

stantinian' tradition of the Church, a tradition which was at the same time both a close alliance with the dominant classes and the dominant authorities, numerous Christians today are attempting to rediscover the apocalyptic tradition of primitive Christianity, a tradition of a period in which Christianity was the religion of slaves, a protest (although impotent) against the established order . . . and not yet an ideology of imperial justification and of resignation."

It is important to point out, however, that dialogue today takes place in a significantly different context. This context has been defined on the Christian side by such events as the emergence of neo-orthodoxy (and later crisis theology), the formation of the World Council of Churches and, more recently, Vatican II and the great thrust toward authentic Christian living it inspired. On the Marxist side the most important development has been the new revisionism which was dramatically symbolized by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. This event gave impetus to Eastern Europeans in their political struggle against the domination of a centralized Soviet power structure and encouraged them to extract the kernel of moral relevance from Marxism by demythologizing the Leninist-Stalinist school of thought. This might be described as an effort to salvage the "humanistic" Marx from the "historical determinism" that had become the accepted ideology of the Party. Since that time the situation in Eastern Europe has become increasingly rebellious (witness the uprisings from Poland to Czechoslovakia) while in Western countries Communist parties (e.g., in France and Italy) are less inclined to accept either Soviet leadership or values.

"The "different context" that has resulted from internal debates within communism as well as Christianity's own revised estimates of its nature and role in the world has provided a fresh basis for dialogue. The emphasis is now less on the patrimony of shared values, less on the past so to speak and more on what can be achieved in the future, on what both Christianity and communism can do to bring about a better world. I think the underlying reason for this shift has been a common realization that traditional values of themselves cannot remake the world. The situation is, in a word, more revolutionary on both sides and revolution always looks to the future, the light at the end of the tunnel, to the fruits of hope — a future that will be the creation of man's free and responsible self-determination as opposed to the iron laws of historical determination (communism) or an inscrutable will of God (Christianity).

"Transcendence" has thus quite naturally become an important category in the revisionist thinking of

both Marxists and Christians, translating a desire on the part of both to get beyond ideological constrictions. Sartre, for one, has given considerable attention to this category, and in a speech earlier this year during an American tour the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec said it was the major issue confronting Marxists today. This is so because transcendence is the category of the future. It enables man to envision a future order and legitimize present hopes, to overcome the limitations of the given by projecting a new reality. In this way questions of meaning and value can be validated in a way they cannot by an appeal to tradition.

As Machovec put it: "Man is a limited being, but in love and moral engagement he is able to transcend the limits of his individuality. He finds value in his relationships to his surroundings. I tend to think that genuine transcendence is the capacity for the 'I' to seek out and find the 'Thou.'" And Garaudy asserts that communism hopes for an inward transformation of man and the creation of a new society in which love will become an objective reality of society rather than a mere prescription. "Our task as Communists," he writes, "is to draw near to man in his most glorious dreams and his most sublime hopes, to draw near to him in a real and practical way, so that Christians themselves might find here on our earth a beginning of their heaven."



It is easy to see how the Christian could also adopt such language and such an attitude. He, too, must proclaim the need and legitimacy of a new society. He, too, must strive for the primacy of love and the end of alienation. He, too, must take himself and history seriously. But even here Dupré and others fixated on old antagonisms raise an objection. The transcendence of Marxism, they argue, must remain immanent to human possibilities. *Praxis* enables us

to project beyond the present but not beyond the human. Therefore the future they talk about can only be a finite one. Precisely because religion, particularly the Christian religion, claims to transcend the human and natural it can never be squared with any theory that is rooted in man's active relationship to nature and social conditions. Christianity, in this view, is intransigent. It regards transcendence as embodied in a supra-historical being, a guarantee of the future, whereas Marxists see it as an absence, a desideratum to be pursued in risk, unassured of success.

But this is by no means the only way of viewing the matter. An orthodox strand of the Christian tradition defines revelation as an encounter between the transcendent and man in his concrete historical situation. The "God of the above" and the "God of the ahead" meet in human destiny, in moments of decision and action. Moreover, a good deal of recent Christian thought has moved to accommodate the Marxist conception of transcendence by defining God as the future of man, as he who is not yet, as the aspiration of man's yet-unfulfilled being, as the endless expanding horizon of man's hopes. The future, according to such thinking, is radically open. Karl Rahner is one Christian theologian who has made a significant contribution to dialogue on this level. In an article entitled "Marxist Utopia and the Christian Future of Man" he works out from the premise that God is "the absolute future of man."

Christianity, he explains, is essentially a religion of the future. "It understands itself and can be understood only by reference to the future, which it knows as absolute and as coming to both the individual man and all mankind. Its interpretation of the past occurs in and through the progressive disclosure of the approaching future, and the sense and meaning of the present are based on a hopeful openness to the absolute future's imminent advent. . . . Thus the real nature of man can be defined precisely as the possibility of attaining the absolute future — not this or that particular state of affairs which is always encompassed by another and greater future still unrealized and yet ordained and which, therefore, is relativized and known to be such. In this sense, Christianity is the religion of becoming, of history, of self-transcendence, of the future. For it, everything given is ordained; everything is understandable only in relation to what is still unrealized."

This view of continually self-transcending history is possible only if the historical process itself is open. Rahner further points out that because of this essential distinction between all relative human projects

and the absolute future, Christianity is able to affirm both the real and the limited character of all human achievements. In this way it avoids the hubristic temptation of "brutally sacrificing each generation in favor of the following, and of thus making of the future a Moloch to which the real man is sacrificed in favor of a man who is not real but is always still to come."

Two remarks about this crucial passage are in order. First of all, it marks a radical departure from the usual emphasis on tradition and appeals to established canons of interpretation. Second, although it calls for further development and clarification, it is a magnificent example of how creative theological thought can renew itself by contact with prevalent worldviews that have their own "truth." Atheism is no more "integral" to Marxism than a sterile supernaturalism is to Christianity. What matters is an attempt to *understand* the other's position and dialogue on the basis of creative thought. I mentioned a moment ago that Rahner's position outlined in this article calls for further clarification on some key points. Let me note three of them now. First of all, it isn't immediately obvious just how the absolute future and God are the same, especially since Rahner maintains that this future is *above* history. Second, Rahner seems to want to say that the absolute future is in some sense already given in the revelation of Christ. This claim clearly calls for further explanation. Finally, the concept of an absolute future says nothing specific about what kind of social order shall come to be; it makes no commitments to the material content of the future.

But these questions aside, my main concern has been to show how futuristic categories, despite their inherent dangers, can significantly advance the cause of dialogue. Someone has said that there is really no need to fight communism because the Communists are going to revise it to death. This crude remark utterly misses the point because it assumes that revision is negative rather than positive. It is precisely because revision is so often indicative of a creative coming to terms with the historical process that it must be considered a vital dimension of dialogue. Giulio Girardi concludes his book *Marxism and Christianity* with this observation: "There is a Marxism that is open to dialogue, the Marxism of men. And there is a Marxism that is closed to dialogue, the Marxism of institutions. Our hope, and the hope of the world, is that in this dramatic tension between man and institution, the final victory will belong to man." The same observation could be made of Christianity and the same hope for the final victory could be expressed with equal urgency.