

Ethical Détente: Marxist-Christian Dialogue in Hungary

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The Hungarian Marxist philosopher Jozsef Poór suggested in 1981 in the official party journal *Pártélet* that the now out-of-date phraseology of “ideological struggle” should be replaced by the more appropriate and up-to-date word “dialogue”.¹ This proposed shift of word-usage in political vocabulary clearly reflects a new and ambiguous twist in Hungarian church policy on religion in the 1980s. “Dialogue” has become the established term denoting the approach of Hungarian Marxists to religion.

In Hungary church-state relations are regulated by agreements signed by the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in 1948 and by the Roman Catholic Church in 1950. Dialogue, in a political sense, has been going on ever since, for it has been of mutual interest to achieve peaceful coexistence. Though church leaders consistently supported the programmes of the government, within this framework the integrity and autonomy of faith, doctrine and confession remained basically unchallenged. Yet party policy has firmly and repeatedly stated that “in the ideological sense there is no peaceful coexistence”² and a programme of “ideological struggle” has been maintained notwithstanding the adoption of a “policy of alliances” with the purpose of achieving “national unity”. György Aczél, said in 1977: “active support for certain aims of socialism is also increasing in the ranks of the clergy”.³ Moreover, the dialogue, according to Aczél is an important factor in the party’s strategy for ideological struggle: “The policy of alliances of the Marxists is a firm policy because in the ideological dialogue with their allies they endeavour to make themselves better understood, to understand their partners more fully, and to promote the spread of the scientific ideology outside the party”.⁴

Our concern will be the new, narrower sense of the dialogue of the 1980s, which denotes a series of public exchanges of views between Marxist intellectuals and various theologians who, in most cases, are church leaders. Theological or confessional argument is often invoked to justify active support for collaboration with the Marxist state while confrontation on the level of the basically different philosophical assump-

