Debatable "Theology of Diaconia" -- Hungarian Example of "The Church in Socialist Society"

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Churches in the socialist countries respond in different ways to the ideology, social and political challenges of their environment. At the same time they also seek to explain their position clearly to people abroad, especially to their church partners in the ecumenical discussion. The so-called "theology of diaconia" was developed in Hungary as a means whereby the church might solve the problems confronting it in its socialist setting. This theology is found in the Lutheran Church in Hungary and still more in the Reformed Church there. In the following essay, the author offers a critical evaluation of this "theology of diaconia".

One consequence of the Second World War was to confront the East European churches with socialist-communist ideology and its corresponding social system. In countries which came under the direct influence of the Soviet Union, this confrontation was bound up with concrete requirements imposed by the political authorities. After a fairly brief initial period of relative tolerance in the life of both church and state, came a decisive phase when clear directives were given for the life of these countries. These directives affected the life of the churches there both practically and theologically.

The phrase "the Church in socialist society" is first of all simply a description of the situation generally obtaining for the churches in Eastern Europe. In this situation the Church has to choose between two courses. The churches seek either to perform their special ministry as a command of their Lord in their new context as defined by a new legislation and a new social system, or interpret their new historical
situation as a summons to seek their new role in the socialist state and to take their bearings within the framework determined by the socialist ideology. The first of these two alternatives may be seen as an attempt to maintain the church's integrity and identity within the new social system, whereas the second corresponds to a deliberate identification with the new system and a form of integration within it.

In the following essay, I want to illustrate the problem of "the church in socialist society" by reference to a particular theology which has achieved a monopoly in Hungary: the so-called "theology of diaconia" (or "theology of service").

A theology of this kind, with its main emphasis on the church's service in today's world, is certainly not a novelty in the present century. Immediately after the war, in the theological circles influenced by the work of Karl Barth, there was talk of the "prophetic ministry" of the church. It is not difficult to demonstrate the influence of Karl Barth in Hungary, especially among the Reformed theologians. The Conferences of the European Churches in Nyborg Strand (Denmark) were already speaking of the "servant Church" at a very early stage. In some of its basic texts, especially in "Gaudium et Spes", even the Second Vatican Council described the church as serving in the world. This is the basic trend. Within this trend, however, there are considerable differences. One leading Hungarian theologian, for example, sees this theology of service in his own country as having the following distinctive character:

As we interpret it in Hungary, however, the theology of service has this distinctive feature: for us, this service embraces active cooperation with the Marxist and practical participation in the development of the socialist society. It is obvious from this interpretation of service and its practical consequences that our theology of service differs from every other theological interpretation of service not only in this particular point but also in its spirit and structure. To devote a separate study to the demonstration of this difference would be a useful contribution to our international ecumenical ministry (Károly Pröhle, 1981).
It is helpful to have this clarification. It will enable us to steer clear of any naive equation of the "theology of diaconia" with other currents in contemporary theology because of overlapping terminology. Even if some of its ideas can occasionally be found in Catholic writers, the "theology of diaconia" is primarily a product of Protestant theologians in Hungary. This theology is to be found both in the Reformed and in the Lutheran Church, with only a few differences of emphasis. In what follows I shall concentrate on a description of the "theology of diaconia" as advocated by representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The "theology of diaconia" has been described in countless articles over the last twenty years by the leading Lutheran bishop, Zoltán Káldy. He can therefore be accepted as a reliable interpreter and witness. In his view, any church in his country, where the social, economic and political order was developing increasingly in the direction of socialism, was faced with four possible courses: (a) hierarchy, (b) conformism, (c) retreat into the ghetto, (d) opposition. In Káldy's view, his own church chose a fifth way, namely, that of diaconia. The substantial development began only after the Hungarian revolution (1956) and the definitive removal of Bishop Lajos Ordáss's successor.

