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RELIGION AND ETHICS IN THE THOUGHT OF RICHARD ULLMANN

T. VAIL PALMER, JR.

RICHARD K. ULLMANN (1904-1963) was born in Germany and received his Ph.D. from Frankfurt University. After a period in Buchenwald concentration camp, he left Germany in 1939 and eventually settled in Birmingham, England. In 1946 he became a member of the Society of Friends. He wrote many articles which were published in *The Friend* (London) and a number of articles in other Quaker publications, particularly *The Friends' Quarterly* and *Der Quäker*. Several poems, in German, also appeared in *Der Quäker*. His more substantial publications include the 1961 Swarthmore Lecture, *Tolerance and the Intolerable*, and a posthumous Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *The Dilemmas of a Reconciler*. His thought is expressed most completely in a 1955 essay, *Friends and Truth*, and in a book, *Between God and History*, published in 1959.

QUAKERISM AND EXISTENTIALISM: A DIALECTIC

To understand the relationships between Richard Ullmann's religious thought and his ideas and actions in social ethics, we must begin with his strong affirmation of "the dialectical nature of truth."¹ The term "dialectical" has a variety of meanings in the history of philosophy and of theology; but most of those who call themselves "dialectical" thinkers mean, at least, either that fuller truth is best approached through dialogue between persons who hold contrasting views or that progress in truth comes through the paradoxical affirmation of truths that appear to contradict each other and the attempt to resolve that tension through the development of a synthesis involving insights from both sides of the paradox. Richard Ullmann clearly means that truth is dialectical in both senses of the term.

Thus, he insists, beginning with whatever truth I now possess, "more truth can be found only in boundless communication."² Furthermore, no statement of belief, however evidently false, can be simply discarded or ignored; at the very least there is "the truth which is hidden even in the most fallacious beliefs of our fellowman, namely, that his

greatest error is still true in so far as it is a valid test of our own truth.”³ If this be the nature of truth, then even though there is such a thing as “the deceiver” or “the false or the mistaken prophet,” nevertheless “the publishing of truth is in itself full of ambiguities.”⁴

A consequence of the dialectical nature of truth, in both senses of the term “dialectical,” is that the discovery of truth is a never-ending process: “Search is an essential aspect of truth.”⁵ All presently affirmed truth is of necessity incomplete; the very fact that the discovery of truth proceeds endlessly is an assurance of yet more truth to be found: “Dissatisfaction with my present knowledge of truth is...profound certainty about that greater truth which I do not know.”⁶

In the nature of the case, all dialectical systems of philosophy and theology must be quite complex. This is certainly true of Ullmann’s thought. It will be possible here only to examine those portions of his system that most clearly point up the relationship between theology and social ethics.

Richard Ullmann draws heavily on two sources for the basis of his own theology: the seventeenth-century Quakers and twentieth-century existentialists—particularly Karl Jaspers, but to some extent such thinkers as Gabriel Marcel, Paul Tillich, and Martin Buber. He describes his method as “that of mirroring Quakerism in existentialist philosophy,”⁷ but it might be more appropriate to describe his approach as a dialogue between early Friends and existentialists. Dialogue it must be, for no individual or group can possess the whole truth. The failure to recognize this point is, for Richard Ullmann, one of the primary shortcomings of George Fox and the first Friends: “Fox’s unwarranted claim of infallibility...is a central part of his doctrines, and only if we grasp it as such, need we not feel altogether discouraged by the fact that his certainty has been lost for our generation.”⁸ A corollary of this weakness is an equally unwarranted intolerance of the views of non-Friends: “Do not Fox’s words...create the feeling that he and his Friends alone know the truth or at least the only true way to truth?...This is, I am afraid, just another kind of intolerance.”⁹

Parallel to their understanding of truth was the way in which early Friends dealt with the paradox of the second coming of Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God—the truths that Christ and the kingdom have already come and that their full coming lies still in the future: “Early Friends, however, do not conceive this paradox as a tension within individual human experience, they try to solve the tension in a simple and direct way. The Kingdom, they hold, is altogether

present and fulfilled for those who know that Christ is come into their hearts as their immediate teacher; whereas it is still in the future for those who have not yet been convinced.”¹⁰ Clearly, Ullmann finds this solution altogether too “simple and direct.” Related to the early Quaker conviction that, for them, the kingdom of God has already arrived is what Ullmann calls Fox’s “historical ingratitude”:

The sweeping gesture with which he removed all history between “the Apostles’ days” and the Second Coming of Christ as a “long night of apostasy”...is symptomatic of the exaggerated view which he has about inner guidance, as entirely divorced from all temporal continuity... Fox did not recognize any of the influences which had worked upon him, neither those of the spiritual reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries nor those of such contemporaries as created for him, and together with him, the historical climate for his ministry.¹¹

