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THESES FOR A CHRISTIAN-MARXIST DIALOGUE
by Hans-Hinrich Jenssen

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1) The status of armaments and existing and planned (SDI) weapon technology have created a situation in which an unconditional priority must be given to the effort toward preservation of peace and avoidance of nuclear war. The situation demands that all powers amenable to reason and a sense of reality work together, surmounting social, political, and ideological-religious distinctions. The impressive development of the international peace movement of the 1980s is an expression as well as a confirmation of this analysis of the situation, which is the guiding principle of the Socialist camp and its constitutive parties (cf. the timely and important suggestions of Mikhail Gorbachev).

2) Churches and Christians, as well as other religious groups, are increasingly recognized and sought out by Marxists as important allies.

3) The Socialist state's political position toward the churches, in which it interprets freedom of belief and of conscience generously, and strictly on the basis of acceptance of responsibility, has removed the necessity for religiously motivated anti-Communism, as defined by international standards, and, as far as internal politics are concerned, it motivates to a stronger degree all Christians to give their best to Socialist society, and by this means, to make an effective contribution to their own well-being, but also to the achievement of peace, because, as they say, "the stronger Socialism is, the more certain peace is."

4) The combined alliance of Marxists and Christians has been accompanied in our countries since our emancipation from Fascism by what we can describe as a "latent dialogue." This dialogue is now definitely being transformed into a "manifest dialogue."

5) The dialogue is characterized by the fact that it is a conversation about common, objective social and political interests and the common goals and activities which flow from them. It has a continuous and leading priority, which is reinforced and completed by a dialogue about the resulting questions, caused by the fact that we have here a situation in which people are working together, who have not only different, but actually opposing philosophical views, at least as concerns the "basic questions of philosophy." One can also say that the coalition political stance of the SED [Socialist Unity Party] contends with the fact that it is a case NOT ONLY of an alliance of various social classes and levels, but, in close connection with this, AT THE SAME TIME an alliance of people with various world-views, to which, in the Marxist sense, RELATIVELY independent meaning is attributed.

6) Dialogue does NOT mean that an identity of world-view is sought, nor does it mean that Marxists have now attributed to religion any truth-content, or that they will forego spreading and propagating their atheistic world-view in the future. And naturally, the reverse is also true of us Christians, despite all our conscientious understanding of some of the ideas of atheism. That we will retain our belief in God and its philosophical implications as the absolutely essential basis of all Christian piety is clear.

7) But Marxists do concede to religion--under definite social and political conditions--and not least on the basis of practical experience by international and national standards, more strongly than before a FUNCTION which can be evaluated positively. They recognize that Christian belief is effective not only as a quietist force, that is, as an orientation toward an other world, which keeps us from social engagement, but also as a motivation to social and societal activism and to the leading of a moral life--in sum, to an "active humanism."

8) In this sense they speak of Christian belief today--along with its negative aspects--as positive because of the following characteristics (among others):

a) a "turn toward the world," which is in no sense equivalent to Christianity becoming "worldly" but which rather bears the mark of a kind of renewal of faith, even though there might be connections to worldliness.

b) a fundamentally new interpretation of the idea of a "just war," which no longer serves, as it used to, to justify

war, but in fact serves as the justification for activities on behalf of peace.

c) an originally humanistic content.

d) a capacity for "humanistic concentration."

e) a complete openness to the consideration of scientific findings and to rational, reasonable deliberations while working out a concrete ethical system.

9) While the viewpoint mentioned under subheading (b) refers primarily to Catholic theology, the items mentioned under (a), (c), (d), and (e) touch Protestant theology in a very fundamental sense and urgently require further clarification as well as depth, in the purely internal theological field, but also in the exchange of views with Marxist allies.

10) From the perspective of Christian self-understanding it is not exclusively the ethical dimension of faith, but above all the theological-religious dimension in a narrower sense (faith itself) is of fundamental importance. Therefore, a whole array of further topics concerning Christian coexistence with Socialism is highly significant. The clarification of such topics is certainly primarily an internal theological task, but it could also become, in part, the subject of a dialogue, since "intellectual common ground" could be discovered and worked out through the "confrontation of ideas." Among these topics are:

a) the relation of Christian faith, on the one hand, to so-called "negative ambiguous areas," on the other hand, to the positive realities of human life, to the "center of life" (Bonhoeffer) and, in connection with this, also the evaluation of the "theodicy question" and the political questions which arise from it.

b) the meaning of scientific insights not only for the ethical orientation of a Christian but also for Christian understanding of the world and its people.

c) the question on the one hand of the evaluation of the themes of atheism, on the other hand, of their refutation.

d) the necessary reciprocal relationship between "political deaconship" and "intellectual deaconship."

11) In summary, it should be stated that the search for intellectual and spiritual common ground for Christians and Marxists can make an essential contribution to preventing political misunderstandings or even political alienation due to differences of outlook concerning the

basic question of philosophy. In fact, mutual efforts toward the preservation of peace and toward social advancement and humanistic goals is like an important underground stream, which prevents the flow of common endeavors from trickling away (freely adapted from Albert Schweitzer).

Reference to Marxist publications:

1) Die Philosophie des Friedens im Kampf gegen die Ideologie des Krieges [The Philosophy of Peace in the Struggle against the Ideology of War]. Berlin: Dietz, 1984; particularly Wolfgang Kliem, "Religion and the Struggle for Peace in our Time," pp. 202-41.

2) Philosophen im Friedenskampf [Philosophers of the Peace Effort]. Berlin: Dietz, 1986, in this source, among others: Victor Garadzha, "Common Responsibility for the Preservation of Peace--the Basis for the Dialogue between Marxists and Christians Today," Wolfgang Kliem, "Communists and Christians Together in the Struggle for Peace," pp. 96-104 and 105-12.

3) S. Beier, H. Fisch, G. Pollach, Neue demokratische Bewegungen im Westeuropa [New Democratic Movements in Western Europe]. Berlin: Dietz, 1986, "Christian Forces and the Peace Movement," pp. 91-103.

4) Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Philosophie [The German Journal for Philosophy], 7/1981, 8/9, 1984, 3x; 10/1985, 6/1985, articles by Kliem, Klohr, Kroh, Lutter, Volland, Seidel, Wrona.

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