"Theology of Diaconia"

When we ask what the "way of diaconia" means in substance, we are, not surprisingly, referred at once to the ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments, including, of course, the ministry of love (diaconia in the traditional sense). "We have, however, gone beyond the previously established limits of diaconia . . . and see and reflect on things in the light of global standards. In our view, diaconia means increasing the prosperity of our people, promoting peace among the nations and equality between the races, and in struggling against war and on behalf of peace" (Z. Káldy, 1964). In other words, this is how the proclamation takes concrete shape. Appeal is made to the example of Jesus who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28)--this biblical citation is also the title and epigraph of the volume of Káldy's sermons and addresses (1979). Christ is the diakonos--the servant. Accordingly,
all the New Testament statements about Christ as the diakonos—and also the use of the verb diakonēin (to serve)—are frequently appealed to as biblical support for this position.

The first points to be noted are the frequent appeal to christology and the focus on concrete social ethics (even in reference to the life of the disciples). The "theology of diaconia" claims to be based on christology. This supposed basis in christology, however, calls for certain comments:

(1) The basic saying of Jesus culminates in the statement: "... and to give his life as a ransom for many" (cf. Mk 10:45). This profound redemptive dimension, this fundamental element in Christ's diaconia, plays hardly any part at all in the "theology of diaconia" presented here. One logical consequence of this, of course, is that II Cor 5:18, which speaks of the "ministry of reconciliation" and is therefore determinative for the Church's diaconia, is not referred to, either. The diaconia of reconciliation is obviously irreconcilable with the ideology of the class struggle. This redemptive dimension is exchanged for a humanitarian extension of diaconia. This "extended diaconia" strictly speaking, stands foursquare with the social and humanitarian aims forming part of the program even of the new socialist system. With "diaconia" being interpreted in this manner, the church can be accepted and can help in the construction of the new society.

(2) It took more than a decade for the terminological limits to the idea of Christ as the diakonos to undergo any verbal correction. Diakonos has now been complemented by Kyrios, the oldest title of Christ. But even this title was not given the central significance which it has in the New Testament and in the ancient creeds of the church. What is emphasized is not the glorified majesty of Christ as the Lord "in heaven and on earth" (cf. Phil 2:5-11) but the revelation of Christ as "the Lord who serves"—so that, once more, we are conformed with a onesided social diaconia. In the socialist context, of course, it is not really possible to confess the Kyrios title in its original sense, where it is a challenge to the sole sovereignty of the Emperor and to his claim to absolute authority. Of course, the Lord was a servant! But we have no right to suppress His sovereignty over all the powers of this world.
(3) Jesus connected his service—and that of his disciples—with his sufferings. In other words, Christ's service (ministry) is in itself also a suffering. Christ is the suffering servant of God. Since it is exclusively New Testament passages which form the background of the "theology of diaconia," it is impossible for the Old Testament passages—those concerning the servant of God in Isaiah, for example—to make their full force felt in the account of Christ the diakonos. The other christological titles of majesty are also left out of account. Not only the suffering Lord but even the disciple who suffers with his Lord is extraneous to this theology. The "via crucis" is certainly mentioned, of course, even in reference to the disciples. But the need for disciples to bear the cross of Christ is interpreted here too as the need for them to love and serve the neighbor. It is wrong, we are told, to think of cross-bearing and self-denial in individualistic terms. We are to understand them, instead, as the rejection of the desire to rule and as an affirmation of service to the neighbor.

