



#### MY VIEWS WERE CARICATURED . . .

Editor, THE WANDERER:

I hope your readers will not be misled by the caricature of my views given by John J. Mulloy in your November 16th issue. In my published writings I have repeatedly said that history is not all progress, that change is not automatically for the better, and that criteria are necessary to evaluate proposed changes. I have likewise said that "to evaluate new and appropriate expressions (of the Faith), suited to the mentality of the times, is primarily the responsibility of the Church's Magisterium. But the theologian has the function of exploring new possibilities and of seeking in this way to be of service to the Church" (*The Survival of Dogma*, Doubleday, 1971, p. 161).

Avery Dulles, S.J.  
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#### . . . IF SO, IT WAS FR. DULLES' CARICATURE

Editor, THE WANDERER:

1) Fr. Avery Dulles' attempt to reply to my "Letter from the Romans" on the basis, not of what I had cited him as saying, but on what he had written elsewhere, seems a rather ingenious method of getting out of an awkward situation. If my quotations from Fr. Dulles were correct, he should have addressed himself to meeting my questions concerning them; if they were incorrect, he should have specifically shown where the misquotation occurred. As it is, his defense reminds one of the Scottish lawyer who proposed to defend his client against the charge of a murder which two witnesses had seen him commit, by bringing into court one hundred witnesses who had not seen him commit it. The specific charge brought against Fr. Dulles is based on what he said or wrote in the two instances we cited, not on what he wrote in some other book where he said something quite different.

2) If Fr. Dulles' views were caricatured in my "Letter from the Romans," as he charges, it would appear that Fr. Dulles himself was the author of the caricature. For my presentation of his ideas was taken from his own article in *America* magazine and his own interview given to Mr. Andrew Wallace, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Thus what Fr. Dulles appears to need is someone to stand by his elbow

when he is writing articles or giving out interviews, so that he will not be tempted to caricature what he really believes in these presentations intended for the layman. It would indeed be regrettable if only the theologian and the specialist were acquainted with the true character of Fr. Dulles' beliefs, while the rest of us have to be content with the caricature he gives us of himself in these popular presentations. It is possible, of course, that his books do not differ substantially from the views he sets forth in his articles and interviews. In which case the real Fr. Dulles is known to no one, not even the scholar, but only a caricature of himself. Such a failure in communication would indeed be without parallel.

3) I hope to write another "Letter from the Romans" on the significance of Fr. Dulles' refusal to answer the six questions I presented to him, concerning his view of the meaning of doctrinal change. Here I should like simply to point out that these questions were sent to John Cardinal Krol prior to Fr. Dulles' appearance at the Philadelphia Archdiocesan CCD Congress, held under the sponsorship of Cardinal Krol. I had hoped that His Eminence might raise these questions with Fr. Dulles and elicit his response to them. I assumed, when I heard nothing on the matter from the Cardinal Archbishop of Philadelphia, that he did not wish to explore admittedly troubled waters. But now I wonder whether Cardinal Krol did raise these questions with Fr. Dulles and received the same refusal to consider them which we find Fr. Dulles displaying here. If so, Cardinal Krol and the readers of the *Wanderer* would find themselves in the same boat when dealing with this eminent theologian.

But did Cardinal Krol put these questions to Fr. Dulles, or did he not? We must remain in the dark on this matter until His Eminence chooses to enlighten us.

John J. Mulloy  
Philadelphia, Pa.

#### CULTURE, CONCEPT AND DOGMA IN AVERY DULLES

Editor, THE WANDERER:

A controversy has sprung up between Avery Dulles, S.J., and John Mulloy as to who is caricaturing whom. I hope no one will be mortally offended if a third party butts in. Mr. Mulloy and I covered

the Dulles speech in Philadelphia together and had several occasions to discuss both the merits of that speech and the general nature of Fr. Dulles' theological work. It was for this reason that the editor of the *Wanderer* sent me a copy of Fr. Dulles' letter in response to the Mulloy report, along with a very kind invitation to contribute to the discussion. I am happy to accept the invitation.

