, O.P.
St. John's Seminary
Brighton, Massachusetts

IF MEMORY serves, I have known personally Cardinal Dulles since the early 1980s when I invited him to address the Faculty of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., I served at the time as academic dean of what is more commonly known as the Dominican House of Studies. On the other side of Michigan Avenue, Father Avery held the post of distinguished professor of theology at The Catholic University of America. His visit to the House of Studies afforded the occasion to speak about what was then his almost newly published book *Models of the Church* which first appeared from Doubleday in 1974. As a general rule, it takes Dominicans at least a decade to catch up with the work of Jesuits. In any case, it was at this House of Studies session when Father Dulles explained to some skeptical Dominican professors that he never had intended to offer a selection of models for each Catholic to choose according to his or her ecclesiological preferences. Instead, the still-in-print essay, as most educated Catholics now understand, was written to explore the dimensions of the Church that find expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Cardinal Dulles has made it abundantly plain that in his view, to grasp fully the mystery of the Church requires keeping all of the models together. Otherwise, we wind up with something like the ecclesiological equivalent of Humpty Dumpty.

Comprehensiveness marks the work of Avery Dulles. His literary output is massive. I am sure that there one day will be an *oeuvres complètes*. Although not an expert on the complete works of either Chesterton or Dulles, I hazard the guess that Avery and Keith will require about the same number of volumes. Dulles has published more than twenty-five books and more than eight hundred scholarly articles and reviews.

In his introduction to the Ignatius Press edition of *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Ralph McInerny writes: “Chesterton has a rollicking style.”¹ Cardinal Dulles writes as a pedagogue not as a journalist. He is characteristically careful, clear, well-ordered, and above all exhibits great discretion when making judgments or drawing conclusions. No “rollicking” theologian he. I find this quality of the eminent and dear Cardinal Dulles, who celebrates in 2008 his ninetieth birthday, a most winning one. We should all strive to imitate this quality of his theological *habitus*. I have been told by a member of the Society that St. Ignatius counseled his sons not to let emotions get the upper hand. It seems to me that Cardinal Dulles has adapted this advice exquisitely to suit the exercise of his theological vocation. Many Catholics remain the beneficiary of this Jesuit’s commitment to expounding serenely the many truths of the Catholic faith.

It would embarrass Avery Robert Dulles to hear himself compared to St. Thomas Aquinas. But I find one quality that the two theologians share worthy of mention. Aquinas was a pope’s man. The reasons for this submission run deeper than those of courtesy or even of the religious submission of mind and heart required of theologians. The reason for Aquinas’s submission ultimately touches upon Truth itself. The same is true, I aver, for Cardinal Dulles. He expressed himself on this point in the 1996 edition of his *A Testimonial to Grace* (which originally had been composed in the 1940s after his conversion).² “In a sense I could say, as did John Henry Newman in his *Apologia pro vita sua*, that there is no further history of my religious opinions, since in becoming a Catholic I arrived at my real home.”³ In other words, he found Truth. Cardinal Dulles, *ad multos annos*. N.V

¹ Ralph McInerny, introduction in *St. Thomas and St. Francis Assisi* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 11.

² Avery Dulles, S.J., *A Testimonial to Grace* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946).

³ See Avery Dulles, S.J., *Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey*, fiftieth anniversary ed. (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

Testimonial to Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. in Honor of His Ninetieth Birthday

JOSEPH W. KOTERSKI, S.J.
Fordham University
Bronx, New York

SCIO CUI CREDIDI—“I know in whom I have believed” (2 Tim 1:12). The choice of these words by Avery Cardinal Dulles for the motto on his coat-of-arms at the time of his elevation to the College of Cardinals conveys much about the man and his life’s work. From the time of his awakening to a recognition of God during his days at Harvard College and his conversion to Catholicism through his long years as a Jesuit priest and scholar, the spirit of this phrase from St. Paul has guided his life. It is a fitting motto for his shield.

