

Kennedy-Dulles Dialogue in Heaven: The Logic of War

by E. Martin Schotz

[The lights come up slowly; the location is the Colored House, Heaven. John Kennedy is sitting in a rocker reading a newspaper. Allen Dulles in panama hat and bermuda shorts enters suitcase in hand.]

DULLES: [friendly] Well, hello Jack.

KENNEDY: [jumps to his feet] You! You dare speak to me?

DULLES: Why Jack, what's the matter?

KENNEDY: Forget the pretense, do you think I don't know it was you who was behind my assassination?

DULLES: Oh, it's that, is it. Taking it personally, are you?

KENNEDY: You're incredible. Do you expect me to greet my assassin with open arms?

DULLES: Now hold on, Jack. It is one thing to say that I was behind your assassination. It's another thing to call me your assassin.

KENNEDY: And what would you call you?

DULLES: That's not the point, Jack. It's true I was behind your assassination, but who do you think was behind me?

KENNEDY: Who?

DULLES: Why the people, Jack, the American People.

KENNEDY: The *People*??

DULLES: Yes, and if the whole truth be told, who do you think was behind them?

KENNEDY: Tell me.

DULLES: You, Jack, none other than you.

KENNEDY: [laughs] You have nerve, Dulles. Isn't it strange that somehow I don't remember being in on the arrangements.

DULLES: No, it's not strange at all. It often happens that way.

KENNEDY: Well, since I missed my own participation, maybe you would like to let me in on it.

DULLES: Well, you see, as far as I'm concerned, you are as much to blame as anyone, if we want to start blaming people. Look here, you don't think you were killed out of any personal motive. We were all fond of you, I hope you realize that. It was simply a matter of politics. Yours versus the people's.

KENNEDY: The people's? Why, the people loved me.

DULLES: Yes, they loved you, Jack. But did they love your policies? You don't think there could have been a successful assassination without the assistance of the people? You don't think we could have returned America to her true Cold War traditions, if the people had really been in support of what you were doing. After all, we live in a democracy, Jack.

KENNEDY: A democracy you assaulted.

DULLES: A democracy I assaulted? Not at all, Jack. It was a democracy you assaulted. After all, did you not run on a platform of rebuilding our defenses and of a hard line against the Soviets and Cubans? Yes, it was on that basis that the people elected you. And what did you do with our public's trust? You *changed your mind*. Or to be more precise, you let the communists change your mind. [Now in an ironic tone] "To hell with Dulles, to hell with the CIA, to hell with those who had slaved for years to protect our system. To hell with what the people thought they were electing. I, Jack Kennedy, numero uno, I know what's best for them."

KENNEDY: And suppose I did know best?

DULLES: So what if you did, Jack. That's how the communists in Russia are always justifying what they do. They know what's best for *the people*. No, Jack, that's not our way. The people have the right to make mistakes and correct them.

KENNEDY: And suppose that mistake is blowing themselves and the rest of the world up. Is it necessary that *the people* have that right too?

DULLES: Yes, if they want it. Strange as it may seem, if we deprive them of that right, what will be the difference between us and the communists? Once you give up the principle that the people are leading the country, and let an elite with the power to manipulate the media lead the people, well, where will it end?

KENNEDY: Oh, I see, shooting the President is OK, but manipulating the media isn't.

DULLES: It's not a matter of being OK. None of us wanted to do what we had to do. I know it's hard not to get carried away by the way it happened. But try to look at it this way. Suppose you had had a stroke in Dealey Plaza that afternoon. Would the history of the United States really have been any different? We didn't take over the government, we just shot *you*. And the people realized that on the personal level it was a tragedy, but on the political level no serious damage had been done to our democracy and they supported our return to tradition. Even your family and advisers understood once it happened and helped us.

KENNEDY: *The people*, they didn't even understand my policies. How could they have fought your efforts to erase what I was doing?

DULLES: Precisely. And you had no business following policies that others didn't understand and support.

KENNEDY: This is ridiculous.

DULLES: You see, Jack, this was precisely the problem. This was the reason you had become a communist agent, Jack. Our system had ceased to make sense to you. You had stopped believing in our way.

KENNEDY: Do you mean you actually believe that I was a communist agent?

DULLES: I don't believe it. I know it. If and when the people decide they want peace with the Russians we will have it, but not before. That is the heart of our system, the free marketplace of ideas.

KENNEDY: Look Allen, I understand what you are *trying* to say but do you *realize* what this means? What you are saying is that if you're not free to commit suicide, you're not free.

DULLES: That fortunately or unfortunately, Jack, is the logic of our system, and only the people have the right to change the system. Freedom for us is liberty, free will, the absence of restraint. That is the system you took an oath to uphold, and that is the system that you betrayed.

KENNEDY: But what about the freedom that comes out of recognizing that something must be done? The freedom that is the product of knowledge which the people don't have and must be helped to see.

DULLES: That is the real difference between the communists and us, Jack. We believe that people are naturally born free and that no one has the right to restrain that natural God-given freedom. It is the communists who believe that without education, health care, a job, or what have you, you can't be free, that people have to be [sarcastic] *raised up so they can appreciate freedom*.

KENNEDY: In that respect do you think that their idea is so wrong?

DULLES: To tell you the truth, I don't know. But it's not for me to decide. I am simply a servant of our people.

KENNEDY: Allen, listen, I see what you are saying. Perhaps I did act rather rashly with you. I'm really sorry I didn't appreciate you more.

DULLES: [Putting his arm around Kennedy to comfort him.] It's all right, Jack. I understand. You were young and headstrong. It was natural for you to make such a mistake. Those Mickey Mouse civics classes we are all brought up on, which teach us the President is so important.

[KENNEDY and DULLES chuckle.]

KENNEDY: My family must have given you a lot of trouble?

DULLES: Not really.

KENNEDY: Not even Bobby?

DULLES: No, he took it better than I expected. Of course, Nick Katzenbach was a big help.

KENNEDY: [Embracing DULLES and then holding him at arm's length, smiling and looking DULLES straight in the eyes.] You forgive me . . . all the trouble I caused you, the family. . . . everyone.

DULLES: Of course. [Dulles affectionately musses KENNEDY'S hair. They hug each other with vigor.]