The subject under discussion is the "irreformability of dogma," to which the crucial last chapter of Fr. Dulles' book, *The Survival of Dogma*, is dedicated. The Jesuit's contention is that his views on this subject constitute a subtly shaded but coherent whole. By suppressing some of the shading, he contends, Mulloy has "caricatured" his true position. By contrast, I should like to contend that Dulles' position is simply not coherent, that the main lines of it contradict the shading and vice versa. If I am right, then there are really two Dulles positions, intertwined with each other and jostling each other; Mulloy has given a quite accurate depiction of one of them.

I do not propose to pursue Mulloy's battle, however. I have my own line of attack. Dulles indicates that his true opinion is to be found in *The Survival of Dogma*, which I have read, and from which I conclude that his views are inconsistent. Dulles says in his letter to the *Wanderer* and in many other places that history is not necessarily a tale of progress and that change is not always for the better. Fine. But on p. 12 of *The Survival of Dogma*, he says: "Quite evidently, the Christian self-understanding and the structures of the Christian community must be overhauled in order to correspond with the presuppositions, concerns, thought-forms, patterns of life, communications systems, and technical possibilities offered by the contemporary world." Now, this statement may be true or false, but according to Dulles' own letter it can't possibly be "evident." For if change is not necessarily for the better, then the changes which made the contemporary world were not necessarily for the better, and it cannot be "evident" that the Church ought to overhaul herself in order to "correspond with" the results of those changes. Dulles' statement can be "quite evidently" true only on one of two suppositions. Either all change is good, or else the specific change which produced modernity must have been carefully investigated, according to universally recognized criteria, and proved to have been good to the satisfaction of all reasonable men. But the second supposition, of course, is demonstrably false. No such investigation or proof exists, nor are there criteria for deciding this question on which all reasonable men agree. In fact, there is a dramatic counter-witness in the modern world, one most frequently made by morally and aesthetically sensitive people, many of whom are converts to Catholicism. Their witness is that the only decent response to contemporary "presuppositions, concerns, thought-forms," etc., is to imitate the young man in Anthony

Burgess' novel, *Tremor of Intent*, who "went into a corner," heaved his shoulders, and "tried to throw up the modern world."

Does Fr. Dulles have a way out of this difficulty? Perhaps. Throughout his book, it is true, he speaks of contemporaneity as a positive value. He speaks of a "quantum leap" in history (undated, but apparently post-World War II) and urges that Christianity ought to "correspond" with this "leap," but he never explicitly says that correspondence means conformity. Perhaps, Thiss, when he says that the Church should be "overhauled in order to correspond," only means that Christians ought to take the full measure of a hostile new world and do battle with it in a fully up-to-date way. Or perhaps he means that the Church ought both to conform to what is good in modernity and oppose what is not good. But if he means any such thing, then (1) he has been incomparably obscure in his way of saying so and (2) has been "caricatured" by all his reviewers, especially the most favorable!

Meanwhile, whatever he means by correspondence, Dulles is in deep trouble from a different inconsistency. On the one hand, he says that the Church must be "overhauled in order to correspond with" the results of a certain quantum leap which, though it has planetary implications, is mainly a cultural phenomenon of the developed world. This is a world which, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, is heir in some way to Western civilization, especially in the latter's nineteenth-century form. But alongside this developed world, there are also non-Western civilizations, especially in Asia and Africa. So: on the other hand, Dulles says that Christianity ought to overhaul itself in order to correspond to the presuppositions, thought-forms, etc., etc., of these other civilizations. What a pretzel our poor Christianity must become! Or better, what a jellyfish! The structures and "thought-forms" (whatever they are) of Christianity are expected to do what the structures and thought-forms of Hindu culture, Bantu culture, et al., are not expected to do. Why? Is there no such thing, *pace* Dawson, as Christian culture? Does the Christian Faith not naturally form a culture? Does the Faith only conform to culture? The latter really does seem to be Dulles' position, though I am at a loss to know how such an idea can be justified except in terms of the very historicism and relativism Dulles says he rejects. Moreover, if the Church utterly diversifies her intellectual life by becoming "conceptually" post-modern in the Western world, "conceptually" Indian in India, Watusi in Burundi (Socialist in Czechoslovakia?), etc., then how are Christians going to communicate with one another? How are future Popes going to speak to every one? Are they going to employ the language of the post-modern, quantum-jumped West? Wouldn't that be cultural imperialism? Or are they, perhaps, going to employ a specialized theological meta-language, which is above culture? And if the latter is possible, then what was wrong with neo-scholastic Latin? These are questions to which I can find no satisfactory answer in *The Survival of Dogma*. (By the way, it certainly will not do to say, with Leslie Dewart, that classical, scholastic terminology was culturally Hellenic. Dewart failed to understand the radical novelty in St. Thomas' doctrine of existence. See the article by Frederick D. Wilhelmsen in *The Future of Belief Debate*.)

