A Hungarian Christian-Marxist Dialogue and its Lessons

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A HUNGARIAN CHRISTIAN-MARXIST DIALOGUE AND ITS LESSONS

by József Lukács

The late Dr. József Lukács (Marxist) was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the head of the department of philosophy at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. He was the most outstanding Marxist theoretician and protagonist of the Christian-Marxist dialogue in Hungary and an indefatigable participant of the international dialogues. One of his many writings was "Cooperation and Dialogue" in Varieties of Christian-Marxist Dialogue, ed by P. Mózes. He was the editor of Világoság in which this article appeared. Unexpectedly he died in January 1987. His widow graciously granted approval for the publication of the English translation of this, his last article.

A wider and thorougher dialogue is called for in a writing of great importance, published in Világoság's January 1986 issue by József Cserháti, Bishop of Pécs, Secretary of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopate. This invitation seems to me very opportune and will certainly be well received by many Catholics as well as Marxists. This is explained by the fact that we all are born members of the same nation: patriots whose successes and failures are objectively the same within our society, a society developing socialism. That fact remains unchanged by our persisting differences in world outlook. It is nevertheless my personal conviction that the cooperation which we pursue through debates and dialogues has deeper causes. There are principles characterizing the ethical and social views of people with different world outlooks which, mutatis mutandis, may be said to belong to our common heritage. One could give a long list of such principles as the aspiration for humane ideals, the wish for equality and justice among men, solidarity and respect for other persons the endeavor to render service in our common affairs, the appreciation of efficient work or the wish to secure harmony in the relationship between the individual and the community, and so on, and so forth.

Engels did not hesitate to state that socialism in the age of early Christianity "actually existed and came to dominance," "as far as it was possible at the time." There are important trends among Christians of our day which try to draw inspiration from that tradition, in order to convey their creed in an authentic form. József Cserháti also writes about this:

"The believers want to understand, on the basis of world outlook as well as religion, what is involved in accepting the reality of today, what it means to see historical necessity in the requirements set by present-day historical transformations and then, on such a basis, to rearrange the conditions of social coexistence in view of the interests of the whole society as well as of the humane ethic of present-day Hungarian socialism." (p. 11)

These are extremely significant and authentic observations. Apparently, Bishop Cserháti accepts the necessity of the historic changes which Hungary has undergone, together with the humane ethic that embodies the imperatives of the social and individual development ahead of us. He then draws the practical conclusions: "The believers united by the Churches and the religions
cannot but wish to strengthen the joint efforts of people with different convictions to achieve these common goals." (p. 15) Naturally, such a cooperation cannot take shape without *debates*, which form part of a *dialogue* between people who are separated by their convictions but united in their activities. In this way, differences in convictions cannot be referred to as hindrances to cooperation: "No one should insist that the discussion must by all means be based on the integrity of some theory or scientific system, for it would certainly preclude any dialogue if fundamental questions of philosophy or world outlook were to determine the first step." (pp. 9-10)

As far as one who is not a believer can judge, Bishop Cserháti's position is in accordance with both the constitutive statements made by the Second Vatican Council about the dialogue with atheists, and the Pope's admission of the significant impact of socialism on believers (as expressed, for example, in the apostolic letter "Octogesima adveniens"). As regards the views of Marxists in Hungary, it is well known that, ever since the 9th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, they have repeatedly pointed out both the need and the necessity of such an important cooperation. They have also expressed their satisfaction over every successful step taken towards that goal. We might then collectively give a more satisfactory answer to the problem which Cserháti raises as follows: "Not to take religious people into consideration and to ignore the mission of the Churches is to deny both the reality and the principle of pluralism." (p. 12) To be sure, there are individual Marxists as well as Catholics who emphasize their differences in world outlook and disregard, sometimes unwittingly, the others' actual endeavors. But the same is not true, and Bishop Cserháti clearly sees this, of the overt *declarations* of either the Hungarian Marxist Party or the Catholic Church. They declare that they consider each other partners, or allies, not enemies. It is not the case, therefore, that what the Churches have to say is ignored. But the warning is justified that the cooperation between those of different convictions must be seen as necessary in *everyday life and at all levels*, and the initiatives coming from the other party should be realized *on a wider scale*. Just because on so many points I agree with József Cserháti, even though he did not mean to open a debate, I find it useful to expound the Marxist point of view and clarify some basic principles concerning the dialogue. Let me invite the Catholic partners to a friendly and open discussion over these points, where some of our earlier views may also be called in question.

