in non-combatant capacities, for example in medical units, alongside Tito's partisans. The Ljubljana Peace Working Group held meetings in December 1986 calling on the authorities to permit alternative service, and collected signatures in support of their cause. They won the support of the Slovenian Party President Joze Smole, who stated that:

> What is significant in those youth peace initiatives is that young people want to join more actively in the question of peace . . . and I think those initiatives deserve every support.

He also criticised those in other parts of Yugoslavia who presented such initiatives as a direct attack on the Yugoslav People's Army.

The initiative, however, met with little success. In this fragmented country, the army is one of the strongest unifying factors. Each army unit includes soldiers from each republic, and the implications of this for general stability make military issues extremely sensitive. The government and military command are therefore reluctant to discuss even minor changes, and the current unstable situation means that the issue of conscientious objection is unlikely to be resolved soon. The initiative put forward by the Ljubljana group was interpreted by the authorities as a further indication of Slovenia's aspirations towards decentralisation, and was therefore brushed aside without due consideration. Joze Smole had gone so far as to outline possible alternatives to military service, but these were not examined. On 15 January 1987, the Presidium of the Socialist Alliance (covering the whole of Yugoslavia) decided to reject the calls for an alternative form of civilian service, and stated that "no further debate should be conducted" on the initiative.

Compiled by members of Keston College staff

"The Role of Religion in our Society"

Over the past two years the Hungarian intellectual monthly, *Kritika*, has published a series of articles on religion in Hungary. These have been styled a "debate" under the title "The Role of Religion in Our Society". The series provides an insight into the kind of discussion about religion now current in official intellectual forums.

Kritika has a small readership mainly confined to the intelligentsia, and has an editorial policy which operates within the framework of party guidelines, although this framework does permit the questioning of party policy on peripheral issues. The contributors to this discussion on religion range from Marxist-oriented Christians to rigidly doctrinaire Marxists. Their tendency is to view religion from the outside as a socially-determined phenomenon subject to rational analysis. The absence of contributors whose views are not broadly in harmony with Marxism and the policies of the Hungarian communist party is one of the salient features of the discussion.

The main concern here is how critical thinkers should relate to religion in the light of Marxist

principles and party policy. Since the late 1950s, the party has officially accepted that religion will long continue to exist within Hungarian society, and that the way forward lies not through brutal confrontation but through an "alliance" of all social forces under the party's leadership. It was some years, however, before the shift away from the militantly confrontational policies of the Stalinist era became evident. More recently, party officials have been prepared to admit that religion may contain some socially beneficial elements. The question now facing Hungary's Marxists is that of how the social impact of religion should be evaluated, and of the appropriate role of religion in Hungary's Marxist-Leninist society.

The discussion is opened by Miklós Tomka, Hungary's leading sociologist of religion, whose article provides the keynote for the entire series. His thesis is that religion not only still exists in Hungary, but is undergoing regeneration. He discerns two contrasting processes here. On the one hand there is the sharp decline of what he speaks of as traditional forms of religious feeling and practice. As evidence, he points to the statistical results of his surveys showing a great drop in church attendance, in the number of clergymen, priests and nuns, and in the percentage of church baptisms, weddings and funerals in recent decades. His surveys also reveal that less than half of Hungarian adults admit to being "religious", and that of this minority about eighty per cent claim to be "religious in their own way" as opposed to "religious in accordance with the teaching of the church". Tomka bluntly concludes that "the old traditional religious sentiment is falling into decay", and suggests that the institutions of the church are experiencing "crisis". On the other hand, Tomka sees signs of the regeneration of religiosity in new forms in Hungary's mushrooming basis communities and other small religious groups. There is also, he notes, a growing general interest in religion, which is reflected in the resurgence of religious themes in contemporary Hungarian art, music and literature. Tomka dismisses the notion that Christianity will ever recover the lost allegiance of the great majority of Hungarians, but he estimates that the decline in the percentage of "religious" people will bottom out at about thirty per cent of the population.