But the method cannot be simply one of using existentialist insights to correct the weaknesses of early Quaker thought, for there are also weaknesses in the thought of the existentialists, even of Karl Jaspers, on whom Richard Ullmann depends most heavily. For example, among the existentialists, including Jaspers, “little positive thought is given to the experience of the ‘we,’ not as depersonalized collective, but as true community.”¹² In particular, Jaspers omits an aspect of the “we” that Friends have often emphasized: “Though Jaspers emphasizes repeatedly that truth exists only in communication, I am not sure that corporate guidance would have a place in his thinking.”¹³ Ullmann also accuses Jaspers of an inadequate understanding of mysticism:

Jaspers...is certainly wrong when he asserts...that after what he calls the “trance,” the mystic does “basically no longer understand” his experience even though he may “remember” it and have his life changed by it. It is illogical to equate the inability of communicating in words what is the most essential in mystical experience, with a fading understanding of it. Jaspers speaks several times of self-communication and communication in silence, but strangely enough our Quaker silence is for him no silence of communication.... The mystics know what Jaspers is very reluctant to think, and what apparently has not become lucid to him at the boundaries of thought: that though he cannot master Truth, he is still mastered by it; that though he cannot possess Truth, he is still possessed by it.¹⁴

In describing the early Friends here as mystics, Ullmann is apparently using “mysticism” in its broadest sense to denote religious experience in general; he is at pains elsewhere to deny that Quaker mysticism has much to do with Hindu or Buddhist or even medieval Christian mysticism.

Thus when Richard Ullmann turns to the positive contributions early Friends make to the dialogue, he is careful to correct some of the popular contemporary misunderstandings of early Quaker thought. He takes George Fox’s phrase, “that of God in every one,” which has become a popular Quaker catchword today, and points out: “As a matter of historical accuracy, the Quaker phrase of ‘that of God’ was neither meant, nor often asserted to denote, a pantheistic Creative Power or Life Force.” Instead, it simply points to “a God-given capacity” that “enables man, and man alone in the known creation, to experience God Transcendent intimately and immediately, and thus to encounter Truth so that he is seized by it and knows it to be true and tries to know it as, and express it in, his own truths. That capacity, however, must not be identified with God himself, it is that from God rather than that part of God.”¹⁵

One of the chief contributions of Quakerism, according to Ullmann, is the understanding that truth is always subject to growth and change: “The dynamic concept of truth has been one of the most characteristic Quaker dogmas throughout our history.”¹⁶ More concretely, Quakers have discovered that shared dialogue and communication can and do lead to a shared experience of the presence of the transcendent God and thus open the way for the development of full community, not only among a few close-knit individuals but also among ever widening circles of humankind:

Just as a self finds himself and his truth in the face of Transcendence, intercommunication may bring a group of selves into a common experience of Transcendence in Presence.... Intersubjectivity may, in intercommunication, work its way up to an inclusive community or oneness in Truth, and this, as the experience of Friends shows, not only in quite small circles. Authentic communication achieved in this way...is full togetherness in which the members are concerned not so much with seeking out one another in the search for truth than with receiving truth in the common openness to Transcendence.¹⁷

Another important contribution of the early Quakers is the idea and experience that the kingdom of God is already present in the midst of his people: “It is the experience of the presence of the Kingdom and

not the utopian hope for a territorial Kingdom on earth which prompts Quaker action.”¹⁸

The contributions of existentialists to the dialogue begun with their emphasis on the individual: “The relevance of existentialist philosophy” is that “in an age where collectivism and depersonalization threaten to deprive man of his individuality, ...it has turned our eyes back to the unconditional self, my self, my responsibility for myself, and the freedom of my isolated ‘existence.’” This is even the case for existentialists such as Buber and Jaspers who have also emphasized “that my self stands individually and responsibly in relation not only to myself, but to other selves and to the world and to what transcends the world. I have to decide for myself what that relation is to be; and this can be done only by me alone where I am most true to my self.”¹⁹

In terms of the discovery of truth, this means that “I cannot have truth unless I find it in and for myself.”²⁰ In this sense, the existentialists emphasize “the subjectivity of truth.”²¹ Ullmann also draws on the existentialists for his insight that it is ultimate truth toward which we move even though our search for it is always incomplete; he can affirm “that inner certainty of truth eternal which upholds us though we can never know it.”²² From the existentialists also comes the insight that “truth is, and can be, mediated only in symbols and parables.”²³ This is particularly the case with religious truth: “All utterances about God, from the mere fact that he transcends human thought, are of necessity only parabolical.”²⁴ Ullmann takes this point specifically from Paul Tillich’s *Love, Power, and Justice*; he fails to note that Tillich later insisted on one major exception to this generalization: “The statement that God is being-itself is a nonsymbolic statement....It means what it says directly and properly....Nothing else can be said about God as God which is not symbolic.”²⁵