It is known to be a goal of Marxists to attain the ideological unity of society on the basis of mutually recognized needs and national interests. However, the process that leads to ideological unity should be expected *to last long*, while different or conflicting world views will probably persist underlying the ideologies which may converge at certain points. All this is understood by the majority of believers, and this is what history teaches us. Christianity was first opposed to
antique society, both objectively and in many respects subjectively, then became state religion in Byzantium and Rome, to get a role later, after the fall of the Empire, in shaping the feudal order. It also managed to adapt itself to bourgeois society. But now it appears to face another alternative. Will it opt for the compatibility of its world outlook and, moreover, its anthropological and moral point of view with supporting by its own means, a process of socialist transformation towards a just and more humane coexistence, in spite of all the difficulties and defects of socialism, its courageous efforts and slowdowns - or, will it get bogged down within the limits of a capitalism based on class discrimination and the alienation of human values?

To accept a point made by John Paul II, religious consciousness is indeed irreducible to politics immediately. (Reductionism would perhaps mean a step back to the kind of political clericalism which the Church attempted to practise in the not so distant past.) However, the distinction between the religious and the political does not alone answer the question as to the social values the realization of which the Church finds compatible with its own mission and with the conscience of its adherents—and to what political goals Christians are opposed. As we have seen, Bishop Cserháti has furnished remarkable answers to these questions.

Marxist Atheism - a Hindrance to Dialogue?

I do not wish to avoid the question which may seem to be the main obstacle to cooperation on the part of many Christians: that of atheism. How could it be possible to join efforts of people with convictions so radically different? It would be too easy to remind Christians that their Church was also exposed to charges of atheism at its birth, and later became capable of reconciling its ideas with those of "pagan" Greek thinkers like Plato or Aristotle; it then absorbed influences like the philosophy and theology of Averrhoism in the Middle Ages, while since the end of the last century it has made attempts at incorporating certain principles of modern rationalism historicism, and humanism, as well as existentialism and even evolutionism. The reply would no less easily be given: those incorporated conceptions represented some kind of idealism for the most part, even if they could not be labelled Christian. They were of an agnostic rather than an atheistic character, and therefore more or less in accordance with the belief in God, whereas Marxism is a materialistic and atheistic world outlook.

Here we must underline the importance of approaching both Marxist atheism and religious belief without prejudice. I think József Cserháti's words about non-believers can be accepted and applied in the reverse sense: "We believe we have abandoned false classifications which only attributed value to religious people and held that those who were not religious were not eligible for moral judgement... Whatever the value we encounter and whoever the person who
embodies it is, we must admit it, as a reality and truth, to the foundation of general human
values." (p. 8) This is especially important when we consider that it was usual in the part for the
Church to refer to atheism, materialism and all forms of free-thinking as synonyms of immorality.
There are still allusions made by high Church authorities to "atheistic systems" as "the shame of
our age" (this will not encourage the dialogue). It was an almost inevitable reaction to such acts of
intolerance and aggression that certain forms of atheism came to speak in a one-sided and
undifferentiated way about religion. Marxism itself could not remain free of such a reaction. But,
in the spirit of the dialogue, let me add a few points in order to facilitate a fuller understanding of
the Marxist evaluation of religion.