Far from ascribing to religion a negative impact on social development, Tomka believes that — especially as it is manifest in the blossoming basis communities and other small groups — religion is a "propelling force of creativity" and the "motor of action in the solution of common problems". Religion can serve these functions, he maintains, because it is the "most enduring carrier of values" in a society which is suffering an acute crisis of values. Prominent political figures, Tomka says, seem to agree that religion has much to offer socialist society. Politburo member György Aczél has stated that

> it is easier to forge an honourable, principled alliance for the fulfilment of the . . . tasks of socialism with the believing person than with the indifferent who do not care about anything, or with those who deny any kind of moral standard.

The General Secretary of the Patriotic People's Front, Imre Pozsgay, has enumerated principles fostered by religion which he believes are particularly important for Hungarian society: love, tolerance, respect for marriage and motherhood, recognition of the value of work, the rejection of selfishness, etc.

While Tomka mentions the crisis of values in Hungary as one reason

for the regeneration of religion, he does not analyse that crisis. This leaves a gap in his portrait of religious feeling which is not filled by any of the subsequent articles in the series. The question of why such a crisis of values has come about in a society which is building socialism haunts the whole discussion. Imre Valcsicsák, a lecturer at Budapest's Karl Marx University, rejects Tomka's suggestion that religion can help ease the crisis. He proposes that the various communist youth organisations and employing organisations should try harder to communicate the values of socialism and to provide a real sense of community for their members. Student Ervin Csizmadia, however, considered Valcsicsák's solution mere wishful thinking. In his opinion, society would wait in vain for better programmes from the communist youth organisations.

Tomka's proposition that society can benefit from values rooted in religion gained the broad assent of virtually all 13 contributors to the series. But there were differing views on whether the good that religion offers outweighs the bad. This question was fiercely debated. Valcsicsák took issue with what he regarded as Tomka's one-sided view of the positive qualities of religion. Making a distinction between religion and the socially beneficial acts of religious people, he sees the latter as positive, but not the former. He tells a story to illustrate his point. A quiet, peaceful man is going home from the pub. He sees three men attacking a girl. Emboldened by alcohol, he drives them off single-handed. Does this, asks Valcsicsák, mean that alcohol is a good thing? Valcsicsák also draws attention to terrible crimes which have been committed by religiously motivated people — for example, the mass murder and suicides committed by the followers of the notorious Rev. Jim Jones — and claims that religion poses a further danger to society because it usually diverts attention away from a correct understanding of the way to solve social problems effectively.

Further evidence of the harmful influence of religion on the development of a socialist Hungary comes from János Jóri, a lecturer at the University of Pécs. He takes Tomka to task for mentioning liberation theology as an example of positive political action arising from religion, while failing to mention that the Pope has criticised aspects of the new theology, declaring that priests should refrain from political activity and that all the faithful should practise non-violence. Jóri then draws on an attitude survey conducted by his university which compares how believers and non-believers view the future of Hungarian society. The believers emerged as having a more pessimistic outlook, despite the fact that the majority of them think that the number of believers in society will increase. This Jóri interpreted as inadvertent testimony on the part of most believers that the religious values adhered to by the increasing number of believers would contribute little to the solution of social problems.

While opinions were divided on whether the good in religion outweighed the bad, none of the contributors advocated a return to the brutal anti-religious policies of the 1950s, when, in the words of Jóri, the Marxist state "committed violence not only against the churches, but also against believers". Valcsicsák represents what might be called a hard-line view of the subject. He maintains that Marxists must not give up "the struggle for the abolition of the factors which produce religion". But he excludes religious people as targets in that struggle. He reminds his readers that Marxists have already learned that the use of

"administrative measures" against religious people generally becomes a "quixotism that inclines towards inhumanity". He suggests further that such repression is counter-productive and has contributed to the widespread respect for religious values in Hungarian society. Another doctrinaire Marxist, the *Népszabadság* journalist Pál E. Fehér, who generally represents official views, goes some way towards defending the repression of the past. He says that in the past the state had to use "all possible means" against the churches. The one exception he makes is the use of show trials, which he says "we condemn most strongly". But Fehér points out that the circumstances which made strong repressive measures necessary no longer apply. The struggle between the churches and the state for political power, he says, has reached the end. What is needed now is the employment of more subtle forms of propaganda which are calculated to encourage the development of a materialist world-view, but without resorting to crude anti-religious exercises.