In his understanding of history, Richard Ullmann is also very much in line with existentialist thought: “The unique remains the most important factor in history.”²⁶ But as he moves further with this line of thought, we may suspect a weakness or incompleteness in his dialectic: “I do not believe that God, having created man with the capacity of having history, intervenes in history directly in the way proclaimed by the prophets of old.”²⁷ The problem is that neither early Friends, with their “historical ingratitude” and their premature resolution of the tension between history and the kingdom of God, nor existentialists, with their essentially non-historical emphasis on the centrality of the isolated individual, provide Ullmann with much of a handle to get hold

of the ideas of God's revelation and action in history. In order to do justice to these ideas, which are quite basic to Christian faith, he would have to bring some group such as the Hebrew prophets or the modern "salvation-history" theologians more fully into the dialogue with the existentialists and the early Friends. But this he hesitated to do. Perhaps the dialogue with Marxist thought, which he was beginning to approach at the end of his life, would eventually have provided him with a way of dealing more concretely with the importance and reality of history as a medium through which Transcendence could be expressed?

The heart of Ullmann's dialogue between Friends and existentialist thinkers emerges in his existentialist interpretation of some key themes in early Quaker thought and experience. He can, for instance, reinterpret some typical early Quaker religious language:

It is at least inaccurate to assert that the experience of Christ Within meant for early Friends the same thing as divine immanence.... Religious experience was for them an I-thou experience.... It seems quite possible for an on-looking witness to say of a fellow-man that he is filled with God and his Spirit. For the inspired person himself, however, it seems more fitting,...as a more accurate description of his actual experience, to declare that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and that God speaks, not in him and from him, but to him and through him. Such shades of language are not without significance for the underlying truth.²⁸

Ullmann says of the early Friends: "The truth they published was that you cannot have truth unless you find it for yourself: truth is existential."²⁹ Even the Quaker abstention from creeds can be seen as a consequence of the symbolic, non-literal nature of religious truth: "The miracle of conversion...consists in the possibility of communication...beyond the conveyance of contents....The small group is released from its separateness, the lonely soul from its bewilderment, because they have suddenly been given a language to intercommunicate on something that cannot be really communicated except to those who already know."³⁰

The thought of Karl Jaspers can provide a fuller understanding of the early Quaker practice of publishing truth: "For Quakerism, however, Jaspers' analysis of communication yields an important insight, namely that publishing truth is not only a declaration of truths already found: it is an essential tool in our search for truths still to be found, as truth is accomplished only in and through communication."³¹ The existentialist analysis of I-thou communication also helps to explain the

method of the Quaker meeting for business: “If we check individual guidance by corporate judgments, these are reached...by a corporate, but corporately subjective, discernment of the spirit, achieved in inter-subjective communication.”³²

THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Ullmann draws on existentialism for his central principle of Christian ethics—the command to become our true, authentic selves: “Directives of attitudes are commandments to be what we are, to attain our authentic self. The true self is the will of God for us.”³³ This basic principle drives behind the usual distinction in ethical thought between teleological ethics (emphasizing goals or results of action, such as the “utilitarian” emphasis on maximizing pleasure for the greatest number of people) and deontological ethics (emphasizing moral rules or principles, the form of action, or the motive behind the action). “The traditional distinction between utilitarian ethics and ethics of principle falls to the ground....Not what I hold on principle nor what I want to achieve, but what I truly am, the will of God for me, makes me act rightly. My whole self is involved.”³⁴ In particular, we can never say that any particular type or form of action is always automatically right: “It is never a category of action as such which can rightly be called Christian, but only an action in a situation undertaken by a fully authentic self.”³⁵

The attainment of our true self comes most deeply in religious experience, the I-thou encounter with God: “This, what we really are, our authentic self, happens to us in the spiritual experience of encountering God. The revelation of God’s will is not like a moral law to be executed, it is like a structure of being which is real, and which is real not only as God’s will for you and me but also, as far as we can discern, as God’s own Nature or Being.”³⁶

Ullmann often uses the phrase, “structure of being,” to characterize the true selfhood which lies at the heart of authentic morality. It is difficult to dig out precisely what he means by the term, “structure of being.” One implication of the term, clearly, is the importance of self-awareness: “The deeper a man’s awareness of the structure of being, the more consistently will he fuse principle and expediency in the concrete situation,...by his whole being expressing God’s will for him.”³⁷ Further, Ullmann makes a clear distinction between the true self, the structure of being, and the historical conditions or situation within which the self acts; a person “does not escape the tension between

his true self and the conditions of action in which he is involved.”³⁸ Although these two poles—structure of being and the conditions of history—cannot be severed in practice, they can be distinguished in basic theory: “The structure of being, the ground of our true self, is therefore always intermingled with the stuff of history and incarnate in our own historicity, and unfortunately never appears as unadulterated as in our abstract thinking about it.”³⁹

