

# Avery Dulles, theologian and cardinal, dies at 90: Worked against polarization in the church

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Cardinal Avery Dulles, who left a prominent Protestant pedigree to become one of the nation's most distinguished theologians and a prince of the Catholic Church, died December 12 at the age of 90.

One of the oldest men to be named a cardinal, at age 82, by Pope John Paul II in 2001, Dulles died at the Jesuit infirmary at Fordham University in New York, where he had held an endowed chair since 1988.

When he was named a cardinal, Dulles was the oldest of the 44 clerics elevated to the College of Cardinals, and the only one who walked up the steps of St. Peter's Basilica with a cane. He was also the first U.S. Jesuit—and the first American theologian who was not already a bishop—to be honored with a cardinal's red hat.

Dulles was too old to vote in the 2005 conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI, but was nonetheless an active member of the U.S. hierarchy, having served as part of the U.S. delegation of cardinals that was summoned to the Vatican in 2002 to grapple with the growing clergy sex abuse scandal.

“He was absolutely beloved by his brother Jesuits; admired by scholars, students and readers; and esteemed by the Vatican,” said James Martin, associate editor of the Jesuit magazine *America*. “His piercing intellect, lucid style and deep faith made him a reader's writer and a believer's theologian.”

Dulles's father, John Foster Dulles, was secretary of state in the Eisenhower administration. Two other family members had been appointed to the same post: John W. Foster, in 1892, and Robert Lansing, in 1915. His uncle, Allen Dulles, was Eisenhower's CIA director, and a great uncle, Allen Macy Dulles, was a noted Presbyterian theologian.

Avery Dulles became interested in Catholicism through his studies of art, philosophy, theology and medieval literature at Harvard, and became a Catholic after his graduation in 1940.

In his best-known theological work, *Models of the Church*, he held that the church is a mystery that cannot be defined in conceptual terms, but must be approached through combinations of diverse analogies.

Written in the heady days after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Dulles's book envisioned a future for the church in light of the council's emphasis on the laity.

The church, Dulles said in a 2001 interview, "has an institutional structure that it needs to maintain. But I did insist that the institution is not primary, and I still would affirm that. The institution is for the sake of the spiritual life and for the sake of holiness, and is not an end in itself."

Dulles was widely respected across the theological spectrum, perhaps because he worked against polarization within the church, especially in the United States, where he said that liberal and conservative Catholics tended to retreat and "shoot across at one another from their trenches." -*Religion News Service*