

THE DIALOGUE AND THE COLD WAR

Josef L. Hromadka, the distinguished Czech Protestant theologian, writes an article, "Toward a Dialogue," for the winter issue of Communio Viatorum, the theological quarterly published by the Ecumenical Institute of the Comenius Faculty of Protestant Theology in Prague. Professor Hromadka's remarks have a special interest as the observations of a Christian theologian from behind the Iron Curtain. Excerpts follow.

The most recent events in international life have strengthened our hope that relaxation of tension and of our anxiety might be not too far ahead. For years have we longed for the time when we shall breathe more freely and arrive at a real mutual understanding. What we need for the growth of a genuine real ecumenical fellowship is a quiet, open and spontaneous dialogue. I hope I do not engage in any exaggeration if I attribute the many failures of our ecumenical life to the lack of a genuine theological and personal dialogue. By dialogue I have in mind such talking together in which we are free of any prejudice, secret or open distrust, antagonism, unwillingness to listen to one another and to interpret the other side, the partner in the dialogue, *ad meliorem partem*, in the best possible way.

The Cold War has caused terrible havoc also in our ecumenical interrelations, poisoned the atmosphere, established a barrier between ourselves and made even our personal friendship very difficult.

However, the recent changes in the international political life are affecting our relations also in the realm of the theological and ecumenical struggle. The Cold War had frozen and solidified our mind and our approach to other people. We had ceased to see living men with their grief and sorrow, desires and aspirations. Now we are beginning to see living faces. We are breaking through the barriers of cold, abstract notions and prejudices which have prevented us from sensing the pulse of human beings, the radiance of their eyes, and the beating of their hearts. . .

The dialogue between Eastern Orthodoxy (indirectly also Roman Catholicism) and Protestant churches and the dialogue between the younger and historical churches must be followed and supplemented by an earnest and intensive dialogue between theologians and churchmen separated from one another by what we call the Iron Curtain. Most of the resolutions and pronouncements of the World Council of Churches reflect the political and

psychological atmosphere of the West. It is understandable and, as long as the representatives of the churches "behind the Iron Curtain" are very small in number and not admitted to the "inner circle" of the various ecumenical groups and commissions, the situation cannot be changed.

My comments must not be understood as criticism, dissatisfaction and reproach. They wish only to point to an urgent need of the *Oikumene* if it should achieve its end and its present mission. This dialogue would deal not only with concrete and special problems of the present international situation; but also, and above all, with the ultimate principles and norms which should be our common basis and our court of appeal. We haven't yet discussed in any satisfactory way the problems of the Cold War, of the Chinese Republic, of Germany, and the future both of colonialism and economical imperialism. And the problems of freedom, justice, human rights, international ethics are still waiting for our thorough, open, extensive and intensive discussion. We have not yet overcome the preconceived idea that all these issues have to be interpreted against the background of Western social, political, and cultural tradition.

The challenge of the social revolution, of socialism and Communism has not as yet been taken into serious consideration. The ways in which theologians and churchmen in socialist and Communist countries approach our present problems have not yet been analyzed and positively discussed. We have not yet penetrated beyond ideologies to the place where Christian *man* and Communist *man* come together to speak with one another, not as representatives of ideological systems, but as human beings with their hearts and minds, sorrows and sins, desires and aspirations.

There are many people in Western churches that are almost yielding to a feeling of despair and frustration because they look at the problem from the point of view of ideological systems and theories; because they are not ready to listen to the pulse and heart of an atheist or Communist. They are frustrated because they see the masses of people without any church tradition and education. Hence they cannot realize that this very situation is not only an unfortunate predicament, but also a great promise for the days to come. A real open-hearted dialogue without suspicion, distrust and prejudice could render tremendous help not only to the ecumenical movement but also to our struggling, suffering and forward-looking humanity.