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THE MIRACLE OF DIALOGUE: ITS ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Douglas J. Elwood

ABSTRACT

As the world faces the frightening prospect of extinction brought about by political controversy, racial bitterness, religious tension, economic disorder, and the whole disarray of international institutions, the almost forgotten art of dialogue becomes not only an option but a moral principle, and a necessary first step in resolving conflicts, large or small, at the interpersonal and societal level.

This paper examines the subject of dialogue in relation to conflict resolution, in particular, the face-to-face dialogue that opens the way and make resolution possible and, in the end, effective. But two conditions are required for dialogue to take place—it must proceed from both sides, and the parties to the dialogue must persist relentlessly. Resolving a conflict through dialogue requires that each party recognizes and affirms the humanity of the other. More than face-to-face encounter, dialogue involves the spirit of conviction with openness in which each party is sensitive to the needs of the other, and willing to negotiate openly rather than force a solution by using power tactics. In the face of daily unfolding conflicts of varying magnitudes which threaten to annihilate the human race, the need for a real dialogical encounter in the spirit of genuine give and take cannot be overstressed.

An observation many would share is that genuine dialogue is often a neglected option, especially among people in positions of power, but sometimes even among those seriously concerned with issues of peace and justice. We immediately think of the long-standing conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and that between North and South Korea, not to mention others like the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

At the village level, it is common for people with a grievance to file a legal suit against another party without first hearing the other side of the issue. People often press their demands before making their request. They often use coercive force and bypass

persuasive power. So, what should be a last resort becomes the first retort. Important issues may be at stake, to be sure, but few of these same persons would use such an abrasive approach to get what they want in their interpersonal relations.

Some would say it is all part of the spirit of our times. If so, it would seem that the time is ripe to reintroduce the almost forgotten art of dialogue. Perhaps it is not too much to say, in view of the conflict situations we face today on a local and global scale, that dialogue appears more and more not as an option but as a human imperative. This is true, for example, in the areas of political controversy, racial bitterness, religious tension, economic disorder, and the whole disarray of international institutions. It has been said that "the quest for peace leads through the maze of conflict." But the outcome depends on how we respond to the conflict. The main purpose of this paper is to challenge the reader to consider dialogue not merely as an option but as a moral principle and a necessary first step in resolving conflicts, large or small, at the interpersonal or societal level.

The Meaning of Dialogue

The word "dialogue" in its root form means "talking together," in contrast to "monologue" which is just "talking alone." More precisely, dialogue is "talking and listening to one another." It was a classical form of literature in ancient Greece. The Greek verb *dialégesthai,* from which our word "dialogue" comes, meant examining fundamental convictions and giving positive arguments for them in the form of conversation. This style was used in the famous *Dialogues* of Plato. The running conversations in Greek plays were also called "dialogues," and still are in modern scripts.

But dialogue is much more than conversation. At a deep personal level it is communication—verbal and nonverbal. Here we are thinking of a dialogue not only as an art to be cultivated, as the Greeks understood it, but also as a moral principle to live by. We may define the dialogical principle, in the words of Reuel Howe, as "the serious address and response" between two or more persons or groups, in which "the being and truth of each is confronted by the being and truth of the other."[1] The "truth" of a person, in this context, refers to his/her integrity and uniqueness as a human being. This definition is based on the thought of Martin Buber, the distinguished Jewish philosopher of this century whose writings have profoundly influenced a number of leading Christian thinkers of our time. Buber's philosophical poem, *I and Thou,* and its sequel, *Between Man and Man,* are modern classics in the study of dialogue-in-depth.[2]

To think of dialogue as the being of one person encountering the being of another suggests that it is not easy to achieve—a fact which may explain why it occurs so rarely, and its rare occurrence accounts for the frequent absence of its benefits in our communication with one another. In this day of mass communication we need more than ever to study the nature of communication-as-dialogue. For, with technical aids that surpass the wildest imaginings of yesterday's science fiction, man can bombard the mind of his fellow human beings with a subtleness and effectiveness that is frightening. As Reuel Howe expresses it, "Man becomes the victim of communication rather than communication being a means by which he finds himself in his relation with others in a community of mutual criticism and helpfulness."[3]

