NOTES ON THE DIALOGUE

Does Dialogue Mean Capitulation?

Thomas Molnár

The French saying, *Pas d'ennemi à gauche*, can be paraphrased today: No dialogue with the right. For indeed, the "dialogue," the most popular term of the sixties, is a companion-word of peaceful coexistence with communism and of *apertura a sinistra*, even of ecumenism whose noble objectives have been corrupted by the scramble of many, so-called ecumenists for the atheist’s smile. Primarily, then, "dialogue" is a political term, masking a strategy designed to appease and validate the ideological Left. Since this Left has its representatives within the Christian churches as well as in the political arena, it is hard to separate church matters from more generally political matters in discussing the dialogue. To a large extent, indeed, they overlap, as is shown by the identity of expressions that advocates of political or religious dialogue use in their parallel approach to the problem.

The political dialogue with the Communist world was initiated on the premises that the Soviet leaders fear us (more generally, the “imperialist” West) but if reassured about our peaceful intentions, they would relent and allow the “open society” to break up their rigidity. In the late fifties there appeared articles and books which, re-examining the events of 1918-21 in Russia, concluded that it was Western intervention in the peaceful evolution of Bolshevism which sowed the seeds of distrust in the minds of Lenin and his associates. The lesson was clear: it is still not too late to stop the cold war—the fruit, like the first isolation of the Soviet Union, of a Western plot by the industrial-military establishment and other “fascists.” In the same vein *Commonweal* printed an editorial suggesting that in order to show how reasonable and peaceful we are, we should give up Berlin and build a new one (!) somewhere else.

Now I am not so naive as to deny that all kinds of Western circles wanted to trade goods and ideas with the Communist bloc, and that all of them helped design and practice peaceful coexistence.

Big businessmen were Khruschev’s most enthusiastic greeters on his first visit to the United States. But the ideology and tactics for the move had been formulated by the liberal-leftist intelligentsia, the Riesmans, the Stuart Hughes, the Linus Paulings who contended that in history all conflicts have come to an end. Why not terminate the cold war too? They forget, of course, that the conflicts referred to lasted several centuries (Crusades, the wars of religion were among these gentlemen’s examples), and did not end by one protagonist offering unilateral disarmament or ideological truce. But what they forgot even more completely, in the face of evidence, is that each time the Communist world, however grudgingly, yielded or backed down, withdrew or negotiated, it was under military pressure or at least a show of firmness. Examples, unfortunately, do not abound, but even their small number is conclusive: Moscow yielded in Iran (1946), at the Berlin airlift (1949), in Korea (1953), in Lebanon (1958), and most spectacularly in Cuba. In other confrontations it also yielded to Peking, just as Peking yields now to superior American force in Vietnam where the Chinese dare not intervene, and confine themselves to verbal attacks.

If there is today a calmer climate between Washington and Moscow, it is not due to any friendly gesture on our part, but to our demonstration of obvious superiority in decisive instances; to the simultaneous catastrophic breakdown of Communist economy; and to the Budapest revolt which showed the world the hatred of Soviet-subjugated nations. Although each American show of strength comes as a surprise to the lords of the Kremlin (or of the Forbidden City), they nevertheless accept the power relationship as favoring the United States and generally the free world. Yet, no good purpose is achieved by sweet smiles at any time; just before the Cuban confrontation Khruschev declared that “America is too liberal to fight.” He seemed to be justified by Kennedy’s earlier softness when the Berlin Wall was constructed.

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4 worldview
The same considerations apply to the cold war between the United States and Red China. Let me charitably assume that our intelligentsia do not simply and squarely favor Hanoi’s and indirectly Peking’s victory, as their fathers’ generation favored always and everywhere that of Moscow. To sober minds, not blinded by pro-Chinese bias, it ought to be clear that peace in the Indian Ocean area can only be secured if Peking’s ambitions remain contained, if countries like India, Japan and the Philippines remain reassured, and if our presence in Vietnam encourages everywhere in the area men of General Nastution’s type to beat down Communist attempts at power seizure. No amount of dialogue with Peking can achieve this goal; if, on the other hand, we confront China with firmness on her peripheries, chances are she will not subdue new satellites—as the Soviet Union would not have done if the Kremlin’s leaders had been unequivocally deterred at Yalta, Potsdam, and a decade later in Budapest.

It is also argued by partisans of the political dialogue that Western “reasonableness” in face of Communist challenge is not so much designed to appease Moscow or Peking as to reassure the little countries about America’s peaceful intentions and about the radiant future of a pluralistic world. But this view too is based on the wrong psychology. In the 1930’s the small countries of Eastern Europe, exposed to Hitler’s appetite, literally implored England and France to make a firm stand against Nazi expansion. Yet the appeasers of the time, Clement Attlee, for example, kept reassuring Germany that England would not interfere with her rearmament, and kept advising Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, and Bucharest that Hitler did not wish to make conquests beyond a reasonable Lebensraum of German-speaking peoples.

