

ON DIALOGUE

to me now, the following delicious paragraph got included toward the end of Mr. Ky's discourse to us. I find its note of confidentiality and off-the-cuff bonhomie both engaging and terrifying — almost as though an elderly and dotty relative were pushing one to the wall with excessive affection to assure one that there was a body in the potting shed but that of course it was all right because superior powers were in charge whose goodness could not rationally be placed in question. It went somewhat like this:

Confidentially, I will say to you that the Johnson aggression is being defeated. His military skill is really very backward. It cannot understand the meaning and force of the Peoples' Army. The Americans admit to a great surprise in the last weeks, but we are in no sense surprised. But they are incapable of understanding us, so our natural mode of operating becomes a great shock to them. Imagine! over thirty cities attacked simultaneously, thousands of people involved. And where during all this preparation was the C.I.A.? And I must say that there are many unexpected things in preparation for Mr. Johnson. So an early withdrawal would be a very fortunate thing for the American youth. I have met with these young people many times, and I must say that I love them very much. We fight them only because we are forced to do so. In the near future we must win our final victory, and therefore there will be many more casualties. But how can we in all conscience avoid this? We have already undergone many years of suffering, and we cannot lengthen our suffering beyond limit for the sake of your youth. In spite of the love we bear for them, we cannot bear with their aggression. So the real question is how to bring the Administration to an understanding of how to do this. How can we bring them to an understanding of the war which will be to the benefit of their own youth? How can we insure that the resources of the U.S. are not to be squandered uselessly in this war? And how also to solve the terrible burden placed upon our conscience by the temptation to excessive killing?

(I must say, in all honesty, that I find the preceding, as I read it over again in the rather less heated atmosphere of my university, an admirable and balanced examination of conscience. If such statements are to be smeared with the tarbrush of propaganda, then one must admit that this is a totally admirable and new form of propaganda, one based forsooth upon an understanding of the horrendous waste of lives on both sides of the firing line. And if the word "propaganda" expresses and summarizes the sentiments, one can only say from his deepest heart, scored by some four years of Western political expression: *Vive la propagandel!*)

"Dialogue" is a word frequently used in the pages of worldview and other publications engaged in exploring the bonds that unite disparate groups and in exposing the differences that lie at the heart of disagreement. Religious groups speak of dialogue with other communions and sects; at times the waters of verbal acrimony have parted and hawks and doves proposed a "dialogue" with various members of the species about Vietnam policy. A lessening of cold-war tensions has afforded perhaps the newest exemplar of dialogue, that between East and West. Its continuance is attested to by the appearance of the first English-language edition of an "international review" devoted to this exchange and called, appropriately enough, Dialogue. What can be achieved by this approach? What are its signposts and limitations? The editors of Dialogue, published in Vienna, offer their view of this process "In Place of an Introduction" to Vol. I, No. 1. (Members of the review's international committee with whom readers will be familiar include Yves Congar, O.P., Erich Fromm, Josef L. Hromadka, Johannes B. Metz, Paul Oestreicher and Charles West.)

Cold War produced cold philosophies. Both anti-communism and anti-capitalism had that much in common that they took the other fellow at his worst, which was often founded in stark reality. When the Thaw came, somewhat warmer views became feasible and even fashionable. With the Cold War ice melting, some elements of good were laid bare on either side, at least for those who had more use for their heads than to bury them in their hands bemoaning the corruption of the world since Good Old Joe's death.

So far this new situation does not amount to much more than discovering, with increasing speed, that the other system is not altogether bad, and one's own not altogether good. Can we proceed from here to discoveries more thrilling than this truism?

What is this "some good" in each other's system? If communism (capitalism) is not an entirely diabolical system of oppressing good people who would otherwise love to be good capitalists (Communists), what else is there, more precisely, in it?

Could it be that planned (free) economy is not just a flop, proletarian (bourgeois) democracy not just a fake? Could it be that atheism (Christianity)

is not just a wicked Communist (capitalist) ideology but an honorable venture of the human mind, worthy of examination and sympathy? Could it be that there is something to be learned from atheism (Christianity)?