Dialogue is basic to all mature human relationship. It is more than a method of communication, says Howe; it is communication itself. Then he adds reflectively: "It is imperative that a Christian be a dialogical person through whom the word that gives life is spoken."[4] Through dialogue we can "let God into our world," because "in dialogue we open ourselves to one another, and in so doing we open ourselves to God."[5] When we are open to both human and

God, miracles have to happen. The miracle of dialogue is needed in all relationships: individual and social, educational and religious, economic and political, national and international. Buber's theology of dialogue, which Howe embraces as a pastoral psychologist, shows that God is to be found "between" two or more persons whenever they are related as an "I" to a "Thou." We are reminded of the promise of Christ to his disciples: "Where two or three persons come together in my name, I am there in the midst of them"—that is, between one human being and another.

Buber's main point is that when we know a person merely as an "object," he is nothing more than an "It"—that is, a thing to be controlled and manipulated, exploited or abused. But to know the other as a "subject" is to know him through a direct personal encounter. It is to know him as a "Thou"—that is, as a person. The same can be said of one group's relation to another group. The transition from an "I-It" relation to an "I-Thou"

relation is, in Buber's words, "a change from communication to communion." At the deepest level, therefore, dialogue is more than conversation and even more than communication; it is communion. It is a mystical relationship, for this is primarily where God is to be found—"between thee and me." Whenever we stand in the relation of an I to a Thou, the "Eternal Thou" speaks to us through that moment of truth.[6]

The Nature of Conflict

As the title indicates, this paper treats the subject of dialogue in relation to conflict resolution. A conflict exists when two or more persons or groups pursue incompatible goals or activities, so that gains are made on one side at the expense of the other. Incompatible goals or activities may originate within the same person, between two or more persons, or between two or more groups. If, for example, you decide to spend Saturday after-

noon both sleeping and studying, then you are in conflict with yourself. If you want to cross the street and someone else decides to prevent you, you are involved in an interpersonal conflict. If the College of Arts and Sciences decides to hold a meeting in the Multipurpose Room and the College of Engineering decides it also wants to hold a meeting there at the same time, we have an inter-group conflict on our hands. Emphasis in this paper falls on inter-group conflict.

Philosophically, there are two obvious characteristics inherent in the created world which are major sources of conflict; namely, diversity and change. One reason conflict arises is the simple fact that people are different. They have different values, desires, and needs that can be incompatible with those of other people. Change is another source of conflict. Life does not stay the same; it changes, as we all know so well. We live in a world that is characterized by transition. The old is perpetually passing away and the new is taking its place. Why is it

that when people get embroiled in conflict they tend to overlook these two simple and obvious truths about life? They tend to expect other people to think and feel the same way they do, and they treat the situation as though it were fixed and unchanging. The rediscovery that diversity and change are the root sources of conflict can help us to view conflict as a natural and normal part of human community.[7] It can enable us to focus attention not only on the dangers inherent in conflict but also on the possibilities for growth and enrichment which conflicts contain. The challenge is to find ways to deal with conflict creatively so that growth, unity, and health are produced rather than disunity and harm. Conflict is a mark of our freedom to differ, to dissent, and to dream. But conflict can also become the perversion of freedom. It can cripple the mind, corrupt the spirit, and become the destroyer of life itself.

