Correspondence

The Church and Détente

To the Editors: Blahoslav S. Hruby's article in the January issue ("Cardinal Mindszenty as a Casualty of Détente") rightly points out the dangers and pitfalls of the policy of détente. It is a timely warning to the promoters of this policy carefully to assess whether the resulting meager gains justify its continuation. There is, however, another aspect which is very difficult to appraise for the simple reason that it is a hypothetical alternative: What would have happened if the cold war had continued with full force? Would the situation be better in Communist-dominated countries now? Who can tell? It is true, on the other hand, that there are almost infinite degrees between a cold war and a détente that compromises principles. Politics is the art of the possible, and it will test the prudence and skill of Western leaders to find the way that best promotes the cause of human rights and avoids the danger of war.

As for the policy of détente on the part of the various churches, and especially of the Vatican, the problem appears even more complex. Whereas Western countries have no citizens of their own under the direct political control of Communist countries, the churches have a great number of their constituents living there; the Communist regimes exercise complete political control over them and have the administrative and political power that can suppress their activities and limit their freedom. Their situation could be compared to that of hostages in an airplane. Governments are frequently forced to give in to the demands of the skyjackers in order to save the lives of the hostages. It is evident that even in the case of blackmail one may not compromise the moral and theological principles of a church, although certain sacrifices may be tolerated and accepted in other areas. The Vatican made it clear on several occasions that it was not going to sacrifice any moral and theological values but only intended to pursue the dialogue to assure some *modus vivendi* for its members to enlarge their degree of freedom. The way of stiff resistance and no-dialogue was tried in Hungary after the war. Unfortunately, it did not save the parochial and secondary schools of the Church, could not assure freedom of religious instruction, and led to the suppression of religious orders and other organizations of the Church. It is not evident yet that the new way of dialogue will achieve much more, but it would be unfair to condemn the Vatican for trying out a new policy. The Hungarian Catholic Church lives in Hungary, not in émigré communities, and it cannot be directed from abroad. Hence its leaders should be chosen from among those actually living in Hungary, which requires some dialogue on the part of the Vatican. With such leadership the Hungarian Church can develop its own way of coping with the many restrictions and problems it faces.

Thus it seems that the problem of the churches in regard to détente is much more involved than that of the Western governments. In either case, however, one is legitimately concerned that there should be sophistication in the pursuance of this policy and a thorough understanding of Marxist-Leninist goals and tactics.

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Blahoslav S. Hruby Responds:

Sharing Andrew C. Varga's concern regarding détente in relation to the cause of human rights and danger of war, I hope, as he does, that Western leaders are sufficiently prudent and skillful to deal with this problem. What worries me, however, is the spirit of Munich appeasement of 1938 which seems to be prevalent in many circles in the USA and other Western countries. It is appalling and almost frightening to hear arguments that trade and cooperation in other fields with Communist countries must be increased in spite of the fact that many persons are suffering in prisons, concentration camps, and even mental institutions because of their faith in God, their race, political dissent, or because of their desire to emigrate. As many people in 1938 recommended that Czechoslovakia should be sacrificed to Hitler to save "peace in our time," there are today many voices which suggest similar policy vis-à-vis captive nations and those which are in danger of losing their independence.

Our world desperately needs détente, but it must be a two-way-street détente which will benefit both sides and not only the Soviet Union and other Communist countries. So far the gains for the West have been disappointing.

I also agree that the problem of a policy of détente on the part of various churches, and especially of the Vatican, is even more complex. It would be unfair to condemn the Vatican and other churches for trying to begin a dialogue with Communist governments in order to obtain some relaxation of their stiff policies toward churches. We must not, however, overestimate the policy of accommodation because its results seem to be very meager. The Communist parties continue to infiltrate and manipulate the churches and to use them as a rubber stamp for their policies. Churchmen who are not willing to cooperate with Communist authorities are being eliminated from any position of influence and punished by economic and social discrimination or sent to prison.

At the same time, propaganda in all Communist countries persists in its attacks against churches for their alleged support of counterrevolutionary and antisocialist activities. A recent violent attack in the Communist ideological weekly *Tribuna* of Prague against our Research Center for Religion and Human Rights in Closed Societies is an example par excellence of this unchanging Communist hostile attitude toward churches and religious organizations. The article, "Who, How and Why Is Obstructing a Peaceful Coexistence," begins with the following indiscriminate attack against churches: "In their struggle against the first socialist country in the world, the Soviet Union, against the socialist Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries, the church hierarchy joined

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