**Consequences of this on-sidedness**

In the "theology of diaconia" there is a onesided selection of biblical passages. But even the passages selected are not given their full significance in the interpretation offered. The hermeneutic principle is always determined by a concern to see how these passages are concretely related to the contemporary context, and how they can be made to support a critique of the church's proclamation and view of life in earlier times (prior to socialism). The criticism made by Jesus is directed against those who prefer to rule rather than serve. But Jesus illustrated the attitude of domination by referring to "kings" and "things in authority" in the nations. This was Jesus' answer to the question, which of his disciples was "to be regarded as the greatest" (Lk 22:24). This dimension of social criticism in the saying of Jesus is not retained in the "theology of diaconia." The theology directs its criticism on-sidedly at the church's past behavior patterns. In the new socialist society, the church is to serve instead of dominating. In Hungary, this type of "self-criticism" is directed primarily against the Catholic Church, to which constant reference is made by Protestants as a
typical example of domination in cooperation with political rulers. But it is permissible to recall that criticism of such a "dominating church" has largely ceased to have any relevance whatever today—unless, perhaps, it is increasingly relevant criticism of a church which, out of loyalty to the secular rulers, today adopts an attitude of domination over ordinary church members in the interest of "serving" the powers that be.

Just as the servant Christ is contrasted with a church hungry to rule, so too, in respect of the suffering disciple, the "theology of diaconia" criticises the pietistic, individualistic behavior pattern. Self-denial is not to be thought of as an ascetic inward-turning but as the requirement that the disciple is to serve his or her neighbor rather than herself or himself. Yet, when this theology insists that the Christian should turn outwards towards the neighbor, it nevertheless leaves out of the reckoning the problem of the Christian's suffering. But Christian service, especially when it is turned outwards in this way, can encounter suffering. Humanity and the world are not just waiting for the service of the Christian. Diaconia can also call the Christian to cross-bearing in her or his discipleship of Christ. But this is precisely the problem with the "theology of the diaconia": it ignores the suffering of the disciple in this form. When a Christian suffers in a socialist society it is regarded a self-induced suffering. If someone suffers, it is right that he or she should do so because of his or her irrational conduct in a social order which seeks what is best for her or him. For in a socialist system there cannot be any Christian martyrs.

One illustration of what has just been said is the problem of the "outcasts" of the present state system. Even today, of course, the church in Hungary continues to perform its traditional diaconia: the elderly, the mentally retarded, epileptics and disabled people are cared for in church institutions. But people who have experienced injustice in contemporary society cannot count on the church's assistance. In some astonishment we ask ourselves why such assistance is not also part of the church's "way of diaconia". Why is it that social injustice only begin outside Hungary, above all in countries towards which political
sympathy is not encouraged even in other respects? The universalization of the concept of diaconia fades out of the picture the problems within Hungary itself as well as in countries to which it has treaty obligations. It is permissible to criticize racism in South Africa and in North America; economic problems and social conditions in Latin America have top priority among Hungarian concerns. But when Hungarian troops marched into Czechoslovakia in 1968, not a single word of concern was uttered by the church, any more than conditions in Poland may be even mentioned today—as if "diaconia" somehow did not apply in such cases! Nor are Jews and intellectuals who have been expelled from socialist countries regarded as a suitable occasion for the concrete practice of diaconia in our world today. The problem of human suffering in general is treated with almost the same disdain as the suffering of the Christian in particular—if it is encountered in one's own sphere.

This seems all the more lamentable when, even in the non-church area of life in Hungary today, there is already a far greater freedom to criticize abuses in one's own society. Writers and historians can speak of conditions which must be of vital importance precisely for the future of "social diaconia." In art, drama and film, as well as in many books, we find opinions and views which are impossible in the Church. It can even be said that "critical solidarity," which is undoubtedly a soundly based theological attitude, is irreconcilable with a "theology of diaconia." A "critical solidarity" of this kind, which has been accepted in various cultural areas as a valid attitude in the dialogue with Marxism, could hardly hold its peace when people are made to suffer for their refusal of military service in a country where peace is actually regarded as a top priority.