There are two extreme reactions to conflict which we would all do well to reject. One is the violent reaction and the

other is avoidance of conflict. Both are often the result of a basic mistrust that is rooted in the fear of meeting one another in dialogue. In the words of Ronald Arnett, "Violence denies the other's humanity and right to live. Avoidance of conflict does not recognize that life is by nature sometimes conflict-generating."[8] Social psychologists tell us that conflicts are inevitable among human beings. Only in the cemetery will we be completely free of conflicts! Of course, they vary in intensity, and they usually pass through various stages. Some conflicts become violent, as we know, and others remain nonviolent. Some are positive and constructive in their consequences and others are negative and destructive. Conflicts are negative when they result from hostile or impulsive drives to destroy. They are positive when they result from the desire and will to heal, unite, and improve. To paraphrase David and Frank Johnson in their once popular social psychology textbook, a conflict among group members or between groups is a crisis that can weaken or strengthen the group, a critical event that may either bring creative insight and better relationships or lasting resentment, smoldering hostility, and psychological scars.[9] In other words, conflicts are neither moral nor immoral in themselves, but become so according to the way we manage and finally resolve them. They have the potential for producing either highly constructive or highly destructive consequences for group functioning.

Popular discussions often assume that conflicts are themselves the cause of such problems as divorce, psychological distress, social disorder, and violence. The truth is, it is not the mere presence of conflicts that causes all these disastrous problems; rather, it is the ineffective management of conflicts.[10] As we have seen, conflicts can have positive results. However, just because this is so does not mean that we should deliberately foment conflict so as to achieve our goals, for conflict also tends to breed more and worse conflict, if not violence, and we have all seen how violent conflict can become an instrument of intimidation and terror. In summary, therefore, we may affirm on the one hand the inevitability and even the potential conflict and at the same time recognize its destructive possibilities.

In addition to the two root sources of conflict mentioned earlier, there are at least three specific causes: personal differences, poor communication, and structural differences. Personal differences often involve emotional factors such as insecurity and prejudice. Poor communication is the inability to understand how others think and feel. Usually miscommunication results from false assumptions, one of which is that other people ought to think and feel exactly as we do. Miscommunication contributes to what have been called "cycles of retaliation." For example, when we say something to others, based on inaccurate notions of their feelings, they may be hurt by what we say. They strike back, perhaps, out of their own inaccurate perceptions of our feelings. So, now we are the ones hurt, and we strike again, and so they are hurt again, and so on and on. These cycles of retaliation can be broken only by effective communication which takes patience, persistence, and the skill of empathetic listening. But in the end of it "makes possible those workable compromises and that respect for the other and oneself that are essential to healthy human relationships."[11] Jaime Bulatao, in his popular booklet on group discussion, points out that the key to understanding is "to enter into the other person's world of meaning."[12] In the words of the lawyer in the novel, and movie, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* in order to understand another person "one has to put on his *skin* and walk around in it for several days." The third specific cause of conflict mentioned above is structural differences. These are often power struggles in which two or more individuals or groups strive for dominance. This will be discussed more fully in later sections of this paper.

Reuel Howe defines conflict as "interrupted dia-

logue."[13] An amusing example of interrupted dialogue occurred one day when Dagwood, the popular cartoon character, decided to engage his boss in dialogue, hoping to get a raise in salary. He began like this: "Hey, boss, have you noticed how everything is going up?" "Oh, not everything," replied his boss. "Well," said Dagwood, "you just tell me one thing that is not going up." "Your salary," said the boss. Psychoanalyzing conflict as a "dialogical crisis," Howe points out that there exists within all of us a battle between the forces which seem to affirm us and the forces that seem to threaten to destroy us. "Each of us, intent on achieving what he believes to be his own fulfillment, faces the temptation of using others as a quick means of reassurance and affirmation rather than receiving our fulfillment through honest give-and-take. This exploitation of others, however, is always self-defeating and self-destroying, and in such a conflict both participants lose."[14] There are at least four elements involved in a crisis of inter-

rupted dialogue: (1) the drive on the part of each to affirm himself; (2) the threat that each feels from the other with respect to himself; (3) the need on the part of each to sacrifice the other person in order to save himself.[15]