Since 1945 only the American atomic deterrence has kept Russia and China at bay, and has, consequently, protected the small nations of the free world from Communist aggression. The only reassurance Washington can give them is that the United States will keep containing the Communist enemy who is, at the same time, their enemy too. This was true in 1945 and is true in 1965 when Communist leaders speak openly of the compatibility of peaceful coexistence and “wars of liberation.” The first term means with every possible clarity: we want to avoid a nuclear confrontation in which we would be wiped out. So we keep conquering new countries without fear of reprisals.

I have elaborated on the theme of “dialogue with the Communists” in order to illustrate through the political aspect the wider question that the ideological and religious dialogue raises. Here the premises, the terminology, and the psychological errors are the same. Upholders of the political dialogue are interested only in approaches (economic, cultural, ideological) to the far Left and its Communist core: none suggests dialogue with Franco, Salazar, Verwoerd, Chiang Kai-shek, because by “dialogue” they do not mean attempts at understanding all ideologies and all political positions, but ideological surrender to the Left. Contact with Spain or South Africa is imposed by the necessities of the world situation, but it is not proposed by the dialogue-makers.

Pas de dialogue avec la droite! Slander and contempt suffice! If then the dialogue is broached only with the Communists, I conclude that this means only one thing: that they represent the wave of the future. They may be somewhat “abnormal,” it is true, too aggressive and immature—like adolescents in whom the clan vital has reached the bursting point. However, this may be explained by the lack of understanding shown by the non-Communist world. If Russia turned a sulking back on the West, it was because Western powers tried to thwart Lenin’s and Trotsky’s excellent intentions in 1918; if Mao plots our demise, it is because Washington backed Chiang up until 1949; if Castro proclaimed communism, it is because Eisenhower cancelled the sugar import from Cuba. Consequently, the Communists are not only par excellence interpreters of the future and of history, they are also and always morally justified. So are those Christians who dialogue with them because this will help the Communists mature.

A dialogue is supposed to take place between opponents who maintain their respective opinions but agree to disagree. Or, as the Socratic method illu-
strates it, it is compatible with the concept of dialogue that the one who possesses truth (not just opinion, *doxa*) or moral superiority, should try to lead his interlocutor to a clearer perception of truth or a better moral conduct. The present notion of the dialogue forbids the Christian side to assume this position. Both partners of the dialogue share the same premises, namely those of the extreme Left, about socialism as a pinnace, the progressive nature of Communist countries, the deadly sins of the bourgeois, i.e., of capitalists, and of the white man. They both believe that the true meaning of Christianity is socialism and that Christ preached the social gospel.

True, the agreement on other points is not complete: progressive Christians from Tillich to La Pira hold that the Church, or at any rate some form of religion, will survive after several centuries of world communism—whereas the Communists themselves believe in the definitive establishment of the classless society under Party leadership. But both sides see the nearer future very much in the same light, so that one may say with an *Osservatore Romano* article (March 3, 1965) that in the present dialogue Catholics try to minimize the differences while the Communists assert their dogmas with increasing intransigence. In other words, here too, “peaceful coexistence” paralyzes one side, but does not interfere with the hostile activity of the other. The result is an ever more pronounced shift to the Left: the dialogue assumes the character of a domestic exchange of views within the orbit of Communist ideology.

Why this sudden shakiness of Christians in face of categorical Leftist affirmations? The dialogue, as I said before, is merely a mask for Christian capitulation on the whole length of the religious front. I do not mean that Christianity has come to an end; I am not even unduly alarmed, because I know that the Church possesses Christ’s promise, and I also know that nothing stands nearer the Truth than error (or heresy) in its various disguises. Just as Arianism, Gnosticism and other heresies have tempted good minds and good intentions away from the Church in the past, so do Communist ideology and its variants in this century. The surrender of many Christians today can be explained, at least partly, by a hundred years’ inferiority complex vis-à-vis the “world” to which many interventions at Vatican II paid such an uncalled-for, even vulgar, obeisance.

The Church has been generally about fifty years behind the times, but so it is today, in spite of the *aggiornamento*. Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* when Marx and Bakunin had been for years legendary figures of labor struggles; churchmen and other Christians discover today the “working class,” “evolution,” and the U.N. when these have ceased to be vanguard notions, and are becoming cliches. A Father Congar writes of “masses” in a style that a labor union man would indignantly reject as sweetly condescending; other churchmen discover the “class struggle” at a time that socialist parties are learning of the workers’ desire to be bourgeois; yet other bishops, in and out of the Council, speak of psychoanalysis with the naïve enthusiasm of Freud’s first disciples.