One conclusion seems obvious: the "theology of diaconia" is beamed primarily at church members. Its aim is to enlist their active interest in "the great questions of humanity." The decision as to what these questions are is taken not by the church itself (nor even after joint consideration with it) but is imposed upon it. In consequence, the social problems of one's own country are inviolable. These problems, especially in church-state relations, are supposed to have been already solved in an ideal way. The concordat agreed with the state in 1948
brought the then Lutheran bishop, Lajos Ordáss, unjustly before the courts, with the result that he spent the rest of his life under a social cloud. Despite his "rehabilitation" (legal and ecclesiastical), he was completely removed from the Lutheran Church's life. Here as in many other cases, the "theology of diaconia" follows the state pattern. "Outcasts" deservedly suffer, even if they have been "rehabilitated."

The ideological function of the "theology of diaconia"

A. Zinoviev, the expelled Soviet philosopher, writes: "As experience in the Soviet Union shows, religion can be tolerated provided it does not enter into open conflict with the state system, is content to play a quite secondary role and to live in conformity with the laws which are communist institutions."¹

In Aarhus in 1977, a consultation organized by the Lutheran World Federation discussed four possibilities in the church's encounter with Marxism: (a) withdrawal (ghetto), (b) opposition, (c) conformism, and (d) critical solidarity. Conformism, according to the report of this consultation, is usually found in countries where Marxism has achieved state power. The church can then opt for a stance of ideological "non-intervention" combined with "practical cooperation." Interestingly enough, the example given for this stance was that of Hungary.

This is important from various angles. In the official statements made by Hungarian church leaders it is repeatedly asserted that the Marxist ideology is not combined with the church's proclamation. On the other hand, "practical cooperation" is endorsed and, in the life of the church, the "theology of diaconia" stakes the claim to be the correct doctrine and to have a monopoly stance corresponding to that of the Marxist ideology in the new social order. The task assumed by the "theology of diaconia" in Hungary is that of supporting and "liberating" the Christian conscience for cooperation with state policy, both at home and abroad, domestically and internationally. One sign of this is the fact that the leading bishop of the Lutheran Church has a seat in parliament, and is also a member of the government committee for foreign policy. The justification for this is the church's obligation to offer the state its service, its diaconia. The church leadership itself

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ensures that this cooperation with the state in the spirit of the "theology of diaconia" is faithfully observed in the publications and practical activities of the church. State censorship is unnecessary, since the church leaders themselves exercise this function.

Before drawing conclusions about this role of the "Church in socialist society" as at present conceived, we shall do well to listen to what Zoltán Káldy has to say about the "way of conformism": "Conformism means that the church adapts itself to the social order in which it lives at any given time, identifying itself with this order and adopting its aims and ideas so as to perform its own work in accordance with these aims and ideas. The Church becomes in this case simply the servant of the world around it" (1964). As examples of this, he quotes the so-called "Christian Hungary" prior to World War II and the "German Christians" of the Hitler period. But has he not in fact provided here an essentially accurate description of the practical cooperation now practised with the Hungarian government on the basis of the "theology of diaconia"? Christian grounds have to be found for conformity with the current political and social context in which the church lives. What is involved here, surely, in the final analysis, is solidarity, but without criticism; cooperation with the State in a social and political program, in the discussion of which Christians have no right to join, still less to share in the decision making.

This judgment finds support, certainly unintentionally, in the German version of a book written by a former bishop Ernö Ottlyk. In his preface to this German version written by Günter Wirth, the chief editor of the journal Standpunkte, we read: "The path of an evangelical Church in a socialist society, means simply the path of an evangelical Church into a socialist society." "The Church in a socialist society" is the definition of a situation. But the path of the Church into a socialist society is one of integration. This experience is mitigated by the "theology of diaconia," which furnishes its ideological background. This is why the cooperation between state and church can be described, at any rate in official statements by the responsible leaders on both sides, as exceptionally good and satisfactory. For a state in which, in spite of all the social upheavals, the Christian tradition plays a deep-rooted
role even though this state cannot possibly recognize the church's right to exist, the "theology of diaconia" brings forth good fruits.