As is well known, Marxism considers religion to be a social phenomenon. It follows
from this that it has directed its criticism first of all at the contents of the relationship between
religion and the ruling classes of preceding societies. (This was characteristic of Marxists even in
periods in which many of them levelled one-sided criticism against the role of religion.)
Outstanding representatives of Marxism looked to religious laborers as their potential partners
whose objective interests are shared by people of different convictions. They should be treated
therefore as allies, not rivals. "To us it seems much more important" Lenin wrote, "for the
oppressed class to be united in the really revolutionary struggle for the earthly paradise than for the
proletarians to have a uniform opinion about the heavenly paradise." Similar attitudes were
manifested in the fight against Fascism, the policy of the popular front's "extended hand" towards
believers, the movements of resistance during World War II, the reconstruction after the war, and
then in the efforts made to create and develop a new social order. It is of course to be admitted that
a prejudiced mentality prevailed among Marxists concerning religion, for reasons mainly historical
and partly psychological and also under the influence of a vulgar approach. But it must certainly be
admitted, too, that prejudice was mutual. A Marxist should not hesitate to point out here that all
this did much harm to this country, and deteriorated interpersonal relations.

Let me emphasize again, in agreement with József Cserháti, that the necessary
elimination of prejudiced opinions does not mean abandoning one's convictions. It does mean,
however considering our partners the way they actually see themselves, and, moreover, the way
they really appear in life, not the way they are represented through some crude schematism. The
expression of our own point of view cannot be a means to mislead and manipulate the other party.
It is a precondition of confidence and success in the dialogue to expound our position authentically
and convincingly, and in a logically coherent manner.

It cannot seriously be denied that atheism forms an integral part of the Marxist world
outlook. It is clear that all types of materialism, when pursued to their farthest consequences,
to atheism. But we can be easily misled by the term atheism taken in general the same way as by that of religion in general. The atheism of mechanistic materialism denied first of all the existence of God. This it did metaphysically as a mere refutation, a categorical denial of God's existence. For the dialectical, historical materialism of Marxism, however, as it appears clearly with the young Marx, such a denial can only be a kind of 'Aufhebung'. It is negation directed at the "lost essence" (alienation) of nature and the human being which has as its goal to make that state "devoid of essence" practically impossible. Atheism then is, for Marxism, nothing but theoretical humanism. It is a mediator of the effort to realize human essence for the human being and to eliminate all forms of alienation.

**Religions as Sources of Values**

A possible answer to the above is what József Cserháti expresses in these words: "... religion is not supposed to be the satisfaction of some want or the compensation of some frustration. It is not the remedy of the soul's diseases: it is, rather, a constructive and creative link with the universe, which encompasses everything from the tiniest of things to the infinite. It extends to the limits of the people and all causes." (p. 12.) But let me recall here another answer which the Catholic Heinrich Böll formulated shortly before his death: "we feel estranged," we are not fully at home on this earth, and this makes us yearn from a completely different home. In other words, I suggest that we recognize religion as establishing a spiritual contact with the universe and with other people ("the realization of human essence"), but also that religion is differentiated from other forms of the realization of essences by the fact that religion has its own way of reacting to human frustration down on this earth: it wishes to overcome the feeling of "alienation" through the religious contact with God. There is always some need underlying religion, and the needs always issue from the lack of something. The question is how we satisfy those needs.

The important task for Marxism seems to be to explain why the need for religion arises. Naturally, it could be said that there is some eternal need which manifests itself in religion, similar to our eternal need to preserve our particular existence and to reproduce humankind as a genus in varying forms. But human need for religion does not arise in the same way as he/she feels the need to work continually (or to appease his/her hunger, to propagate, etc.). The historically changing character of the religious need is itself justified by the mere existence of atheism or religious indifference. In spite of this, Marxists cast no doubts on the objective determination of the need for religion. They rather try to properly define the relationships between the different spheres of human existence. "... the ultimately determining element is the production and reproduction of real life.
... If somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase."\(^1\)