He does not go far beyond this in explaining the meaning of the “structure of being.” But this reticence about his basic ethical principle is characteristic of existentialist thought; to describe too concretely what another person must be, let alone do, is to run the risk of depriving that person of his ultimate radical responsibility to choose freely what he or she is to be and to do. One consequence is that existentialist thought often moves toward a “situational” or “contextual” ethics, in which only a full knowledge of a given situation (including the nature of the self which is to act in that situation) can tell us what is right or wrong in that situation. Richard Ullmann does avoid a complete contextualism in his ethics, but that is because of further principles he develops, to supplement his basic principle of authentic selfhood.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Ullmann affirms the dictum that goes back to Socrates, that it is worse to do wrong than to suffer from the wrongdoing of others; the Christian, he insists, “should consider his own peril the lesser of two evils.”⁴⁰ This principle is also extended to actions that the Christian takes in responsibility for the groups to which he or she belongs: “What the Christian can and ought to do...is to recognize that he ought to ignore unpleasant consequences for himself and, at least to a certain extent, for his community, if the rightness of action in a concrete situation depends on this.”⁴¹ Richard Ullmann carries this doctrine concerning “unpleasant consequences” through to its logical conclusion, to cases where death itself may be the consequence of an action: “We should act as though death was the ultimate evil and the end of everything for others, but not for ourselves.”⁴²

Combining this emphasis on suffering rather than doing evil with the existentialist insistence on absolute individual freedom and responsibility, Ullmann suggests that the highest form of moral action may take the form of a creative risk: “The creative risk, taken with responsibility and goodwill, is not sinful, however deep the sense of guilt, if a creative

risk has led to destruction. On the contrary, if there were no risk, our action would not be free and responsible.”⁴³

He deepens the concepts of creative risk and of suffering rather than doing wrong by seeing them in the light of the cross of Jesus Christ. He discusses the decision of George Fox and the early Friends, during the crisis of 1659, not to accept the invitation from Sir Henry Vane to help forestall the restoration of the monarchy by becoming magistrates and commissioners of the militia. An apparent “domestication” of the earlier radical social protest of the Friends was implicit in this decision. Richard Ullmann argues regarding Fox’s action: “Do we not see that his ‘domestication’ was a Christian choice under divine guidance, namely the portentous final decision for suffering evil rather than inflicting it? That he chose the cross of persecution rather than the bloody rule of the saints?”⁴⁴

Ullmann applies the example of the cross to such problems as the conflict between truth and love which the reconciler often faces. “All work and reconciliation depends on the reconciler’s own ability to reconcile truth and love within himself,”⁴⁵ and the supreme example of such an inward reconciliation is “symbolized in the person of Jesus, the reconciler between God and man, and man and fellow-man. The means by which Jesus reconciled truth and love in and through himself was the cross.”⁴⁶

With his emphases on reconciliation, on creative risk, on treating the death of others as the greatest evil, on the corporate dimension of suffering rather than inflicting evil, it is no surprise that Richard Ullmann strongly supports the traditional Quaker peace testimony. “Our testimony is no testimony of prevention, reduction, resistance, opposition and protest: it is a tremendously positive response to the promptings of love, goodness, purity and truth,” he writes; “Our actions will not be merely re-active to militarism and the threat of destruction, but will respond actively, creatively and positively to the promptings of the Spirit of Love, Truth and Peace.”⁴⁷ This rejection of war under any circumstances is perhaps his clearest departure from the “situational ethics” of most existentialists.

What may be surprising is that he appeals to his basic ethical principle of authentic selfhood or the structure of being, as a foundation for the rejection of all participation in war:

Action undertaken in the responsibility of the authentic self depends on the full inner awareness (though not necessarily

fully grasped intellectually) of the structure of being. It is for this reason that while some actions may sometimes be right and at other times wrong (for instance, the offer or acceptance of an alcoholic drink...), other actions like warfare or cannibalism can never be right in any conceivable situation because they destroy in themselves the structure of being which is the ground of true selfhood, and are therefore self-destructive. So there are no actions which are as such Christian, but there are actions which are never Christian.⁴⁸

It is apparent that Ullmann intends to base the peace testimony in the dialogue between existentialists and early Friends. What is not quite clear is whether war destroys the structure of being in the person doing the killing, in the person killed, or in the relationships between the two.

When it comes to the question of applying the Friends' peace testimony to practical affairs, to social and political issues of the day, Richard Ullmann refers to W. Grigor McClelland's typology of the "prophet" and the "reconciler" and puts himself squarely in the camp of the reconcilers. He thus opposes one of the programs favored by many radical pacifists or "prophets," Stephen King-Hall's proposal for organized training for non-violent national defense: "Our answer to Sir Stephen should be: no training for non-violent resistance against the Russians, but a deeper understanding of Christ's way, and an unending search for the heart of enemy and friend alike, in order to reconcile them."⁴⁹

In one respect, Ullmann is a rather unusual Quaker "reconciler." The typical reconciler tends to emphasize contacts with national and United Nations officials and governmental bodies, urging the increased use of negotiation, conciliation, and persuasion in international affairs. Richard Ullmann, however, concentrated his efforts on work at the "middle" level of influence- and opinion-leadership in society. In particular, he participated intensively in dialogues between American and western European Christians and church leaders from eastern Europe, held under the auspices of the Christian Peace Conference. In the last two sections of this essay, I will discuss how these dialogues impacted the development of his own thought.