A Marxist analysis of the "theology of diaconia"

The "theology of diaconia" has been analysed by the Marxist philosopher Jozsef Poór, mainly in its presentation by the Protestant proponents. Making use of Marxist methods, his book presents some interesting findings arising from his analysis.

Poór concludes that the "theology of service or diaconia" represents a new form of Protestantism, able to accept the political solutions offered by a "scientific" (i.e. Marxist) study of society. Far from hindering the acceptance of such an attitude, a rightly understood Christian faith as expressed in the "theology of diaconia" will incorporate it as an integral part of the faith itself. Poór's thesis may be summarised as follows: In the theology of diaconia "we are confronted with a special form of religion which for the first time in history has reached the logical conclusion that the social political system, the theory and practice of socialism, solves the real social problems of our time and that this religion itself, therefore, is able to offer its own auxiliary service" (i.e. in the implementation of this program). In Poór's view, this theology is not only of great interest for world Christianity but also confronts the Marxist-Leninist analysis of religion with new problems. He is presumably thinking here that a religion which is integrated into socialism and can no longer be regarded, therefore, as an "opium of the people," no longer represents a destructive opponent either but affords a direct service. The fact that theologians describe their conduct as "diaconia" and view it as christologically inspired can, from a pragmatic standpoint, be considered a matter of complete indifference.

Writing in the atheistic journal "Világosság" (February, 1977) on the "theology of service," the same author says of this theology that "it gives expression to its positive social function, above all, by emphasising that support for the progressive society is a criterion of a rightly understood faith." In other words, according to the "theology of diaconia," it is possible to derive from the criteria of the Christian
faith itself this service in the real "progressive society."

Poor stresses strongly that the concrete practical consequences of the Marxist-Leninist ideology of society are in fact affirmed by the "theology of diaconia." What distinguishes them one from the other is the theoretical argument in Marxism-Leninism and theology respectively. The "theology of diaconia" is obviously at odds with the Marxist-Leninist method. Socialist theory expects, of course, the complete elimination of religious needs. But, in a transitional period like the present, the "theology of diaconia" can satisfy the religious needs of Christians without necessarily bringing them into conflict with the society in which they live. Maintaining its claim to a christocentric basis, the "theology of diaconia" presents an appearance of autonomy (i.e. of being Christian). This claim to autonomy can, however, never be accepted by the "scientific method" of Marxism-Leninism.

It is instructive to supplement this analysis with statements made by the Soviet philosopher, A. Zinoviev, to whom reference has already been made. Zinoviev thinks that, in countries where the Marxist-Leninist ideology has achieved political power, one vital part of this ideology is its need for a machinery of ideological supervision, whereby the individual is compelled to accept the official ideology, for this ideology justifies the program of action decided by the political leaders and it is the people who have to implement this program.

According to Zinoviev, this ideological machinery has a fourfold task:

(a) It imparts knowledge of official doctrine and obliges people to accept it. By constantly progressive "actualizations," the impression is given that doctrine is developing. In reality, however, these concretizations can be very contingent and arbitrary.

(b) The ideological machinery exercises control over all processes in the political, cultural and economic field. Control of this kind is very familiar in history.

(c) The ideological machinery provides the interpretation of events in the political, cultural, economic, technological and industrial field at any given moment. There is a resultant "classification" of these events. There is approval or condemnation. But the correct answer is always at
hand ("In our view. . .").

(d) the ideological machinery compels people to cooperate actively in society. They must perform their tasks in the system. What is involved here is the enforcement of serious participation in the development of (socialist) society and not simply a superficial participation.

It would not be difficult to show how the church leadership in Hungary asserts the validity of the "theology of diaconia" in precisely the same way as the ideological machinery as described by Zinoviev asserts the Marxist-Leninist ideology in socialist society. In this sense, the "theology of diaconia" is a necessary and valuable component of the contemporary social structure, which, as we know, according to Marxist-Leninist theory, can use religion for auxiliary services. By its monopolistic control of the "theology of diaconia," the church leadership assumes tasks which match the state's ideological education. In a "period of transition," the church can play a role and by doing so, to some extent relieve the state of certain tasks.

