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# Letter to the Editor

20 February 1992

Dear Editor,

I have received my share of good and bad reviews, reflecting not only the inconsistencies in the quality of my work, but also the fact that I have written on subject matters about which views are greatly polarised, and some reviewers praised or condemned me on the merits of the topic rather than on the careful reading of the nuances in the work. But the reviews by Mr Peter Hebblethwaite in *Religion in Communist Lands* of my work dismay me, not because he finds shortcomings with my work, but because he ridicules me as a person for reasons that are unclear to me since our paths have never crossed. The first time it happened was in his review of my book *Christian–Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe* (rather than as incorrectly reported in his recent review, *Varieties of Christian–Marxist Dialogue*, which I edited in 1978), published in vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1983). I did not respond at that time because I did not want to dignify blows below the belt and because a bad review does not threaten the integrity of my work. Again in vol. 19, no. 3–4 (Winter 1991), pp.281–4, he chooses to treat me contemptuously and with sarcasm.

I think it safe to say that he knows little of who I am and what I have done but he selects to characterise as 'the crowning moment of his career' a minor work of mine, a simple nine-page (!) introduction to an assortment of scholarly papers delivered at two conferences in 1987 and 1988, the major merit of which was to have been accepted for publication in a Polish Marxist journal at a considerable risk to the editorial board of such a journal well before 1989. The date of the appearance of the publication did not coincide with the editorial decision; at the time no-one knew what we know now!

I am deeply convinced that Christian–Marxist dialogues were of considerable help for the well-being of Christians in Eastern Europe. I did not promote the specific dialogues for ideological reasons. My father, a Protestant minister, was killed by the Nazis; my mother, a Methodist minister, was persecuted by the communists. I hoped that dialogue with Marxists might bring about changes in policies of some communist governments towards religious people. It can be demonstrated that it not only did that but that it made a modest contribution to the internal criticisms of the socialist system which sped up its demise.

Mr Hebblethwaite could well have guessed that I myself was amused by how 'reinvigorating the Christian–Marxist dialogue' ended on the scrap-heap of history. Fortunately it was not alone; so did the cold-warriors and the arms race.

It could well be that the Christian–Marxist dialogue is dead because, indeed, it is not easy to find many convinced Marxists in Eastern Europe. I am not shedding any tears because I never entered the dialogue because of fondness for socialism but because it was the best form of encounter between rival worldviews, as it is between

Catholics and Protestants, Christians and Jews, Jews and Muslims, and between any other religious or even ideological communities. There was a time when Mr Hebblethwaite wrote as if he believed in the validity of this approach. He may no longer, but I do. Not every member of a given community is willing to dialogue; among Marxists it was a rarity. But it was exactly those rare Marxists who battled for pluralism and freedom in socialist societies and who were often severely punished by their governments and parties for doing so, including the loss of jobs. Such people were eminently worth supporting and giving international visibility. I am proud that I have done it in significant as well as insignificant conferences and in print. I consider this work as part of my ministry to the Christian church.

Mr Hebblethwaite is surely feigning that he was unable to decipher why I was so impressed by some of the Marxist and Christian honesty, lack of posturing, etc. at the conferences which I described. It is, indeed, well known that many Marxist representatives at various scholarly conferences did not act in such a forthright manner.

Mr Hebblethwaite cannot be blamed for some of the erroneous statements which crept into the review since he tried to make an indictment of the entire Christian–Marxist dialogue on the basis of a cursory introduction to a collection of conference papers. Perhaps one could forgive him the reference that my remark about socialising at the conference means drinking. Since he accuses me of imprecise writing, is his sentence 'I suppose this could mean they drank a lot' supposed to be a lesson on how to write precisely? It, indeed, *could* mean that we drank a lot, but of what beverage? If he means coffee, that we did. If he means alcohol, I dare him to be as moderate as we were. If my sentence was not entirely clear, why does he need to take the worst possible scenario? Does that not say more about him as a writer than about me?

And what is the deal about my origin? He wrote, 'He introduces himself as a "Yugoslav". No-one would do that today.' Apparently once more I am relegated to the garbage-pile of history. I looked into the issue where I supposedly so introduced myself and cannot find a reference to it. I am, indeed, a native of Yugoslavia and have no reason to be ashamed of it.

On p.282 Mr Hebblethwaite expresses a wish to have a friendly chat with me on 'what [I mean] about six times a page'. Since I hope that my career did not reach its pinnacle with that brief introduction to a collection of conference papers I would welcome future opportunities for such a chat, not only on 'precisely' stated objections to my article but on other topics as well. It just might be that Mr Hebblethwaite would then be less inclined to jest at my expense. The only two publications of mine that *RCL* reviewed were both given to the same reviewer. Is he the only expert in Great Britain on Christian–Marxist dialogue?

Most sincerely yours,

Dr Paul Mojzes,
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USA