I have suggested elsewhere that the prophet and the reconciler tend to differ sharply in their fundamental social analysis. The reconciler, for one, "sees society, at every level, as a texture of relationships between individuals." For him "the essential ingredient for improving international relations...is dialogue, conversation; and conversation is

a relationship between individual persons.”⁵⁰ Ullmann’s existentialist emphasis on the individual and on dialogue certainly aligns him with this type of social analysis. I have also suggested that the weaknesses of this type of social theory include “its failure to take into account the corporate dimension of human society, the interdependent reality of social groups and of individuals in their acts and behavior, and its consequent lack of any serious grappling with the problem of power as a primary factor in the interaction, at various levels, of social groups.”⁵¹ This criticism appears to be borne out in relation to Ullmann’s discussion of justice and love. He writes:

Justice consists of weighing right and wrong, but love carries neither scales nor a sword....

Justice, it appears, is not the road to love; it is rather a stumbling block on it....

Only the yielding of one’s rights, the willingness of taking risks instead of imposing them on others;...only the policy of self-effacing love can bring us nearer to human brotherhood.⁵²

This rejection of justice as a social ideal does not imply any unconcern for the plight of the poor and the oppressed: “Happiness, brotherhood and wholeness are a matter of being, namely of men and women being more closely the selves they are meant to be. The condition of being, however, is having, namely having the minimum livelihood in order to be healthy and happy for oneself and one’s nearest and dearest, and indeed having in order to be able to share both by giving and receiving.”⁵³ To be able to make such an affirmation without insisting on justice as a first step toward love and brotherhood would seem to be possible only if one overlooks the power of entrenched social structures in perpetuating wide divergences in personal wealth, the dimension of social power that is often referred to as institutionalized injustice.

Richard Ullmann’s emphasis on dialogue as central to interpersonal relations and to society as a whole leads him to emphasize speech and conversation as a form of religious and social action. He refers to “speech, that most directly ‘telling’ of all human actions.”⁵⁴ One consequence is that “the sharp separation of freedom of opinion and speech from freedom of action is quite unrealistic. Human speech is one of the most effective forms of human action, for good and ill.”⁵⁵

His emphasis on speech, on dialogue, on communication leads him to emphasize tolerance as a fundamental social value. He bases the call to tolerance on fundamental premises of Quaker theology: “The

Universal Inner Light, the Light of Christ shining in every man, the realization of God's inward immediacy to each soul through whatever outward mediation, makes tolerance a necessity of thought."⁵⁶ In particular, tolerance is a necessity in the continuing quest for truth: "Tolerance is the very battleground on which the war for truth must be waged."⁵⁷ This is because the very dialogue that is essential to the discovery of further truth is possible only if there is mutual tolerance among the parties to the dialogue: "Just because more truth can be found only in boundless communication, it is through tolerance, which alone makes such communication possible, that truth is stood for and falsehood denied."⁵⁸

Ullmann insists that tolerance is not to be confused with mere indifference about the beliefs of others which we tolerate:

Tolerance, far from being indifferent, depends on the fact of difference: it is a way of meeting difference which has been clearly recognized as such; and we cannot meet difference unless we are sufficiently interested in it to feel its challenge and to wrestle with it....

Before we ever become capable of tolerance, and before it can ever exist in any true sense, we must be shaken by the recognition that there are profound differences between ourselves and others, and that nobody can be really indifferent to the truths which imbue his whole existence.⁵⁹

The ultimate test of tolerance comes when we come face to face with that which is intolerable, and "injury of the humanity of man by man is the intolerable, as far as we humans can conceive it."⁶⁰ Examples of the intolerable would be National Socialism in Germany during the 1930s and apartheid as practiced until very recently in South Africa.

The Christian must not oppose the intolerable by forms of attack or resistance—violent or non-violent—which seek to destroy the perpetrator of that evil. The final answer to the intolerable, the ultimate expression of tolerance, is the way of Jesus Christ, symbolized and exemplified by the cross:

It is, then, the message conveyed by the life and death of Jesus Christ, not as preached in sermons and observed in churches and meeting houses—it is Jesus' own witness to his cross which contains the exemplary answer to our problem. Standing for truth, resisting in love, enduring to the last, this was his threefold way when he confronted man's inhumanity with his divinely human

dignity.... Through the manner of his living and dying, the cross of Christ has emerged as the supreme symbol and pattern of meeting the intolerable by something far greater than tolerance. Wherever the cross has been seen, understood and experienced in this way, it has redeemed and fitted human beings to take upon themselves the loving struggle for truth, at whatever cost.⁶¹