The priority of production and reproduction "ultimately" is of course of fundamental importance for the world outlook. The founders of Marxism held that the analysis must start from the real preconditions: nature and the empirical individuals, and their relationships. They set "out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.\(^2\) Now, those preconditions are indeed atheistic. They are devoid of God, for both religion and atheism stem from that life process and can be understood on that basis. This, however, does not mean that different political, legal, moral, philosophical and religious conceptions have no active influence on the course of history. On the contrary: "There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as nonexistent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree."\(^3\)

That is to say, in history, even the economic movement cannot assert itself as necessary independently of the non-economic factors, such as the political conditions or religion. The objective historical process is a resultant factor of the clash, summing up many particular wills, which are, in turn, determined by many further conditions—in a process which produces something else than the individuals participating originally wanted, but nevertheless, the wills, plans and value preferences are inherent in the final outcome.

Even though Marxism assigns no place for transcendental beings in shaping the world, it does take into account the real historical function of the religions, that is, the fact that the religious relationship of people to their God plays an important part in history, whether God exists or not. (Marx actually took up a debate with Kant and maintained that as far as men really believe in supernatural beings, their belief exerts an influence upon them. "And in this sense, all gods, both pagan and Christian, had a real existence. Or did Apollo of Delphi not exercise real power over the life of the Greeks?"

Religions are, therefore, real historical forces within their own conditions of existence, independently of the Marxist perspective which presents them as expressions of real life processes and, of course, as embodiments of alienation that pervades the latter. This, then, also means that Marxists explain the transcendental on the basis of particular features of the life process which appear to be in principle theoretically inconceivable, and practically uncontrollable. These features have played a dominant role throughout all our history until now. Religion, on the other hand, can
not only express and embody the alienation but itself fight it and protest against it. In this way, religion does not cease to make efforts to attain genus being, which embodies the great aims of humankind: justice, equality, and freedom.

Socialist Goals, Religious Ideas and Moral Reconstruction

What is meant here by "continuing progress"? First of all, Cserháti recognizes our age as committed to social liberation. We want to stop exploitation and oppression, "to abolish social injustice and inequality, i.e. poverty." (pp. 7-8) He adds that "the socialist ideas at the foundations of our society would be fit to provide the youth with a real choice of values." (p. 10) He also finds it important to remark that he himself "has known many Marxists with high moral standards who are faithful to their principles and to the ideology of the party, and lead an exemplary, honest, altruistic moral life." (p. 8) These words speak for themselves: they make us understand that their author accepts the aims of socialism, as well as socialist moral values, and respects people with different convictions. Naturally, he approaches these phenomena from the point of view of a Catholic Christian, that is to say, he takes a distinct theoretical position. The further progress of the dialogue requires us to consider some aspects of those differences in the theoretical approach.

In the service of social progress, Cserháti writes, "the first and most fundamental task is the internal liberation of the human being, a primary condition or originator of which is the conscience and the activity of distinguishing good from bad." This is fulfilled if we do what is good and avoid what is bad. But "we are and remain moral if in our manifestations we can place the spiritual and mental values higher than utility if we see progress and general cultural development in the rise of moral standards, and if we attach greater value to these than to possession and the accumulation of wealth." Also, "if we are not obsessed to seek self-realization and the satisfaction of our desires." "Socialist morals, which are so often invoked, in fact involve the transcendence of individualistic ethics and goals of life when the latter remain exclusively on the individual's horizon: reference to 'I' is replaced by plans and perspectives based on the point of view of 'we'."

Honestly I must say I find it difficult to accept the claim that "the first and most fundamental task is the internal liberation of the human being. For I should be confronted by the question why, during almost twenty centuries of dominance, Christianity could not attain that internal liberation in the face of continual bloodshed, exploitation, oppression and misery in the world—at least, it could not attain a sufficient degree of liberation. (If we are not to indulge in simplistic evil, we must recognize the role of social structures which interfered with the intentions of evangelists and teachers of morals, and which fostered violence, egoism and the subjugation of other men.)