Admittedly, it takes courage to resume dialogue once it has been interrupted, but Jesus' teaching on gain and loss states for us the underlying principle: "He who seeks to save himself will lose himself, but he who is willing to lose himself... will save himself." In other words, broadly interpreted, "He who tries to win all will lose all, but he who is willing to lose something for the sake of the other will win in the end." It means that we enter into a dialogical relationship not just for the purpose of gaining, but also for the purpose of giving, with the prayer that we may lose something— for instance, our pretensions, our defensive need to justify ourselves—and that we may gain a reassurance of life by having it affirmed in relation to another.[16] "If Christians would be like Christ," Howe

concludes, "they must expect to become dialogical persons to and through whom he may speak. The incarnation in us of the spirit of dialogue would... prepare...us for participation in God's saving work in the world."[17]

Conflict Science: A New Discipline

Unfortunately, much more energy is invested in creating new methods of waging conflict than in regulating and resolving it. It is only in the last thirty years that social scientists have turned serious attention to the problems of conflict. In fact, a new academic discipline has emerged in recent years— actually an interdisciplinary field—that goes by the name "conflict science" (also called "peace science" or "peace research"). Walter Isard of Cornell University has done the most thorough study, to date, in a recent book entitled, *Conflict Analysis and Practical Conflict Management Procedures: An Introduction to Peace Science*.[18] Graduate students should be encouraged to enter this excit-

ing new field of research.

Coping with Conflict

The central thesis of this paper is that dialogue can work miracles even in the difficult area of conflict resolution. Here, in fact, is where dialogue can come to the rescue not only as a moral principle of mutuality but also as a technique for settling disputes, effecting change, or facing our common crises. In the interdisciplinary studies in Conflict Science a considerable amount of energy has already gone into the study of conflict resolution, especially by specialists in organizational behavior and group dynamics. Emphasis has been given, for example, to the psychological factors which affect the strategies that people use when faced with conflict or crisis. Some people, as we have noted already, just avoid conflict or ignore it. Others assume that they are going to lose and consequently give up before they start to solve the problem. Some try to win at all costs, even if it means the opponent loses all. Still others, if they see

they cannot win, will try to force the other party to lose, too, so that in the end nobody wins. Recently there was a tragic event in Dumaguete City, in which a suitor killed the very girl he loved because her parents did not approve of their relationship. Nobody won! If conflict is not skillfully managed and ultimately resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned, it can break out into open warfare. We can be equally certain, however, that almost any conflict can be satisfactorily resolved if approached with the proper attitude on the part of both parties to the conflict. Robert Owens, in his book on organizational behavior, confidently states the position of most contemporary behavioral scientists as regards conflict: "...with diagnostic and management approaches now available, it is possible not only to minimize the destructiveness of conflict but also, in many cases, to deal with it productively."[19]

There are two main approaches to the resolution of conflict: the "win/lose" and the "win/win" strategy. The win/lose approach results in one side winning all and the other side losing all. It is known also as the "forced" solution because in this approach the person with the power uses it to force the other party out of the arena. It is also appropriately called "adversarial confrontation" because the opponent is regarded as an enemy to be conquered or defeated. This is a tempting strategy in view of the fact that defeating an opponent is one of the most widely recognized forms of interaction. The very language of business, politics, athletics, and even education is filled with win/lose terminology. For instance, one "wins" a promotion or a raise in salary; one "beats" the opposition; one basketball team "crushes" the other. Athletes are bent on winning, of course. Lawyers are trained in the art of winning their cases. This is natural and appropriate. The problem is that, in an environment that places such a premium on winning, competitive behavior often persists in relationships where it is not appropriate—that is, where conflict tends to divide, polar-

ize, and destroy. It is not unusual for rival groups to form power blocks in support of their position against proponents of another position. In a win/lose situation every action of other group members, or of the other group, is seen in terms of one person or group dominating the other. The contesting parties see their interests to be mutually incompatible. No compromise is even considered possible. One side must fail at the price of the other's success. Any hope of being able to appeal to each other on the basis of reason is abandoned or not even entertained. The parties to the conflict come to believe that the issues can be settled only by a power struggle. It should be evident that the win/lose approach is the least productive.