DIALOGUE WITH EAST-EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS

Richard Ullmann's entry into dialogue with east-European Christians has been dramatically depicted by his widow:

Like all western Christians, Richard met Christians in the East very critically. A decisive breakthrough came for him in Frankfurt in 1959, when for the first time he met church leaders from the East. He expressed himself so freely and openly that he was greatly astonished when he was then and there invited to Prague. In Frankfurt he did not foresee how strongly this movement would capture his heart. Now in Prague he saw that there were real Christians in the East, who answered for their faith amidst great outward and inward struggles, and that their work for world peace was just as genuine as that of the contenders for peace in the West. Only the vocabulary was different.⁶²

The Frankfurt meeting was a theological conference for East-West understanding, held January 10-13, 1959. The Prague meeting, to which Lene Ullmann referred, was the second Christian Peace Conference, April 16-19, 1959. Richard Ullmann also attended the third Christian Peace Conference, in Prague, September 6-9, 1960. Meanwhile he had been appointed to a small working commission of the C.P.C., which planned and organized the first All-Christian Peace Assembly. He met with this commission April 20-22, 1960, in Debrecen, Hungary.

At the All-Christian Peace Assembly, held June 13-18, 1961, in Prague, Richard Ullmann gave one of the major addresses, on the topic, "From the Cold War towards Real Peace." Immediately after that assembly, in response to a last-minute invitation, he and his wife flew to Moscow for a one-week visit.

In December 1962, he addressed a regional conference of the Christian Peace Conference, in Driebergen, Netherlands, on the topic, "Peace and Freedom." Immediately before that meeting, he had been named a Vice-President of the Christian Peace Conference. Shortly afterwards,

on December 11, 1962, a regional committee of the Christian Peace Conference was formed in Great Britain, with Richard K. Ullmann as its chairman. His work for the C.P.C. was brought to an end by his death in August 1963.

DIALOGUE WITH MARXISM

Although Ullmann did not himself have many direct contacts with Marxists or with persons from eastern Europe other than church leaders, he did give close attention, in his posthumous *Dilemmas of a Reconciler*, to the report by a group of five American young Friends, of their summer tour with three young Russians (Paul Lacey, ed., *Experiment in Understanding*, Washington, D.C.: Young Friends Committee of North America, 1959). He noted particularly the problems and potentialities of the discussions and dialogues among these Quaker and Marxist young people.

It is not surprising that Richard Ullmann has more to say about Marxist thought and practice in his writings from 1959 on, than in what he had written earlier. His earlier comments had mainly been negatively critical of Marxism. In his references to Marxism and to the Soviet Union after 1958, his approach becomes more one of critical appreciation. He strikes the keynote for this approach in his address to the 1961 All-Christian Peace Assembly:

As long as we look at things from an ideological viewpoint, we cannot see people as Christian....

Our thoughts fail to meet one another as long as we think statically and ideologically.... Instead we must discover on all sides the buds of dynamical developments.⁶³

In the context of this address to Christians from both sides of the Iron Curtain, he makes it clear that the “ideological viewpoints” to which he refers include both the rigid anti-Communism of many western Christians and the uncritical support given by many eastern Christians to Communist interpretations of international issues.

He also makes it clear that Marxism itself is not always rigidly bound to a static ideology, and he criticizes those who persist in viewing Communism as monolithic:

We are so sure of the monolithic character of communist societies that we bother very little with the signs of life even within the

framework of Marxist-Leninist ideology (“they are all alike”).⁶⁴ Historically...Soviet Communism has already been through very different stages and has very different aspects, some of which were due to its reactions to Western aggression.⁶⁵

One question in which Ullman is interested is that of the relationships between Communism and Christianity. In particular, he insists that the sharp anti-communism of many Christian spokesmen “is most welcome to the Communist leaders, because it confirms so clearly their doctrine of the inherent and ‘corrosive’ evil of Christianity and all religion. These leaders are far more bewildered by Christians who cooperate with them both with appreciation of their constructive efforts, and with Christian, critical detachment regarding obvious wrongs. This attitude does not fit their books.”⁶⁶ The major developments during the 1960s, in the way of Christian-Marxists dialogues in Europe, had not taken place when Ullmann wrote this. By 1965 or 1968, had he lived, he could have noted that a number of Marxist thinkers were finding ways of fitting these newer Christian attitudes into their understanding of religion. But even in his visits to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary in 1959 and 1960, Richard Ullmann is able to note the mutual perplexities of Christians and Communists, the type of ferment which is about to break open into full dialogue: “I am deeply moved by the perplexities under which people over there live and work: not only the Christians but, through their Christian witness, the Communists.”⁶⁷

One aspect of the relationship between Communism and religion is the question of religious toleration in socialist countries. Ullmann points out that official Marxist atheism does not result, as many in the West believe, in a policy that aims at the ruthless extermination of all religion:

Let us...look at the major criticism made by Christians against Communism, namely, its atheism. Most Communists would deny with sincere passion that they infringe religious toleration. All they demand is that Christians, Jews, Mohammedans or Buddhists living in their realms should have a positive attitude to the socialist structure of their society...