These supposedly modern manifestations of the Church remind one of young children, fed at home with spinach, who suddenly discover the corner candy store. The sheer primitiveness of the attitude is pithy and laughable. Publications like *Catholic World* and *America*, until about five years ago ultra-respectable and boring, rush with indecent haste (but with style unchanged) into the safe embrace of the new orthodoxy, and claim, without fear of ridicule, the vanguard’s laurel for it. Father Sheerin, the editor of *Catholic World*, does not hesitate to compare the fate of Catholics in Communist countries and the fate of non-Catholics in Spain. Bidding ever higher in the aggiornamento game, he chooses to ignore that Protestants and Jews in Spain are neither tortured nor locked in concentration camps. Their groups are not infiltrated by the State apparatus as they might be in Poland where police-stooge Boleslav Fiascely has created the *Pax* movement on orders from Soviet NKVD General Serov, in accordance with Lenin’s recommendation: “The Church should not be attacked frontally but helped to disintegrate from within.”

It is important to understand that conservatives denounce less the Kremlin’s stale and narrow dogma than the assemblage of progressive ideologies of which Marxism is only the most virulent expression. Let me take a brief look at the religious side of this ideology so that it may be seen why the Christians-for-dialogue are disarmed in advance.

This is what the combined systems of Teilhard de Chardin and modern Protestant theology propose: Mankind, propelled by evolutionary forces, has reached maturity when the scientific worldview permits us to sidestep God as the explanatory factor of the universe. God still remains at the depth of our being where guilt and death dominate, but we must prepare for the day when religion ceases to be a dimension of man and God will be compatible with
secular morality. For Bishop Robinson, this morality is that of the social worker; he even spells it out: concern for low-priced housing, sewage systems, improved prison conditions. For the more sophisticated Teilhard it is planetary socialization and "hominization" (whatever that means).

This ideology neutralizes religion as the teaching of truth by accepting every new shoot of evolution, hence communism and atheism too, on the same rank with it. From the vantage point of the noosphere (millions of years hence, Teilhard assures us) this religious belief in God, indeed it makes no difference how stumblingly we advance towards our biologically predetermined end. Christianity, communism, atheism, Buddhism, all beliefs are equivalent in the eyes of the syncretists. Rational arguments have long been dismissed, and to speak of Christ's truth is sheer triumphalism; all that counts is some feeling for the "whole" and for "convergence," fraudulently baptized "love."

With the religious universe of discourse so diluted, Communists and atheists have an easy time persuading certain Christians that "truth evolves" and that Marxism in particular should not be neglected in the process of seeking it. The French Dominicans, Fathers Dubarle and Jolif, seek it eagerly at the Semaine de la pensée marxiste where they receive the approval of the Party philosopher, Roger Caraud: "When Father Dubarle admits the value of scientific materialism...when Father Jolif brings to the surface those values which are immanent in the materialistic concept of ethics...when both argue that Catholics and Communists may cooperate in the elaboration of a common humanism...then a new step forward has been made" (L'Humanité, January 27, 1965). Another philosopher of the Communist Party, Gilbert Mury, writes of the future form of Catholicism as Lenin predicted it, that is with "its superstitions and outmoded ideology swept away," and he notes his agreement with the Catholics of the dialogue that "religious faith is socially conditioned." It is noticeable at every new Rencontre, he writes, that Communists and progressive Catholics stand together, and that only a small band of conservatives try still to wreck their agreement (France Nouvelle, March 31, 1965).

It may be of course that the dialoguing priests merely express their excitement over new contacts they now make with so far forbidden circles. Dialogue with Communists gives them a frisson nouveau, a thrill, although Pius XI spoke of communism as "intrinsically perverse" and forbade common action with it even when, as he foresaw, the Communists seem to adopt peace slogans. Cardinal Koenig of Vienna must also feel an exciting new flavor in his mouth when he declares that the Church has made peace with atheists! All this is indicative of the selective dialogue, justified only if one believes in the Teilhardian doctrine that a new phase of evolution cancels out earlier phases, the Church of John XXIII that of Pius XII.

