

The Hungarian Lutheran Church and the “Theology of Diaconia”

Dispute over the “Theology of Diaconia” – the Hungarian version of “the Church in Socialist Society”

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One consequence of the Second World War was to confront the East European Churches with socialist-communist ideology and its corresponding social system. A fairly brief initial period of relative tolerance in the internal life of these countries was followed by a more decisive phase when clear directives were issued. These directives affected the life of the Churches 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* to 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 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 to us in our 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 there. 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 describes 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:

. . . for us, this service embraces active cooperation with the Marxists 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 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.

It is helpful to have this clarification. It will enable us to steer clear of any naïve 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 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) hierocracy, (b) conformism, (c) retreat into the ghetto, (d) opposition. In Káldy's view, his own Church chose a fifth way, namely, that of diaconia. Substantial development of this course began only after the Hungarian revolution (1956) and the definitive removal of Bishop Ordass from office by the civil authorities (1958).* Zoltán Káldy assumed office as Ordass's successor.

"Theology of Diaconia"

When we ask what the "way of diaconia" means in substance, not surprisingly we are referred at once to the ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments, including, of course, the ministry of love (diaconia in the traditional sense). In 1964, Káldy said: "We have, however, gone beyond the previously established limits of diaconia . . . and see and

*See the article by John Eibner, "Lajos Ordass: Prophet, Patriot or Reactionary?", in *RCL* Vol. 11 No. 2, 1983 — *Ed.*

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 among the races, and struggling against war and on behalf of peace". In other words, this is how the proclamation takes on concrete shape. Appeal is made to the example of Jesus who came "not to be ministered unto but to minister" (Matt. 20:28) — this biblical citation is also the title and epigraph of a volume of Káldy's sermons and addresses published in 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 *diakonein* (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 a ransom for many" (Mark 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 2 Corinthians 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 war. 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 programme of the new socialist system. With its "diaconia" thus defined, the Church can be accepted and can help in the building 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 by Hungarian theologians. *Diakonos* has now been complemented by *Kyrios*, the oldest title of Christ. But even this title has not been given the central significance which it has in the New Testament and in the ancient creeds of the Church. What is emphasised is not the glorified majesty of Christ as the Lord in heaven and on earth (Philippians 2:5-11) but the revelation of Christ as "the Lord who serves" — so that, once more, we are confronted with a one-sided 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 the fact of 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 are 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 their neighbour. 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 one's neighbour.

Consequences of this One-sidedness

In the "theology of diaconia" there is a one-sided 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 view of life promulgated by the Church in earlier times (prior to socialism).

Jesus criticises those who prefer to rule rather than serve; but he illustrates the attitude of domination by referring to "kings" and "those in authority" in the nations. This is His answer to the question as to which of His disciples was to be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24). This dimension of social criticism in the sayings of Jesus is not retained in the "theology of diaconia". This theology directs its criticism one-sidedly at the Church's past behaviour 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 an 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 interests 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 pietistic, individualistic behaviour patterns. Self-denial is not to be thought of as an ascetic inward-turning but as the requirement that the

disciple is to serve his neighbour rather than himself. Yet when this theology insists that the Christian should turn outwards towards his neighbour, it nevertheless leaves out of the reckoning the problem of the Christian's suffering. Christian service, however, 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 bear his cross in his discipleship of Christ. This is however the central problem with the "theology of diaconia": it ignores the suffering of the disciple in this form. In a socialist society, when a Christian suffers, this is regarded as a self-induced suffering. If someone suffers, it is right that he should do so because of his irrational conduct in a social order which seeks what is best for him: for in a socialist society there cannot be any Christian martyrs.