With the era of *political* confrontation now over, not one of the *Kritika* contributors was completely opposed to co-operation between Marxists and believers. Perhaps the least enthusiastic was retired teacher and amateur classicist Ferenc Varga. He is prepared to admit that periodic and restricted co-operation is possible if dictated by necessity, but he doubts whether the values of both atheism and theism can be adequately safeguarded where there is any kind of co-operation. Varga also voices his suspicion that the Catholic Church is using its "small steps" policy to extend a subtle political influence in conjunction with its so-called "humanist Marxist partners". One of the more enthusiastic supporters of co-operation was Zoltán Fürj, a lecturer in Marxism-Leninism at the Debrecen Agricultural University. Fürj points to examples of Marxist-Christian co-operation which for him prove its potential value — for example, the struggle against fascism and the support given to the communist party by left-wing believers in the immediate post-war years. As suggested by his examples, Fürj's criterion for co-operation — one which is shared by the majority of contributors — is political. He believes that co-operation should be dependent upon the support of believers and their churches for the practical political programme of the Hungarian Communist Party. While lamenting the superficial nature of the Hungarian churches' involvement in the struggle for "social progress", Fürj sees hope in the development of a new kind of theological thought. Whereas Tomka's hope arises from new expressions of religious feeling emerging spontaneously from the grass roots level — for example, basis communities — Fürj's arises from the theologies of service worked out by leaders of the Hungarian Reformed and Lutheran Church. He says that they accept "the socio-analytical and the society-building functions of Marxist theory, the party and the state". Although this new theological thinking has been developed further in the Protestant churches, Fürj says that it has also come to the fore in the activity and declarations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. Thus the regeneration of religion is represented here as meaning that religion is not necessarily the opium of the people but a form of service which promotes and serves the development of society according to Marxist-Leninist principles.

In finding a mutual basis for co-operation, Tamás Fricz, an editor on the staff of *Ifjú Kommunista*, envisages rather more give and take

between religion and Marxism than does Fürj. He adopts the notion advocated by the former editor of the Catholic monthly *Vigilia*, Béla Hegyi, that the Christian concept of love should be a central factor in the criteria for co-operation. The ten commandments, he believes, have a universal character which transcends ideological differences, and, references to God apart, they correspond entirely to Marxist thinking. On the basis of such common values, Fricz thinks that the churches might play the role of the "living conscience" in society, and suggests that they would be best able to fulfil this function if the state and the churches were to work "relatively independently" of each other. But what appears to be Fricz's radical break with Marxist-Leninist teaching about the leading role of the party in society is no more than a mirage. Despite the seemingly broad scope for independent church action envisaged by Fricz, he, like Béla Hegyi, assumes that the commonly-held law of love will oblige the faithful to "work for socialism with Marxist methods and principles". For Fricz, this assumption is fundamental to the creation of a common platform for co-operation. Moreover, in the final analysis, Fricz imposes limits on the law of love. "Of course," he says,

> this does not mean that a Marxist, perhaps a party member, is forced to love everyone, to be understanding towards everyone, even towards those who . . . retard the realisation of collective values and interests because of their acceptance of the moral rules of religion.

The *Kritika* series reveals the possibilities and the limits of public debate in the Hungarian media on the subject of religion. The possibilities are probably greater in Hungary than in any other country in the Eastern bloc. Perhaps only in Hungary is it possible to make a strong case in the media for religion being "necessary" for the well-being of a socialist society as Tomka did. But the assumption which must remain unchallenged is that ultimately religion must be politically subservient to Marxism. Those who cannot accept this must look to *samizdat* for the publication of their views.

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