The demand for conformity to the laws of the land and the structure of socialist society is not fundamentally different from what many Western societies expect from their own Christian citizens....

It is no longer possible to think of the atheistic propaganda in Communist countries as a form of religious persecution, except perhaps in the German Democratic Republic where the more active interference with religious liberty is probably due to the fact that its churches are organizationally affiliated with the West German churches.... People are free to retain their faith if they accept certain civic disabilities, of a kind similar to those suffered by non-conformists and Roman Catholics in this country before emancipation and enfranchisement, a hundred and thirty years ago.⁶⁸

All in all, Richard Ullmann neither accepts Communist atheism nor attacks it as an intolerable evil:

If we reject Communist atheism, as we must, because it deprives man, as the image of God, of his security in God, we still cannot reject it as the intolerable, but only as a different faith which must be opposed on the battleground of tolerance, precisely in the way in which we would have to oppose the atheism or, better, non-theism of Buddhism. On the battleground of tolerance we must struggle for deeper insight and greater truth.⁶⁹

He goes an important step further, as do such theologians as Paul Tillich, and insists that Marxist theory is not as starkly atheistic and materialistic as it may appear or claim to be, on the surface. There is, at the very least, a genuine dimension of transcendence in Marxist thought:

Without faith in the experience of, and the encounter with, the Transcendent, in the reality of what really transcends world and time, we have no possibility of discovering meaning in history. This assertion will be strongly denied by non-religious thinkers whose philosophy of history seems capable of dispensing with concepts such as faith and revelation, and even with all metaphysics. Whether they know it or not,...whosoever finds meaning in life or history cannot but base it on certain "assumptions".... They result from a man's confrontation with the Transcendent which he may wish to deny because he cannot grasp it.... In this way, "atheistic," "scientific" Marxism lives by the faith in an inexorable goddess: History, who reveals herself in dialectics analysed by the priests and theologians of the Communist Party.⁷⁰

Ullmann similarly avoids a simplistic repudiation of Marxist "materialism." He insists that for Marxists material goods are not themselves the ultimate goal of human activity but are rather themselves means

to the attainment of more inclusive forms of human happiness: "We must not think...that the ameliorating social activities of other agencies are normally aimed at nothing more than the material advancement of people. This is not true even for Marxism, whose declared aim is furtherance, through material advancement, of 'the true happiness of the people' while at the same time decrying religion as an other-worldly, hence 'illusory happiness.'"⁷¹

He believes that we can learn from Marxist analysis of western concepts of freedom as ideological concepts justifying bourgeois society: "The marxist critique of the bourgeois-individualistic notion of freedom was quite as necessary as was the critique of existentialism of the marxist concept of science by which the ultimate inner freedom of the Self, intangible for society, is denied. We have learned one thing from marxist criticism, that the notion of freedom which may satisfy the sense of freedom, is largely influenced by the ideas of freedom prevailing in a society."⁷²

Another aspect of Marxist thought, which he subjects to criticism, is Karl Marx's notion that all of history, up to the time of the proletarian revolution, is simply "pre-history." Richard Ullmann finds more adequate Berdyaev's characterization of the present and of the coming ages, respectively, as "history" and "meta-history": "The use of 'meta-history' for the time of utopia is more adequate than Marx's attempt at calling the time of his utopian classless society 'the true history of mankind,' while dubbing 'pre-history' all ages before it. Is it for this reason that Marxists cherish so many 'pre-historic' methods of thought and action?"⁷³

Ullmann reserves even sharper criticism for two basic themes of Marxist thought: the notion of class war and the idea that the individual is the product of society:

As far as it is built on the idea of class war and hence on the ruthless elimination of the class enemy by whatever means, it is intolerable....The real difficulty is not Communism as a system, but its many intolerable practices which are rooted in the fallacious assumption that man is the product of society. Society is not the product of man either, as Western individualism has taught. It is the nature of man that he exists only in society, and that all human morality derives from this mutual relationship. Communism, with its one-sided doctrine, presumes (unsuccessfully, of course) to treat man as a mere object of society, that is, in practice as an

object of the people in power. To this extent, Communist doctrine is obnoxious and intolerable.⁷⁴

He insists, however, that these intolerable aspects of Marxist theory are not all-pervasive but are strictly limited in scope. Much more fundamental is his appreciation of Marxism's redemptive concern for man's essential humanity: "Communism, as an ideological system, far from denying the humanity of man, tries to redeem it even in the class enemy wherever this is thought possible; that is, it tries to save man from ...his self-estrangement."⁷⁵

In particular, Ullmann expresses a critical appreciation of Marxism's devotion to equality and human welfare. In particular, these aspects of Marxist thought serve to differentiate Communism sharply from such social systems as Nazism and Apartheid:

Ideologically: Apartheid works for the inequality of man, Soviet Communism for greater equality. For this reason, I hold firmly, Soviet Communism is capable of redemption, Apartheid not.