The author of 24 books and more than 800 articles, Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., is truly a hero for many of us in the Society of Jesus. He is a good and faithful priest, a world-class scholar, and a wonderful friend in the Lord. I count it a great blessing to have known him over the years at Fordham University, where he has been the Laurence J. McGinley Professor Religion and Society since 1988. The complete set of his semestral McGinley Lectures were published this year by Fordham University Press.

In addition to many public lectures, he has, in recent years, given an annual set of conferences to our Jesuit novices on the theme of *sentire cum ecclesia* as an important part of a Jesuit vocation. To think with the Church means, first of all, to embrace what the Church teaches, but it also entails the vigorous use of the intellect that God has given us in and for the Church. What is especially valuable for our novices about these conferences is to see before them a man who practices what he preaches.

As recounted in his autobiography, *A Testimonial to Grace* (1946), it was as a young man, thinking about the magnificent order found in the natural world, that he came to theism. He explains that one day, after leaving

Harvard's Widener Library where he had been reading a part of Augustine's *City of God*, he was struck by the discrepancy between the regularity of order and apparent design in the universe and the materialist explanations of the universe by chance that were prominent in the education he was receiving. "Never, since the eventful day . . . have I doubted the existence of an all-good and omnipotent God." After two years of further thinking about the matter, he came to accept the Christian gospels. Where many writers he read tried to present Jesus "as a mild, tolerant, and ever gentle moralist," the gospels seemed to show him as someone "whom one could hate tremendously, as most of his contemporaries did hate Him, for what they took to be His bad manners and extravagant ideas. . . . The moralists never seemed to rise above the obvious. Christ never paused to state the obvious. He told of things no man had seen."

According to these Gospels, Christ founded a Church. Accordingly, the young Dulles visited various Protestant churches, out of respect for the Presbyterian heritage of his family. But the preaching that he heard there gave the impression of not conveying the fullness of what Christ taught. The sermons that he heard at the Catholic churches he visited seemed dry but more solid. The statues that he saw were not quite up to the level of what he had learned to regard as art at Harvard. The "elaborate symbolism" of the Mass seemed foreign and offputting. But the reading of various Catholic intellectuals helped, including the likes of Maurice de Wulf, Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Martin D'Arcy, S.J., and Fulton J. Sheen, who seemed to him to have "expressed that boldly Christian view of man and the modern world for which I had sought in vain in Protestant churches." Yet further reading brought him to accept the case that the Catholic Church made to be recognized as the Church that had been founded by Christ: "The more I examined, the more I was impressed with the consistency and sublimity of Catholic doctrine." He was received into the Church in 1940.

After a year at Harvard Law School, service in the U.S. Navy, and the years of formation within the Society of Jesus, leading to his ordination in 1956, Avery Dulles took his doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University and began a long scholarly career that has centered on ecclesiology and fundamental theology. The titles to be found in his long list of books (many of them into plural editions and translations beyond the abridged list given here) show his resolute concentration: *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ* (1963), *The Dimensions of the Church* (1967), *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (1968), *Revelation Theology: A History* (1969), *The Survival of Dogma* (1971), *The History of Apologetics* (1971; expanded edition, 2005), *Models of the Church* (1974; expanded edition with new

appendix, 2002), *Church Membership as a Catholic and Ecumenical Problem* (1974), *The Resilient Church* (1977), *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (1982), *Models of Revelation* (1983), *The Catholicity of the Church* (1985), *The Reshaping of the Catholicism* (1988), *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (1992; expanded edition, 1995), *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (1994), *A Testimonial to Grace and Reflections on a Theological Journey* (fiftieth anniversary edition, 1996), *The Priestly Office* (1997), *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (1999; revised and updated edition, 2003), *The New World of Faith* (2000), *Newman* (2002), and *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (2007).