One illustration of this is the problem of "outcasts" in the present social 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 injustices only begin outside Hungary, above all in countries towards which political sympathy is not encouraged in other respects? The universalisation of the concept of diaconia plays down problems within Hungary itself as well as in countries with which it has committed treaty obligations. It is permissible to criticise 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, and today conditions in Poland may not even be mentioned — as if diaconia somehow did not apply in such cases! Nor are Jews and intellectuals who have been expelled from socialist countries regarded as suitable subjects 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 criticise abuses in Hungarian society. Writers and historians can speak of conditions which ought to be of vital importance precisely for the future of "social diaconia". In art, plays, films and books we find opinions and views which the Church finds it impossible to express. 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 for example when people are made to suffer for their refusal to do 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 consultation with the Church, but is imposed upon it. In consequence, the social problems of one's own country are inviolable. These problems, especially in the area of church-state relations, are supposed to have already been solved in an ideal way. The concordat agreed with the State in 1948 brought the then bishop, Ordass, 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 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, and is content to play a quite secondary role and to live in conformity with the laws which are communist institutions" (*The Reality of Communism*, 1981 (English edition 1984)).

At Aarhus in 1977, a consultation organised by the Lutheran World Federation discussed four possible responses for the Church in its encounter with Marxism: (a) withdrawal into a ghetto, (b) opposition, (c) conformism, (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 official statements made by Hungarian church leaders it is repeatedly asserted that Marxist ideology is not to be identified with the Church's own message. 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 corresponding to that of 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 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 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 about it.

As examples of this, he quotes so-called "Christian Hungary" prior to the Second World War 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 programme, in the discussion of which Christians have no right to join, and no right to share in the decision making.

This judgement finds support — certainly unintentionally — in the German version of a book written by former bishop Erny Ottlyk, *Der Weg einer Evangelischen Kirche im Sozialismus* (The Path for an Evangelical Church in Socialist Society) (Union Verlag, Berlin 1982). In his preface to this German version, Günter Wirth, the chief editor of the journal *Standpunkt*, writes: "The path for an evangelical Church in socialist society in the first place simply means the path for an evangelical Church into socialism". "The Church in a socialist society" is the definition of a situation. But the path for a Church into socialism is one of integration. This path is made easier by the "theology of diaconia" which furnishes an ideological background for this process. 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 social upheavals, the Christian tradition plays a deep-rooted role even though this State cannot possibly recognise 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. His book *Századunk és a Protestantizmus* (Our Century and Protestantism) (Budapest 1981) 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" (= Marxist) study of society. Far from making the acceptance of such an approach impossible, 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 has reached the conclusion that the social and political system based on the theory and practice of socialism solves the real social problems of our time, and that this religion itself is therefore able to offer its own auxiliary service in the implementation of this programme. In Poór's view, this theology not only is of great interest for world Christianity but also confronts the Marxist-Leninist analysis of religion with new problems. Here he is presumably thinking of the fact that a religion which is integrated into socialism can no longer be regarded as "opium of the people", is no longer the opponent but the servant of the socialist system. 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 February 1977 in the atheistic journal *Világosság* 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 progressive society is a criterion of 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 real "progressive society".

Poór 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 are the theoretical arguments in Marxism-Leninism and theology respectively. The "theology of diaconia" is obviously at odds with the Marxist-Leninist methodology. 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 Christian autonomy. 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 aspect 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 programme of action decided by the political leaders and it is the people that have to implement this programme.

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

(a) It imparts knowledge of official doctrine and obliges people to accept it. By providing constantly progressive "actualisations", the impression is given that the doctrine is developing. In reality, however, these concrete examples can be chosen in a very random and arbitrary manner.

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

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

(d) It 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 the Dialogue with Marxism

In the recent past, a new phenomenon is to be observed in the dialogue between Christians and Marxists. As Zoltán Káldy stated in 1982:

We have often said that the dialogue between Christians and Marxists is conducted by us in practical life, that is, by our

cooperation. This has proved correct and fruitful. We have thereby avoided the temptation of the *Kulturkampf*. Such a struggle would have set members of our 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.

Coming as it does from a man who to a large extent defines the policies of his own Church as well as its theology (of diaconia), this 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 says, in the form of practical cooperation. This attitude may have been due, in part, to anxiety lest the proclamation of the Gospel by the Church become mixed up with the ideology of the State. 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's 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 programme. It should be noted that it was J. Poór himself, the Marxist-Leninist partner in the dialogue, who recognised 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 programme is a non-negotiable axiom.

