

Correspondence

"The Democratic Prospect"

To the Editors: Richard John Neuhaus is one of our few truly independent thinkers, and as such I can always count on learning something from his writing. His "The Democratic Prospect" (*Worldview*, July-August) is no exception.

Although I agree with the gist of his remarks on the Christian-Marxist dialogue, I would like to add some comments.

It is not entirely the case that "Christian-Marxist dialogues" have come to a "demise," or that the European component of the dialogue, as we have come to know it, "is ended." A dialogue among Marxists and Christians from Eastern and Western Europe and America is being planned for January of next year at Rosemont College. Another such dialogue is being planned by the Paulus Gesellschaft for the spring of 1977 in Florence or Strasbourg (as a sequel to its 1975 Florence Symposium).

To be sure, such dialogues are occurring with less frequency than before. Nevertheless, I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that Christianity is no longer being represented by (as Neuhaus puts it) "Christians who...did not believe in Christianity." That Christians are no longer importing alien ideologies such as Marxism into their theology. That problem—which, of course, is not inherent in Marxist-Christian dialogue—is more pressing than ever.

It is probably also worth noting that books on the dialogue continue coming off the presses, not the least of which (I hope) is my own *On Synthesizing Marxism and Christianity*, forthcoming from Wiley in November.

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To the Editors: Neuhaus's article, "The Democratic Prospect," calls us to get busy on theological culture work. We are to deepen and develop clusters of

concepts that establish a fresh vista of democracy. There is a role for enterprises of religion in the health of our national life. And it is not just promoting their own constituency and forgiving sins. In a continuing pluralistic society (democracy) we have a world to interpet and, one hopes, put together....

[Neuhaus] has set for us a task that could give focus and fire to theological seminars and professors of American culture. We have something to do in the realm of concepts and in the realm of imagery. And so re-illumine the intensity of two traditions. In this work the American experiment in humankind is also data for the study of revelation.

I do not believe that we can be effective in making "truth claims for the Bible" unless we can develop concepts such as *covenant* not only in their biblical content but also in their contemporary human existence and language content. As, for instance, John F. A. Taylor has started to do in *The Masks of Society*. I can also feel the excitement of similar development of a full-orbed doctrine of human being as *spirit*. Worship services that speak only of man as sinner increasingly seem as repulsive and one-sided as meetings of amateur human potential psychologists.

I deliberately use the word "concept"—which for some intellectuals is almost a smear word. But concept is not antithetical to basic presuppositions, feeling tone, and experiential content. William James often remarked about an idea, "that idea hasn't become warm for me yet"—the point being that a concept did not cease to be when it began to mobilize his energies and situational experiences. And a concept never ceases to have the need of becoming fascinating and beautiful. Further, phenomenology now recognizes that existence and essence are not conflicting warriors. We can be "nature's biology" (and possibly mass man), but if that is all, we do not yet *exist* as a human being. To exist personally is to understand and imagine what makes a situation/world "go," and then to affirm "This is what I mean." "I believe in...therefore I am." A present problem of democracy's future is a crisis of *meaning in this sense*.

And these two concepts (covenant and human spirit)—and such conviction about the role of concepts
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WORLDVIEW

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