The second main approach to resolving conflict is known as the win/win strategy, also called "participatory problem-solving." It is considered to be the most productive because both parties win, though not necessarily equally. This strategy is also appropriately called "nonadversarial confronta-

tion." The two parties meet in face-to-face dialogue to find a solution that will satisfy the goals and objectives of both sides. They tend to recognize the legitimacy of one another's interests and seek to meet the needs of all concerned. They seek to influence one another, if possible, through persuasion and appeal rather than pressure or coercion. David and Frank Johnson enumerate the advantages of the win/win approach for an organized group. Among these are the following: (1) it lessens hostility while increasing amiability among group members; (2) it requires no enforcement from the outside to implement group decisions; (3) it cuts out the need for power to be exercised; (4) it extends trust and promotes full and accurate communication; and (5) it results in everyone treating everyone else with respect.[20] This is a cooperative, problem-solving orientation rather than a competitive, win/lose orientation.

As we have seen, conflicts are constructive or destructive, depending on the human response. In the destructive con-

flict, the other's self-esteem and values are threatened, and he is forced to give far more than he receives in the resolution. In constructive conflict, which the win/win strategy permits, the other is affirmed, his values acknowledged, and the benefits of the resolution do not outweigh the costs for either party.[21] Broadly stated, there are four simple steps in resolving any conflict, large or small: (1) clearly define the problem; (2) gather accurate information; (3) explore alternative solutions together; and (4) choose the alternative that is the most mutually satisfactory and best meets the demands of social justice.

The most careful thought should be given to the appropriateness of the techniques used to resolve conflict or to affect change. Rational persuasion, of which dialogue is the primary instrument, obviously should precede harsher coercive techniques, not least because coercion tends to incite negative emotions and create a climate of irrational fear. We should always be reluctant to move from persuasive force to coercive force, and should not until we are reasonably sure that persistent persuasion will not bring the desired result. Why? Simply because we are morally obligated to respect absolutely the humanity of others. There is something of God in every person, for each one is an image of God, and God is to be found between one human being and another (Buber). Even when the injustice of a situation requires us to move from persuasion to coercion, we should never close the door to possible face-to-face dialogue, nor should we ever regard the opponent as an adversary. The chief purpose of dialogue is to convince and persuade. Democracy is the political expression of "persuasion by argument." Democracy is government by consent, consent depends on consensus, and consensus arises out of dialogue in which the issues are clarified. Thus, dialogue is integral to the democratic process.

The Role of Dialogue in Conflict Resolution

We will now consider the crucial role of dialogue in resolving conflict; or how to move from monologue to dialogue, and from diatribe to dialogue. Whether dialogue is used to affect change or to resolve conflict, it is usually accompanied by other methods of persuasion, and sometimes coercion, but it is face-to-face dialogue that opens the way and makes resolution possible and, in the end, effective. It would not be difficult to establish the proposition that all other means for change or conflict resolution should be preceded by dialogue and accompanied by dialogue, to ensure their success. Looking back, Gandhi considered this to be the great strength of his movement. When asked what he thought was his greatest achievement, he said, "The fact that when the British finally left, we parted as friends." Reuel Howe points out that every person and every group is a potential adversary, even those whom we love. "Only through dialogue are we saved from this enmity toward one another. Dialogue is to love what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and instead resentment and hate are born."[22] But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. This is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship into being, and it can bring to life again a relationship that has died. There are only two conditions required to let this miracle happen: It must proceed from both sides, and the parties to the dialogue must persist relentlessly. When the dialogical word is spoken by one side but evaded or ignored by the other, the miracle may not happen. But when two persons or groups undertake it with openness and accept the risk of doing so, then the miracle-working power of dialogue may be released. Earlier we defined the dialogical principle philosophically as "the being and truth of one person or group encountering the being and truth of another." We may now define it methodologically as "a reciprocal relationship in which each party 'experiences the other side,' so that their communication becomes a true address and response in which each in-

forms and each learns."[23]