The text from which the above quotation is taken was certainly published after the initiative for the dialogue had been taken. As an official event, the initial phase took place in the presence of the President of the state Office for Religious Affairs. The "scientific" dialogue was held in Debrecen in September 1981, and, as was announced, is to be continued. According to statements 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 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 Marxism and Christianity, as he demonstrates in his book. Apparently, 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 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 a particular Marxist state, the problem assumes a different complexion. For then the changes which have taken place in the external political structure have to be recognised as axiomatic. This is the starting point. The only possible constructive opportunities for dialogue are then joint conclusions about concrete cooperation between Christians and Marxists. And here the theology of service has its state-recognised role to play: that of producing cooperation with the programme determined by the Party or the State. The Church has no influence whatever over this programme 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 changes in society of a socialist nature.)

The basic 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 the rulers in accordance with their own interests? Are 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 their 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 an integral part of the Marxist ideological machine just as much as the theology of the German Christians accommodated itself to the Nazi ideology? To be sure, Marxism does not advance any religious claim. But here 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 satisfaction, they have been able to report to their compatriots that a growing interest is being taken in their approach. As a result, one of the main interests of the Marxist-Christian dialogue is in its ecumenical significance in the international arena. If this theology, tied in as it is with the Marxist programme, can demonstrate itself beyond the frontiers of Hungary as successful, an opportunity exists for the Churches to fulfil a certain mission in respect of the West.

The "theology of diaconia" is certainly 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 with which it could become associated. As far as a fruitful dialogue is concerned, one important point needs to be made. In the free world, this "theology of diaconia" can be heard as one view among others. It will inevitably come under discussion, however, along with other points of view and the result will be mutual correction and the avoidance of one-sidedness. Theologians from Eastern Europe have often pointed out the link between Western theology and its social context. Now it is their turn to note how their own theology is dependent on its social context.

When this "theology of diaconia" is expounded at ecumenical meetings, its ideological framework very seldom impinges on the consciousness of outsiders. This inadequate understanding is not dangerous so long as this theology does not secure the ecumenical community's unqualified approval and recognition. The representatives of the "theology of diaconia" cannot then translate their ideas into practical programmes in their own country without attracting the critical observations of their ecumenical partners. The "theology of 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 adopt 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 of these that they are thereby supporting the concrete political programmes into which this theology is translated. The ecumenical world must be much more cautious about this function which has been thrust upon it if it wants to perform a genuinely fraternal service. In Hungary any critical analysis of the "theology of diaconia" is out of the question. The ecumenical dialogue, therefore, is of considerable poten-

tial importance, provided it is well-informed about the *Sitz im Leben* of this theology. Obviously, this dialogue needs to be able to show brotherly 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 simply, out of a naïve feeling of "brotherhood", to continue encouraging a Church within a particular socialist society in the direction of simple conformism.

Slanders Rejected

Declaration by leading officials of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

1. At the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee in the Summer of 1980 in Augsburg the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary invited the next LWF Assembly to Budapest. After a thoroughgoing discussion, the Executive Committee accepted this invitation by an overwhelming majority. This decision means that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary — a genuine "minority church" with less than half a million members — was able to provide the first opportunity for a world-wide Christian meeting to be held in a socialist country. The government of the Hungarian People's Republic has guaranteed the granting of entry visas to all the delegates. Our Church and congregations have hereby assumed a great burden and accepted a great task [. . .]

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary hopes that the coming Assembly will make an important contribution towards deepening the fellowship of the "Lutheran world family", and towards strengthening its unity in Christ and its service for peace and justice in our world [. . .]

2. While engaged in preparing for the Assembly, we have been shocked to note that certain ecclesiastical and political circles, press media and individuals in some countries in the West are busy making difficulties for the host country and Church and trying to intensify political antagonisms between West and East and conflicts between our different social systems. This clearly goes against the task of the Church of Christ which is to build bridges in a world of conflicts and tensions, to work for understanding and mutual confidence, and to be a "peacemaker".

We are profoundly shocked by the fact that certain ecclesiastical circles in the West want to assail and slander our Church, which lives in a socialist society and tries to remain faithful to her Lord Jesus Christ; they attack and slander the theology and diaconia of our Church, her relationship to the State, her leaders, and — above all — our presiding bishop Dr Zoltán Káldy. Appealing to the Eighth Commandment of God, we condemn