Although some individuals with less of an inclination for *sentire cum ecclesia* have tried to claim the earlier period of Dulles's writings for their ranks, any fair reading of this corpus will actually show a remarkable consistency and an abiding quest to understand why the Church has made the claims that she has over the centuries. In the lengthy postscript added to *Testimonial* in its fiftieth-anniversary edition (1996), Dulles begins thus: "In a sense I could say, as did John Henry Newman in his *Apologia pro vita sua* that there is no further history of my religious opinions, since in becoming a Catholic I arrived at my real home." Philosophically, he is ever a careful Thomist. Theologically, he regularly shows a deep appreciation for the *nouvelle théologie* championed by the likes of Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, S.J., and Henri de Lubac, S.J.

It is perhaps the frequent misinterpretations of his book *Models of the Church* that have given some to think that there was a time when he risked undermining the institutional Church in preference for one of the other "models" that he describes in this volume. In fact, the book defends the institutional dimension of the Church even while reflecting on the fact that the Church is *sui generis* and irreducible to anything else in creation. Only by pondering the variety of the images that the Scriptures use for the Church, he argues, can one possibly appreciate what it is that Christ established. It is a mystical communion, a sacrament, a servant, a herald, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, and much more.

A decade later, in an academic context filled with deconstruction and dissent, his book *A Church to Believe In* (1983) makes the argument for ecclesiastical authority. His measured tones and balanced judgments were then suspect on the left and on the right; but this was almost inevitable, given the heat of the clashes in those days. On questions that the Church had not yet decided, Father Dulles generally tried to keep the possibilities open, for he took this posture to be a part of thinking for the Church that *sentire cum ecclesia* requires. On questions that the Church had determined,

there could be no question but to use one's intellect to understand more deeply the reasons for the determinations reached by the Church that had been founded by Christ. *Scio cui credidi*.

One situation that Dulles faced as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America during the 1970s is particularly telling. Dissatisfied with a report on sexual morality (commissioned by a previous CTSA president but submitted on Dulles's watch) that criticized Pope Paul VI's affirmation of the Church's traditional opposition to contraception, Dulles and other members of the organization's board decided to "receive" instead of "accept" or "approve" the document. While some wanted an open repudiation of this report and many others wanted the organization officially to embrace its clear dissent, this son of a diplomat judged prudence to require that a clear signal be sent, but in a diplomatic way; a signal that clearly did not adopt or laud the document but that stopped short of shaming or embarrassing its authors by an outright repudiation. One thinks of Aquinas's courtesy to the radical Aristotelian Siger of Brabant when he composed his *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas* and never so much as named his contemporary adversary, the better to leave him room for the change of mind that Dante's placement of Siger in Paradise hints as having happened.

Dulles's profound debt to Aquinas is evident even in the style of his scholarship. After a thorough review of the range of positions taken on a question, he articulates a calm and balanced argument of his own, replete with needed distinctions and qualifications. His reflections on the nature of his discipline in *The Craft of Theology* and in a number of articles from recent decades set forth the criteria for serious scholarship as well as for assessing the catholicity of a theologian. Does the individual hold that faith and reason are compatible? have a belief in traditional trinitarian theology? remain in communion with Rome? show fidelity to the Church's Magisterium? have a sense of continuity with the past? To operate within these parameters is to respect the liberty appropriate to a theologian, and to observe the prerogative of the pope and the bishops to offer authoritative interpretations of the doctrines of the faith. On the sometimes disputed notion of the *sensus fidelium*, Cardinal Dulles has labored to distinguish between the genuine sense of this term in theology and mere public opinion, let alone academic peer pressure.

Among his most recent contributions are books on faith and on the Magisterium. *The New World of Faith* shows numerous ways in which the treasury of the Church's teachings can illuminate a variety of contemporary problems: "The world disclosed to faith is immense. It opens up vistas that extend beyond the world of sense and into a realm not reached

by telescopes . . . , however powerful. . . . Its population includes the living and the dead, saints and angels, and even, at its summit, the divine persons. . . . We cannot even sketch it, still less enter it, unless we receive and accept God's loving revelation."

His latest published volume reviews the nature and history of the Church's teaching office and achieves the same dispassionate sophistication that has been the Cardinal's trademark. He writes with the confidence that is his motto: *Scio cui credidi*. N-V