The "I-It" relation is potentially destructive as a conflict strategy in that the opponent is viewed as an object that must be manipulated and overcome. In other words, the "I-It" orientation is a monological relation with the other instead of a dialogical one. In fact, it leads to diatribe rather than to dialogue. It presses demands before making requests, and it presses its demands in a self-righteous and arrogant manner that leads to rigid opposition and polarization. What the opponent believes is regarded only as an obstacle to be overcome in order to fulfill one's own desires. The "I-It" relation ignores the other's human significance, whereas the "I-Thou" encounter recognizes and affirms the other's humanity.

In Buber's dialogical view of conflict both parties meet in a relation in which the result of the encounter does not reside in either party. The ontological reality of "that which lies between" one human being and another is the significant element, in his view. The answer to a conflict, then, is something that emerges between the parties to the conflict. In practice this means that, as a result of standing one's ground in a spirit of openness, changes in one or both of the viewpoints may occur. Many of us experience this mystery by discovering that the full truth in any issue often lies somewhere in between two extreme and rigid points of view. Unfortunately, we discover it more often through hindsight than foresight! A dialogical meeting with an opponent recognizes the importance of both parties, and this promotes the possibility of an answer emerging *between* them. It means that the final resolution will incorporate some—but not necessarily equal elements of each opposing position and yet go beyond them, since what emerges will be something different from what either party envisioned at the start. This is the miracle of dialogue: it comes from between and goes beyond. Although there are more obstacles in the way of dialogue than any of us like to admit, it is nevertheless true that words need not be spoken in vain. Barriers to communication can be broken through. Meeting of minds can occur and through such meeting relationships can be established, even raised from the dead.[24] When such barriers are broken through, it is indeed a miracle, for the results often defy a purely rational explanation. In this general sense, a "miracle" may be defined as a surprise happening—something amazingly good that happens to us, and between us, in spite of ourselves, in spite of the barriers we have erected and even though we were unwilling in the first place to let it happen.

Buber suggests that there is a dual movement in dialogue, as intimated earlier. It involves standing one's own ground, yet being open to the other's view of the situation. This is the spirit of conviction with openness. Each party is sensitive to the needs of the other, and this requires a willingness to negotiate openly rather than to force a solution by using power tactics. A nonviolent peacemaker, which a Christian is called to be, must reject the temptation to use domination of another person or group as a means of conflict resolution. As we saw earlier, resolving a conflict through dialogue requires that each party recognizes and affirms the humanity of the other.

Adversarial or Nonadversarial?

In one of his columns in *Manila Bulletin*, Senator Edgardo Angara, once president of the University of the Philippines, called for an end to "confrontational tactics" in favor of what he called "a more Asian approach." In support of this he said that "confrontation is seldom the way Asians meet interpersonal differences. The more Asian mode would stress, instead, conciliation." His observation is borne out by a U.P. study which shows a far higher incidence of success in the use of conciliatory approaches to conflict resolution in labor cases. Sometimes confrontation becomes necessary, but it should always be nonadversarial. In the popular mind, however, confrontation is asso-

ciated with an adversarial approach. The mode of adversarial confrontation suggests to Angara's mind a Marxist's theory of class conflict leading to class struggle and warfare, based on the presumed irreconcilability of the interests of labor and management. Angara advocates that we should instead explore the possibilities of the nonadversarial strategy—which he equates with conciliation—wherein both parties approach the table with a view to seeking a common way out rather than scoring a victory. This, it may be added, is both more Asian and more Christian, because reconciliation is the goal to be achieved. It is clearly the win/win strategy. Adversarial confrontation tends to produce a diatribe rather than dialogue, as happened a few years ago in one leading Philippine university. (The faculty group seeking dialogue had legitimate grievances, but their abrasive approach and combative tactics turned off the president of the institution. Being ignored by both the president and the Board of Trustees, they felt in-

sulted and thus, in order to gain power, they organized a labor union among teachers, backed of course by the Department of Labor. Here is an example of an incident in which the immediate cause of the conflict was the adversarial stance of the group seeking dialogue. Even where no harsh words are spoken, sometimes nonverbal gestures can obstruct the flow of dialogue. What is it they say? "Your actions speak so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying."