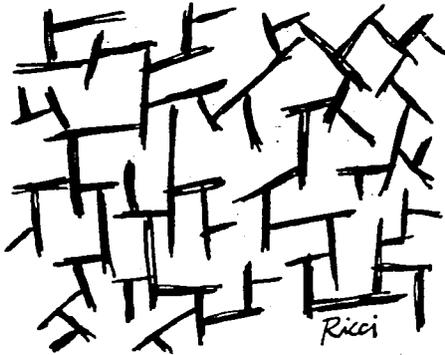
To ask these questions all by oneself poring over a book by somebody who is against communism (capitalism) is both boring and futile. Today it should be possible to lean back and talk it out with one another.

This East-West dialogue must progress through three stages: aggression, information, transformation.

The initial stage of verbal aggression is unpleasant, but of neurotic necessity. We must run out of invectives before we can take in factual information as a second stage. But it is the third stage, intellectual transformation, that is both the most fascinating and the most dangerous.

Transformation by dialogue means that you don't leave it as you enter; conversation becomes conversion. Afterwards you think differently than you did before, and some people might like you less than they did before.

You might even acquire the queer faculty of arguing against yourself with the other fellow's arguments, thus continuing the dialogue monologically, sitting on your own sofa and finding out who is stronger, you or yourself.



Now, what is this? Intellectual Musical Chairs? Illicit gambling with the most treasured truths of the Free World (the Socialist World)?

At a first glance, the answer is as simple as this: it is a change of ideas following a change of reality. The basic change in East-West politics from Cold War to Lukewarm Truce has brought about a correspondingly different climate in the intellectual superstructure. This is just human.

It is still more human, however, if it works the other way round, i.e., if changes of mind bring about changes of reality. The human mind can anticipate changes of human realities such as world politics, it can actualize the still hidden potentialities of a given political situation, it can add momentum to the pace of an already moving body politic, by contributing consciousness and conscience, clarity and intensity.

This, precisely, is the function of East-West dialogue in the context of East-West politics. This dialogue is theoretical as is all speech. But it is theory inescapably linked up with practical politics of East and West. As we move on from Cold War to Lukewarm Truce, and from there, let us hope, to Hot Peace, the intellectual dialogue between East and West progresses correspondingly, spearheading the movement of reality. The dialogue supplies the much needed theory to a much desired practice.

Whoever wants to promote this theory of a practice does so at his own risk, but not in entire isolation. There is, both in East and West, an increasing number of theologians, philosophers, sociologists and other scientists specializing in dialogue. The resulting advantage is that they know what they are talking about, the resulting danger that dialogue may become "dialogology," a kind of private fight between Christian and Marxist theology.

The first institution specializing in this fight was the Paulus Society, founded by the German priest Erich Kellner in the mid-fifties as a meeting ground for theologians and scientists. Later on the Paulus Society initiated the Christian-Marxist dialogue on a large scale through their conferences at Salzburg (1965), Herrenchiemsee (1966), Marienbad (1967), each with several hundred participants, a majority from the West, a significant minority from several Eastern countries, and none from the Soviet Union. The Paulus Society has published about twenty volumes of their proceedings, some of them on the subject of dialogue.

This year the Christian-Marxist dialogue was taken up by the World Council of Churches, assembling during the Easter week at its seat in Geneva fifty Marxists and fifty Christians, from both East and West, including, for the first time in the history of dialogue meetings, theologians of the Orthodox Church of the USSR.

In the publicistic field a small crop of dialogue periodicals in several languages is coming to the light of a rather uncertain day. They are grouped around *Neues Forum*, International Review for the Dialogue, a German-language monthly. . . . *Forum*, with several years of dialogue promotion behind it, is a veteran on whose experience and, to some extent, material assistance, the other dialogue periodicals may and do count.

Something has been achieved, much remains to be done. It is with this word of caution that we introduce this first issue of our English-language edition to the reader. We have no other appeal than to his readiness to devote thought, time and money for a cause which is experimental but urgent.