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It would nevertheless be a doctrinarian mistake to deny that we need, and even more today than yesterday, to appeal to the better part of our self, to concentrate our moral strength on the fight against overwhelming particular interests and against empty hedonism or immoral cynicism. Marxism's denial of the independence of morals from human desires, needs and aspirations does not mean at all that the movements of the economic and political spheres would automatically generate and realize moral values. For example, those elementary moral rules approved of by every explicit religion could not have become universal unless they had facilitated communal life through public control when people were unequal on the plane of society, power and property relations. No doubt those norms prescribed something that did not yet exist in a full-fledged form in ordinary life, as they abstracted from the actual differences between people and were equally applicable to all. The elementary norms are limited in so far as they cannot fully be enforced, or find application through being breached and are subject to different interpretations, owing to ceaseless social conflicts. But this fact is not incompatible with the relatively autonomous tendency to realize people respect even if they appear to be unattainable. (Moreover, these values can always be postulated, and the subjective aspirations to them are no less part of their realization than are the objectively found human relationships, with which they may harmonize or not at certain points.)

The actual moral renewal, to my mind, depends on the consideration of both sides. It depends on the conscious and persistent efforts to commit oneself to the moral values—but it also depends on the extent to which one manages to determine the actual goals (thus assigning concrete contents to our moral values) the attainment of which may cope with the anomalies of the given situation. In other words, it is a condition of internal renewal for us to properly choose among the outer influences. We must internalize the components which are beneficial to human relationships, eliminating at the same time the harmful influences, and then we again objectify or externalize through our activity the external factors previously internalized—another point where I find myself in agreement with József Cserháti.

Community, Utility, Morals

One must also appreciate Cserháti's point that our moral values are not to be subordinated to some narrow utilitarian principle. Marxism is no utilitarianism or economism, nor is it by any means an apology of possession and the accumulation of wealth; it is theoretical humanism. From its principle of considering the human being to be the supreme being for the human being, it necessarily follows that Marxism can only consider as useful what is to the advantage of the human person and of human relationships. It was not by accident that Marx opposed riches which
the bourgeois "borné" turned into a fetish, and identified with mere possession, to the gradually unfolding content of riches: the rich and self-enriching, creative, social personality.

There are three comments which seem necessary to make here. First, all morals without exception are aimed at some social result, such as confirming or suitably modifying human contacts. Perhaps Kant's irony is exaggerated when he notes that the understanding of salvation as a kind of reward means that virtue secretly "begs for reward," but it remains true that the believer who relies on the reward in order to reinforce his/her efforts to lead a moral life considers it his/her own personal "benefit" if he/she manages to love his/her fellow human being like himself/herself. He/she also attributes primary social significance to this act of his/hers.

My second remark is that we can never regard the possession of certain goods as morally indifferent. The prohibition corresponding to "thou shalt not steal" in this country is obviously designed nowadays to defend only the earnings of honest work. Yet it would be a mistake to rigidly oppose the possession of material goods to moral perfection, and to designate the sole criterion of morality as the acceptance of the superiority of spiritual values to material reality. (That would imply, for example, that we are moral only insomuch as we can ignore the interests of the society and of the economic progress of the individual.) No one would claim and, certainly, nor would Bishop Cserháti, that misery is after all more favorable to moral development than if people's normal material and cultural needs are satisfied. It may be appropriate to remember that Marxist materialism does not derive human relationship from material goods. Rather, it derives from the objectively human relationships their reified forms, and it in fact sees its task in superseding that reification in the course of history. According to Marxism, the accumulation of goods produced and the increasing of consumption are not the goal of development. On the contrary, they are means of developing human relationships to a higher level, and of developing people with a higher culture. All the same, they are indispensable as means, and both their production and consumption form an integral part of human culture. Without them, the existence not only of morals but of people as well would be impossible. There may be collisions, as there are indeed for both subjective and objective reasons, among the roles which people assign to material goods and spiritual ones in their endeavors, but it seems certain that frustrating poverty is no better for moral development than is unearned material wealth. This should be kept in mind by many participants in recent discussions.