There is a desperate need for the dialogical spirit and action in the area of politics. In any country, national parties or coalitions are often pitted against each other solely in the interest of their own success and sometimes at the cost of the nation they are professing to serve. At the international level, frequently nations look toward themselves alone and not toward each other, thus threatening the welfare of the whole planet. The human race stands in danger of being destroyed because of the deliberate effort of parties and nations to advance to their own cause

by falsifying the aims and character of their opponents. This is precisely what happened for many years between the two superpowers. The abuse of dialogue has gone on so long that politicians and statesmen find it difficult to break out of their monological fantasies and move toward a real dialogical encounter. If these same persons would speak with one another in a spirit of genuine give and take, the sphere of public life and geopolitics could be transformed by the miracle of dialogue. At one point near the end of his dialogue with Mr. Gorbachev, President Reagan said, "We have raised expectations simply by meeting, and we have raised hopes. We need to stand up and say the world can go on hoping, because we will go on meeting." Just before their last appearance together, Mr. Reagan joked with Mr. Gorbachev: "I bet the hardliners in both our countries are bleeding when we shake hands." Gorbachev nodded in apparent agreement. Then they walked onstage from opposite sides and shook hands warmly in the middle of the

stage. This was the beginning of a continuing and fruitful dialogue that led to a new era of peace.

Reconciliation: The Goal of Dialogue

The religious equivalent of the win/win conflict-resolution strategy is reconciliation. This is the Christian's ultimate goal in every dialogue. To reconcile means literally to "reconciliate"—that is, to restore broken friendship, to re-unite those who are separated, to move together in a spirit of conciliation rather than adversarial confrontation. This does not imply an easy solution, an over-accommodation, or a compromise with evil, as some suppose. It is not to be identified with a desire for appeasement. As a former editor of the *Christian Century* expresses it, "Reconciliation is engagement with the world at precisely the places where the tensions are most unbearable and most dangerous."[25] This is our Christian vocation. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, St. Paul says: "God, in Christ, was

reconciling the world to himself...and he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:19). Reconciliation is both vertical and horizontal—that is, it refers to our relationship both to God and to our fellow humans. The Christians, unlike the Marxist, cannot be content to intensify and perpetuate conflict while dreaming of a utopia where there will be no more conflict. For the Christian, there is an important difference: conflict and struggle can only be stages on the way toward the ultimate goal of reconciliation. Conflict must give way to reconciliation, separation to reunion, enmity to harmony. "Christ himself has brought us peace by making us one," says the letter to the Ephesians; "he has broken down the wall that separates us and that keeps us enemies"(2:14). Jan Lochman, the Czech theologian who has engaged in dialogue with Marxists, says that the Christian ethic is clearly "an ethic of reconciliation. The readiness for reconciliation and the service of reconciliation are what determine whether a life, a movement, a programme, a party are 'Christian' or not."[26]