The "theology of diaconia" in dialogue with Marxism

In the recent past, a new phenomenon is to be observed in the dialogue between Christians and Marxists. The previous situation can best be illustrated by a statement of Zoltán Káldy's:

We have often said that the dialogue between Christians and Marxists is conducted by us in practical life, i.e. by our cooperation. This proved correct and fruitful. We thereby avoided the temptation of the Kulturkampf. Such a struggle would have set members of the family against one another, not alongside one another. Now that cooperation has stood the test, however, it becomes important to advance the Marxist-Christian dialogue by presenting some basic questions so that we may be able to achieve a broader and even more courageous cooperation (1982).

Stemming as it does from a man who to a large extent defines the church policy of his own Church as well as its theology of diaconia, that is an important statement. For many years Káldy was opposed to any dialogue, for he thought of the real dialogue as taking place, as he stated, in the form of practical cooperation. This attitude may have been due, in part, to anxiety
lest the church's proclamation be mixed up with the state's ideology. At the same time, however, the "theology of diaconia" strongly reinforced practical political cooperation with the government. It is legitimate to ask, therefore, whether the "dialogue" now initiated can produce any genuine encounter between Marxism and the Church or whether, in this new stage, the "theology of diaconia" is only to be developed still further, so as to continue to serve the state's ideological machinery. The decisive point in the above quotation is the hope that, through this dialogue, "we may be able to achieve a broader and even more courageous cooperation." The chief interest on the official church side, therefore, still seems to be the use of dialogue to strengthen practical motivation and to provide still stronger assistance to the state social system. This is obviously also the concern of the state. The only result of a new phase of dialogue in this direction, therefore, would be the further development of the "theology of diaconia" in its essentially ideological role as an auxiliary to the state program. It should be noted, however, that it was J. Poór himself, the Marxist-Leninist partner in the dialogue, who recognized that this new "theology" confronted the Marxist analysis of religion with new problems. Surely, however, this ideology can be pursued intellectually only within its own philosophical limits. The practical need for the church's approval of the state's program is a non-negotiable axiom.

The text from which the above quotation is taken was published, certainly, after the initiative for the dialogue had been taken (presumably from the Protestant side and, at the same time, also from the Marxist side). As an official event, the initial phase took place in the presence of the President of the State Office for Church Affairs. The "scientific" dialogue was held in Debrecen in September 1981, and, as was announced, is to be continued. According to the announcements published in the press, the justification for this dialogue was the claim of Christianity to be not only a faith but also a world-view. As such, it must engage as a partner in the dialogue with the Marxist-Leninist world-view. It was also affirmed that, though essential differences existed in ideological questions, cooperation between Christians and atheists could be achieved in many new fields.

It is hardly surprising that the Marxist-Christian dialogue should concentrate on anthropological and ethical questions. Every dialogue must find
a common starting point. But the Christian anthropology consists precisely in
a transcendental dimension which cannot be defined in purely ethical
categories. Surprisingly, it is the Marxist philosopher J. Poór who is clear
that here is the dividing line between Maxism and Christianity, as he showed
in his book. Aparently, however, the Protestant theologians did not draw
attention to this particularly important dimension. This may, of course, have
been due to the fact that their main concern was to find common starting
points.

As long as the Marxist-Christian dialogue is conducted outside the
jurisdiction of a Marxist state authority, there is unlikely to be any threat
to the freedom of the dialogue. But where the dialogue is conducted between
partners who are dependent on the Marxist-Communist state, the problem assumes
a different complexion. For then the external political structural changes
have to be recognized as axiomatic. This is the starting point. The only
possible constructive opportunities then offered by dialogue are concrete joint
conclusions for the cooperation of Christians and Marxists. And here the
theology of service, the "theology of diaconia," has its state-recognized role
to play, namely, cooperation with the program determined by the Communist
Party or the state. The church has no influence whatever on this program
itself. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that the church
itself may, in the light of its own criteria, approve and promote a good many
of the socialist changes in society.