When we seek to formulate the message of this new period of dialogues and try to see the "novel chances of an inner front," we must take into account the increased significance of the moral factors. While one is unwilling to take the acknowledgement of human expanding needs to be nothing but an apology of the craving for possession and wealth, it would equally seem
unacceptable to link moral perfection with a condemnation of the efforts at achieving material security and welfare. What should be done instead would be to prevent welfare from eliciting the moral indifference of consumer mentality and to help it promote human cultural and moral advancement. It is a genuine goal of Marxism to provide for production and welfare in a way that would simultaneously facilitate the many-sided and harmonious development of human relationships, communities and persons. This position, I think, could serve as a basis for a "nation-wide consensus," for it equally rejects the bourgeois pitfalls of hedonism and utilitarianism as well as an obsolete form of thin spiritualistic asceticism.

To come to my third comment, I fully share the view that socialist morals must supersede individualism and any "life program and moral commitment on the individual's horizon," let alone the abuse of power. We are aware of the problems which stem from the various forms of individualism all too often and still found in Hungary as we are approaching the turn of this century. Perhaps I can add something which I hope will meet with József Cserháti's approval. Individualistic egoism is nothing but the pursuing of one's own interests to the disadvantage of the community. But its counterpart, altruism, i.e. the unconditional subordination of the individual to the community, testifies to the same antagonism between the interests of the individual and the community as does individualism. In crisis situations, such a subordination may and does become inevitable. Nevertheless, it is imperative to strive for relative harmony between individual and collective development, in order that collectivism provide the grounds for the mental, spiritual and material motivation of the individuals for the improvement of communal forms. All the more so, since these forms promote individual development at the same time.

That is to say, the development of the social individual, who is a crucial factor under our present circumstances, remains a primary concern, in order to take fuller account of the individual's needs, interests, propensities and world of values. The Communist Manifesto already called for "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all," and present-day efforts to make further progress in socialist democracy are directed at attaining those two aims simultaneously. József Cserháti must have had good reasons to mention "individual and communal attitudes" (p. 12) in his study, for the history of Christianity also shows the role of altruism (usually paired with asceticism) to be the same ambiguous as that of personal, individual commitment to faith: both have proved to be progressive but, at the same time, they displayed certain limitations.

To be sure, a Marxist must find it of interest to study the posterior history of those forms and the attempts at superseding them. But, nevertheless, what he thinks most important is to discover the actual roles of the different religious communities - among them the so-called basic
communities—which József Cserháti mentions, too, in their situation of twofold tension. It is to be examined how far those communities enrich their own members with qualities of open, all-round personalities, and how they enhance the process of socialization and strengthen "social commitment." These then involve the question whether there is a consciously and carefully elaborated cultural, moral, political and economic approach to the non-religious individuals and communities. I think the ideal of a "life for the community" voiced by József Cserháti implies the necessity of all these conditions. It must be said, however, that many of us find the experiments made by the "basic communities" premature and often contradictory.

Is there some inner consciousness which prompts this "desire for community" (p. 12), characteristic of both Marxists and Christians? When Marxists point out that the human being is in principle a social being and that his/her values are generic values, they emphasize the importance of such desires in some sense. And when they add that religion is also a realization of genericity in its own specific way, they admit that religions also aspire to genericity while they connect it to the deity. It was during World War II that György Lukács wrote: "Atheist communists and Catholic believers can fight together against Hitler according to their deepest convictions, with the only difference that... each group has its own preference for different degrees in the historical achievements of men's and people's fight for equality; nevertheless, both call for emancipation and stand up against the inequality in principle which gave rise to modern capitalism."4