The letter to the Ephesians gives us a working formula for creative dialogue: "Let us speak the truth in a spirit of love, that we may grow to the full maturity of Christ..."(4:15). One might call it communication-in-love. In the first place, we should be sure that what we speak is indeed the truth and nothing but the truth, for much conflict becomes destructive because of lies and half-truth exaggerations. In the second place, let us be sure, if it is stated in the familiar Rotary Four-Way Test of the things we think, say, or do: "Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" The basic rule is: never allow yourself to become an enemy to your opponent. Most of us learn very well how to do this in the sports arena, and audiences are quick to register their disapproval at the slightest sign of ill will or uncontrolled temper on the part of players or fans. The rules of "fair play" are well understood. If someone gets hurt, we usually say, "It's all part of the game." When one player happens to hit another with the ball in tennis, for example, Cebuano-Visayans raise an open hand toward the opponent in a gesture of apology. They say that it means "no malice." The question is, why can we not learn as readily to do this in facing our differences in group meetings and inter-group encounters? Why is it that we allow ourselves to build up such resentment and animosity toward those who differ from us that we sometimes even refuse to meet them face to face? When we are offended, why does our desire for revenge lead us into irrational behavior, including violent reaction—if not lethal violence, then character assassination? One psychologist says that "vengeful people are actually afraid they will lose in a face-to-face encounter. They are fearful that if they abandon overkill and adjust their anger to a proportionate level, the other side will win the fight, and so they accelerate their vengefulness in order to drive the other party out of the arena."[27] Our problem, then, if we are this kind of person or belong to this kind of a group, is to determine what makes us so sure we would lose in a face-to-face encounter. As long as we have won something, we have not lost all; and in the process we will have regained our capacity to respect the humanity of others, and this may be the greatest gain of all.

We also have the clear mandate of Jesus: "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you....Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you" (Mtt. 5). Anything less, by intention, is not the Christian way of coping with conflict. It is the expression of goodwill and concern for the well-being of the opponent—be he enemy or not—that keeps the door open to fruitful dialogue. As we have seen, this approach is not an idealistic or impractical solution to the alienations which continue to embitter human life. Even the specialists in group dynamics and organizational behavior say that it works, and they say this not

from religious conviction but on the basis of hard data. As Martin Luther King said so well: "Far from being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy...is the key to the solution of the problems of our world. Jesus is not an impractical idealist; he is the practical realist."[28] This is the true spirit of dialogue, and it can work miracles even in the difficult area of human conflict resolution.

Notes

1. Reuel Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (N.Y.: Seabury, 1963), p. 4.

2. Martin Buber, *I and Though*, (trans. by Walter Kaufmann; N.Y.: Scribners, 1970); *Between Man and Man*, with an Afterword by the author on "The History of the Dialogical Principle," (trans. by Ronald G. Smith (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1965).

3. Howe, p. 4.

4. Howe, p. 83.

5. Howe, p. 152.

6. Buber, *I and Thou*.

7. Speed B. Leas, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict* (N.Y.: Alban Institute, 1985), p. 5.

8. Ronald C. Arnett, *Dwell in Peace: Applying Nonviolence to Everyday Relationships* (Elgin, Illinois: Brethren Press, 1980), p. 139f.

9. David W. & Frank P. Johnson, *Joining Together: Group Therapy and Group Skills* (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 139.

10. Johnson and Johnson, p. 140.

11. Presbyterian Peace Program, *Suggestions for Implementing the "Commitment to Peacemaking"* (N.Y.: Presbyterian Church, USA, n.d.), p. 36.

12. Jaime Bulatao, *The Technique of Group Discussion* (Manila: Ateneo University, 1965), p. 36.

13. Howe, p. 84

14. Howe, p. 84f.

15. Howe, p. 95.

16. Howe, p. 97.

17. Howe, p. 102.

18. Walter Isard & Christine Smith, *Conflict Analysis and Practical Conflict Management Procedures: An Introduction to Peace Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger or N.Y.. Harper & Row, 1982).

19. Robert G. Owens, *Organizational Behavior in Education* (2nd edition; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981); p. 277.

20. Johnson & Johnson, p. 151f.

21. Charles T. Brown and Paul W. Keller, "Strategies of Constructive and Destructive Conflict," (unpublished MS., 1977; quoted in Arnett, p. 126f.

22. Howe, p. 3.

23. Howe, p. 50.

24. Howe, p. 24.

25. Alan Geyer (ed.) *The Maze of Peace: Conflict and Reconciliation Among Nations* (N.Y.: Friendship Press, 1969), p. 6.

26. Jan Lochman, *Reconciliation and Liberation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 61.

27. Brian W. Grant, *From Sin to Wholeness* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), p. 61.

28. Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (N.Y.: Pocket Books, 1964), p. 41.