Historically: the class society in Eastern countries which was broken by Communism was horribly unjust and, in this injustice, claimed to be Christian, just like Apartheid. Admitted that Communism itself is socially more stratified than it supposes, and that it, too, has often used horrible violence, it does care fundamentally for the welfare of its people, as any welfare State does.⁷⁶

He has a similar attitude toward Soviet policies aimed at world peace: "We...should look twice before identifying the Christian Peace Conference of Prague with communist mass demonstrations which are concerned for 'peace' in the one-sided way of Soviet policies. Still, I would add that we should not underrate the genuine desire for peace even in the communist call for 'co-existence.'"⁷⁷

In these scattered references to Marxism, Richard Ullmann raises a number of issues that clearly invite further discussion and study. He is barely on the verge of an open Christian-Marxist dialogue—a dialogue that was to blossom in the years immediately after his death. We can only imagine that the opportunity to enter into that ongoing dialogue might well have enriched the dialectic of his own Christian ethics.

NOTES

1. Richard K. Ullmann, *Tolerance and the Intolerable*, Swarthmore Lecture 1961 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 45 (hereafter referred to as Ullmann, *Tolerance*).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
4. Richard K. Ullmann, *Friends and Truth: An Essay* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1955), pp. 53-54 (hereafter referred to as Ullmann, *Truth*).
5. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, p. 49.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
7. Ullmann, *Truth*, "Author's Preface," unnumbered page.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
9. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, p. 8.
10. Richard K. Ullmann, *Between God and History: The Human Situation Exemplified in Quaker Thought and Practice* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 54 (hereafter referred to as Ullmann, *Between*).
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
12. Ullmann, *Truth*, p. 63.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
16. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, pp. 46-47.
17. Ullmann, *Truth*, pp. 64-65.
18. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 82.
19. Ullmann, *Truth*, p. 15.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
22. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, p. 60.
23. Ullmann, *Truth*, p. 54.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
25. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume I: Reason and Revelation, Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 238-239.
26. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 133.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.
28. Ullmann, *Truth*, p. 34.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
33. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 122.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

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38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 124.
40. Ibid., pp. 159-160.
41. Ibid., p. 159.
42. Ibid., p. 191.
43. Ibid., p. 152.
44. Ibid., p. 81.
45. Richard K. Ullmann, *The Dilemmas of a Reconciler: Serving the East-West Conflict*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 131 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1963), p. 19.
46. Ibid., p. 20.
47. Richard K. Ullmann, *The Quaker Peace Testimony Restated* (London: Friends Peace Committee, 1958), p. 11.
48. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 128.
49. Richard K. Ullmann, "Non-Violent Resistance in a Spirit of Warfare?" *The Friend* (London), Vol. 117 (October 30, 1959), pp. 1255-1256.
50. T. Vail Palmer, Jr., "The Peace Testimony: Does Christian Commitment Make a Difference?" *Quaker Religious Thought*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1964), pp. 9-10.
51. Ibid., p. 12.
52. Richard K. Ullmann, "The Injustice of Love," *The American Friend*, New Series Vol. 44 (April 5, 1956), p. 100.
53. Ullmann, *Between*, pp. 187-188.
54. Ullmann, *Truth*, p. 60.
55. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, p. 23.
56. Ibid., p. 5.
57. Ibid., p. 8.
58. Ibid., p. 50.
59. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
60. Ibid., p. 20.
61. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
62. Helene Ullmann, *Der Mut zur reinen Tat: Richard Ullmann, sein Leben und sein Werk*, Richard L. Cary Vorlesung (Bad Pyrmont, Germany: Leonhard Friedrich Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), pp. 43-44 (my translation).
63. Richard K. Ullmann, "From the Cold War towards Real Peace," *The Friend* (London), Volume 119 (June 30, 1961), pp. 880-881.
64. Richard K. Ullmann, "No East Nor West," *Friends Journal*, Volume 8 (August 1, 1962), p. 324 (hereafter referred to as Ullmann, "No East Nor West").
65. Richard K. Ullmann, letter to the editor, *The Friend* (London), Volume 118 (April 29, 1960), p. 591 (hereafter referred to as Ullmann, 1960 letter).
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, pp. 27-28.
69. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

70. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 22.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
72. Richard K. Ullmann, "Peace and Freedom," *The Friends' Quarterly*, Volume 14 (April 1963), p. 259.
73. Ullmann, *Between*, p. 33 n. 1.
74. Ullmann, *Tolerance*, pp. 26-27.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
76. Ullmann, 1960 letter, p. 591.
77. Ullmann, "No East Nor West," p. 325.