The "desire for community," then, is part and parcel of human existence, but it is also a fact that, until now, certain social structures have impeded the full realization of that desire. It is no surprise that Catholics, though recognizing the positive aspects of secularization, accuse the Enlightenment and illuminism of the emergence of subjectivism, of "emancipation' trying to get rid of any kind of bondage" and of "upsetting the mental and spiritual balance of medieval Europe," thus making it impossible for our desire to be fulfilled. Let us, however, consider two further points. First, it is true that there were communities in medieval Europe, which then were dissolved, if not by the Enlightenment, by bourgeois development. But those communities were opposed to one another in hierarchical ties, and the relationships within them were characterized by personal dependence. The "Fall", i.e. the emergence of inequalities was not a peculiarity of the Modern Age.

The other, more important, point is that a solution must be found to the bourgeois problem of the conflict between the individual and the community (this is what socialism by its essence undertakes), but this could hardly be settled by returning to earlier, more primitive forms of community. This is why Christians find it a difficult question what to propose to replace
"consumer greed, dullness, superficiality and irresponsibility." (p. 13) Are adherents of different religions able and ready to strive for a society of a new type not only as regards its _elementary communities but in its whole detailed structure_; a society which is consciously designed to maintain the interaction of highly developed, conscientious persons and the various levels of communities which are formed of them—ultimately to overcome antagonistic social conflicts between classes and strata with their help?

**Video meliora, deteriora sequor**

It is not enough here to simply refer to basic moral values, even though such reference is a very important topic for the dialogue between believers and Marxists. For it is not easy to determine what we can call good in the given situation. But it is even more difficult to answer St. Augustine's question how it is possible for us to see what is good and yet to do what is wrong. (Cserháti says, "the human being is always aware of the difference between doing right and wrong", p. 8) In other words: what is needed to ground the moral insight and to ensure the real possibilities for proper actions in great numbers through strengthening the influence of good examples?

We have no reason to doubt the truth of József Cserháti's information that the majority of religious _families_ lead a dutiful, laborious and humble life. We are very satisfied to see that these families are kept together by strong bonds of cohesion, and that they have more children than the average, one of the reasons for which is religious faith. But we must note that religion _alone_ could hardly maintain the level of cohesion. Help to reinforce family functions came from government social policy, the success of which seems to prove that certain efficient initiatives of economic, health and social policy can even have their influence on religious families, while the absence or delay of beneficial effects could only partly be counterbalanced by moral attitudes.

Or is it not one of the morals of the great family novels in this century (_The Buddenbrooks, The Forsyte Saga, The Thibault Family, The Artamonovs_) that social changes like the recent transformations in the relations between the sexes and the different generations had a detrimental effect on family cohesion, which could not be counteracted by traditional factors of consciousness? Is it not demonstrated in Francois Mauriac's admirable _Viper's Nest_ that even a deeply Catholic family be ravaged by the egoism radiating from the structure of the society?

I do not want to appear skeptical about the significance of ideas and morals, and the question does not only concern family problems. It is much more important to answer the question how to establish an ethos, acceptable to both socialist humanists and Christians, which is sensitive to changes in the world and can deal with the _actual_ problems of our communities and
our society, taking account of the positive and the negative aspects in the emancipation of classes, strata, sexes, generations, ethnic groups, etc.

On other occasions I have already mentioned that our cooperation, which contributes to the national unity, has at its foundation our guiding moral principles, and I am sure we all can accept the values in common listed by József Cserháti. Let me quote János Kádár's words about the same problem: among the actual moral imperatives for public and private life, we can count "the active love for our socialist fatherland, respect for labor and the working man, honesty in the public sphere, the rejection of any abuse of power and of corruption, openness and empathy for other people, fairness and sincerity, together with loyalty and sympathy."