The question we must still ask is the one the ex-priest Carlo Falconi raises after observing conservatives and progressives at the Council, "There remains the problem of the progressives' orthodoxy. Can the progressives still call themselves Catholics? If we mean by Catholicism—and what else can we mean?—that which distinguishes this Christian community from other historical Christian denominations, namely papal primacy and infallibility, the spirit of the Curia and of canon law, the spirit of scholasticism, and temporal choices in politics—then there is no doubt: the genuine Catholics are behind the blind eye and convulsive gestures of Ottaviani... The progressives who aspire to return to the Christianity of the first centuries, in the domain of ideology and of structure, liturgy and discipline, are essentially Evangelists...and they are destined to de-Catholicize the Church" (Vu et entendu au Concile, pp. 251-52).

This is no longer the dialogue but a caricature of it. For Falconi the problem is settled: the Catholic Church must now, after 40 years delay, embrace Protestantism. The terms he employs, but also the less crude ones by Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and the too Catholic theologians, indicate unmistakably that reconciliation is conceived as the second, and final, Reformation. After all, Luther's intention was, too, to de-mythologize the Church. Ever since, the spiritual inclination of Protestantism has been to make tabula rasa not only of tradition (which is another word for orderly change), but of what I prefer to call the existential, aesthetic side of man. In contrast, it emphasized the social and economic concern, as Max Weber magisterially demonstrated. It suppressed almost entirely the mystical and aesthetic element so richly represented in the history of the Church. When Chateaubriand wrote his new-style apologetics, Le Génie du Christianisme, he could prove without possibility of contradiction that art in the West was not only intimately linked with the life of the Church, but that it actually owed its existence to the Church's inspiration and generosity. It is the great drama of the West since the Reformation that Protestantism "demythologized" religion,
stripped it of its human richness, that kind of richness which gives visible and tactile support to spiritual life, to prayer, to artistic expression and to mystical experience. During these centuries Protestantism gave birth to only one religious genius, Soren Kierkegaard, who ended up in despair, absurdity, and irrationality. He could not find in his religion, channels for his genius.

Yet, we are now invited to such a demythologization! Luther's iconoclasm is re-enacted in French churches where misled and browbeaten priests are destroying or selling the art of centuries, not, mind you, the stilted Sulpician products of the last century, but medieval retables, baroque candelabras, tabernacles, and the statues of saints. Agnostic art critics and art lovers, the State itself, call the clergy to order, to respect if not their religion, at least its artistic expression, the national patrimony of France. In keeping with the "social concern" (but inspired by the most rigid class spirit), churches now built in suburbs where workers predominate are supposed to look like factories, and in the countryside like barns and silos. They are stripped of beauty, and are made functional under the pretext that a display of beauty, "triumphalism," would make the workers and peasants ill at ease. These are again Marxist slogans—of a century ago.

We should recognize the charity and love which impel men of good will, Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Gentiles, atheists and Marxists towards a genuine dialogue under God's light, a dialogue not conceived as surrender. But we shall denounce relentlessly and always the phony peace the price of which is truth as we know it.

CHRISTIANITY AND ATHEISM: A DIALOGUE?

Will the Present Exchanges Develop or Die?

Peter J. Riga

In his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI wrote that atheism "is the most serious problem of our time." The reason is that an ideological atheism denies God and oppresses the Church, and that it is often identified with economic, social and political regimes, among which atheistic communism is the chief. Dialogue in such circumstances is admittedly very difficult, for any group which is persecuted seeks first and foremost its survival and the survival of values it thinks essential.

The Christian, however, cannot despair, for two reasons. First, he must seek out his enemy to do him good, to return benevolence for malevolence, to seek what binds and heals rather than what separates and destroys. The Christian knows that even when he must resist the injustices of his enemy there are bounds of morality beyond which he may not go; he knows he must never discontinue the sometimes discouraging attempt to seek peace and an atmosphere of trust and confidence. For his pains, furthermore, the Christian must be prepared, like Jeremias, to be considered a "traitor," or "soft" on a hated group, or a subversive whose motives will lead to "surrender" and "destruction."

Secondly, change is of the essence of every society, of every philosophy. A philosophy that does not continuously adapt itself to new conditions is doomed to death or, at best, irrelevance. Christianity has had to face up to the sometimes hard truths of depth psychology, evolution, pluralism and freedom, the positive sciences and the whole wealth of development of terrestrial realities. Today communism faces challenges just as great. Men do not repudiate doctrines and dogmas to which they have sworn their loyalty. Instead they review, revise and reinterpret them to meet new needs and new circumstances. Pope John explicitly recognized this in his encyclical *Peace on Earth* when he said:

It must be borne in mind, furthermore, that neither can false philosophical teachings regarding the nature, origin and destiny of the universe and of man be identified with historical movements that have economic, social, cultural or political ends, not even when these movements have originated from these teachings and have drawn and still draw inspiration therefrom . . . The move-

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