The decisive question remains, however: Whence are the decisive ethical
norms for society to be derived? Are we thinking of a system of justice which
has an absolute validity even over governments, parties and ideologies? Or are
the norms merely those established by rulers in accordance with their own
interests? Are the ethical norms subject to constant reinterpretation in
accordance with party political interests or do they have a validity
independent of these interests? Vigorous protests have frequently been heard
in theological circles in Hungary repudiating any identification of the new
theological direction with the position of the "German Christians" in the
Third Reich. The question does nevertheless arise: Has the temptation to take
a similar way really been resisted seriously? Has not a theology been
developed which, in actual fact, has become just as much an integral part of
the Marxist ideological machine as the theology of the "German Christians"
accommodated itself to the Nazi ideology? To be sure, Marxism does not advance any religious claim. But there is surely a danger that the "theology of diaconia" is exercising the function of providing the Marxist social system with a Christian basis. Thereby, it allows itself to be commandeered as an integral part of Marxist ideology. It is a serious question whether a theology which takes "diaconia" as its central orientation has also preserved its integrity as theology so as to be able to conduct a genuine dialogue with Marxism.

Hungarian church leaders and theologians have concentrated for many years on the "theology of diaconia" as their ecumenical contribution. Not without a certain complacency, they have been able to report to their compatriots the growing interest taken in their "theological" approach. As a result, one of the main interests of the Marxist-Christian dialogue concerns its ecumenical importance and its international repercussions. In other words, if this theology, with its connection with the Marxist program, proves successful beyond the frontiers of Hungary, an opportunity exists for the churches to fulfill a certain mission in regard to the West.

Certainly, the "theology of diaconia" is one of a number of positions to which careful attention must be paid. But it is not the only one, and there are related trends in the ecumenical world which it can latch onto. For a fruitful dialogue, however, one point of supreme importance needs to be heeded here. In the free world, this "theology of diaconia" can be heard as one view among others. It will inevitably come into discussion, however, with these other views, with a resultant mutual correction and the avoidance of onesidedness. Theologians from Eastern Europe have often pointed out the link between Western theology and its social context. Now it is their turn to heed how their own theology is dependent on its social context.

When this "theology of diaconia" is expounded at ecumenical meetings, very seldom does its ideological framework impinge on the consciousness of outsiders. This lack of knowledge is not dangerous so long as this theology does not secure the ecumenical community's unqualified approval and recognition. In other words, the representatives of the "theology of diaconia" cannot then, in the absence of the critical reflection of their ecumenical partners, translate their ideas into practical programs in their own country. The "theology diaconia" can count on our interest so long as it is able to remain
free from its monopolistic tendency and its ideological context. Only the ecumenical discussion can help it to achieve a critical stance.

One danger at the present time is the selective citation of certain Western theologians as supporters of the theology of diaconia. It is obvious only to a few that they thereby support the concrete political programs into which this theology is translated. But the ecumenical world must be much more cautious precisely in respect to this function which has been thrust upon it, if it wants to perform a genuinely fraternal service. For in Hungary itself, a critical analysis of the "theology of diaconia" itself is quite excluded. The ecumenical dialogue, therefore, can be of considerable importance, provided it is well-informed about the Sitz im Leben of this theology. Obviously, this dialogue needs to be able to show brotherly/sisterly sympathy for any "church in a socialist society" which is seeking the right way. But the dialogue partners need to have a thorough familiarity with the situation, if they are not, out of a merely naive "brotherliness" or "sisterliness" to continue encouraging a church in the direction of mere conformism "into socialist society."

FOOTNOTES

1 Le communisme en tant que réalité [Communism as it really is] 1981.