The problem of cross-cultural communication is a crucial one for Dulles because it is the synchronic form of the problem he raises diachronically in talking about the "historicity" and reformability of dogma. Very roughly, we can state the problem this way. Concepts are historically conditioned, hence ever changing; and the Faith always comes to us embodied or embedded in these concepts, according to Dulles. This is how dogmas get to be "reformable." Now, when a theologian attempts to take the Faith embedded in old concepts and restate it in new concepts, the Magisterium must judge whether it is the same Faith that is being stated. But the question is: The same as what? If the faith is articulable only in concepts, and the concepts are not the same, then what is the same? Only, apparently, something that can't be articulated! In other words, there is no way the Magisterium can do what Dulles asks it to do, if his theory of conceptuality is correct! (Or rather, there is precisely one way the Magisterium could do what he suggests, namely, by a supra-conceptual Divine inspiration. In which case, of course, the theologians would be really cooked, because obscurantism would be established with a vengeance!)

The real problem with *The Survival of Dogma*, then, is Dulles' notion of concept. In fact, he never spells out exactly what his notion is; but from the course of his argument (I am referring specifically now to the last chapter), it is clear that "concept" in Dulles means phantasm. (Here Dulles seems to be heavily indebted to Rahner.) New phantasms are the "pictures" of things that we have in our minds. They are the material products of sense data. Hence, they vary enormously, not only from epoch to epoch and culture to culture but also from person to person. The phantasm which flashes before my mind when I think of "father" is conditioned by my experience of my own father. Hence my phantasm cannot be your phantasm, since your experience is not my experience and your father was not my father. So, if the "concept" of father is the phantasm of father, then you and I are in trouble communicating. But in fact, for most people, concept means something else. It means the intelligibility which is common to both our phantasms of father. But this intelligibility is not the product of sense experience. It is the product of an act of intellection. Hence, it is the same for all intelligent creatures. We all have the same "definition" of father, and hence we have no problem communicating on this level at all. The technical name for this intelligibility which corresponds to a real definition is "expressed species."

It is too bad that Dulles' "concepts" are not expressed species (or do not at least include expressed species). For, if his concepts were expressed species, his whole problem with the historicity and reformability of dogma would vanish in a puff of smoke. The concepts used in dogmatic definitions would be precise intelligibilities, open to all intellects regardless of epoch or culture. Then, the historical and cross-cultural problematic would resume manageable proportions. It would be a question of finding, in each culture, those ways of speaking which would assist men affectively to assimilate what is denotatively open to everybody (or at least to everybody who has received philosophical training).

But alas. Since Dulles' "concepts" are only phantasms, it follows that the dogmas of the Church are grasped only in fleeting, material images, images which change radically, moreover, with each major shift in life-style and technology. As a result, our dogmas always come to us mired in the previous generation's picture of the world. And then when there is a generation gap, watch out!

If anyone is interested, I should be happy to provide further examples and more technical analyses of Dulles' "conceptual" dilemma in a subsequent issue. A thorough analysis of Dulles' chapter on "The Irreformability of Dogma" requires a penetration of the iconic, of subject analysis, of predicate analysis, of simple apprehension and judgment. If anyone is interested, I will go on. Otherwise, I conclude with the hope that Fr. Dulles has not found in me yet another caricaturist. Poor man, he runs into so many.

William A. Marshner  
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