Almost all depends on the concrete contents and the real conditions of the implementation of these norms and values. In other words, it is necessary but not sufficient to speak about love and tolerance. In addition, we must know how to transform these principles into concrete programs of action in everyday life, as well as to recognize and choose among good and less good alternatives, independently and according to the given situation, so as to achieve the goal chosen, though with modifications if necessary. That is to say, we need not only norms but a moral culture, too, which is the joint activity of mature, intellectually and morally responsible persons. One important aim of our dialogue may be to initiate cooperation on the basis of such a culture, in the course of discussions.

This is also a point of agreement with Jázsef Cserháti's acute observations: "...it has become a socially recognized way of judging the value of a person: what he/she does for others. These, signs of awareness can also be derived from the self-reflectiveness or self-recognition of our age, and can thus be appropriated not only out of religious motives but also by understanding the message of the historical transformation." This is indeed a promising approach to improving the conditions of the dialogue: to progress through an increasingly adequate self-reflection of the society towards the definition of our tasks in common, and further, to expound the concrete contents of the values guiding our actions. All this, as properly underlined by Bishop Cserháti, on the basis of mutual respect, confidence and reliability, as well as the willingness to learn from each other. It is also important to recognize that the dialogue should not remain on the level of theoretical discussion, as it is designed to motivate joint activity (and thus a kind of competition). The confrontation of the foundations of world views may be a less efficient motivating force than a comparison of our views on the human being, together with the construction of a "new spiritual and moral world." (This will provide opportunities for discussions about problems of the family, democratic co-existence, or joint activity in the fields of humanism and culture.)
Dialogue and Plurality

Is it the recognition of, and a search for, pluralistic solutions that we discern from József Cserháti's twofold recommendations to participants of the dialogue? Plurality in world outlooks has been de facto recognized for a period of time: people of different convictions or religions live and act together in our socialist society, which will remain the case in the foreseeable future. This plurality is not an ontological or an epistemological but a sociological reality, which does not reduce its importance. It must also be seen clearly that the recognition and acceptance of the plurality of world outlooks leads to a constructive, mutual tolerance: Marxists should take into account and carefully evaluate the points of view of the Churches and of religious people, while the latter should adopt the same attitude towards the former.

All this, however, does not necessarily mean that the political will manifested in political activity is similarly pluralistic. As we know it from history, it is possible to reach consensus in practical political activity among people with different world outlooks. Such a consensus naturally require continual fight and negotiations between the different positions in order to define the goals and the means of the common activity. But, unless we are prepared to let particularism prevail in the place of joint efforts at promoting the common cause, we must try to preserve this consensus once achieved, as well as undertake the practical steps on both sides to maintain the dialogue.

Here we can point to the all-important role which social ideas or, we may say, ideologies, play in the formulation of human social aspirations and throughout their struggles. Obviously it is not our task to decide which ideas Catholics are prepared to adopt and which are the ones they reject. These are questions currently discussed within the Church. We can perhaps signal, however, that this is an area on which, while trying to learn from each other, it is easier to bring positions closer than in the more fundamental questions of world outlook. To put it in another way: the plurality of approaches can be overcome not only in the framework of political activity but, in certain respects and on several points, in the sphere of ideology, too, without any loss of ground to the opposite world outlook. Karl Rahner went as far as to say that the dialogue will be more fruitful if the Christians become better Christians and the Marxists better Marxists in its course.

Such an ideological development is necessary and desirable when we want to embark upon common programs which we propose to carry out according to our own conviction and a new theoretical appraisal of the situation. Namely, if we strive to establish and strengthen that socialist national unity which has been the goal of our efforts until now and which is one of József Cserháti's main concerns according to his article. It is not enough to thank our partner in the dialogue for his efforts: we must also take on the responsibility for helping the unity of believers
and Marxists to develop in everyday practice, *departing from plurality and tending towards cooperation.*


3Engels: *loc. cit.*
4"The Real Germany" [in Hungarian], Társadalmi Szemle, 1982, No. 1, p. 41.
5*Világosság*, 1985. No. 11,