



BHAKTIVEDANTA

Hittudományi Főiskola

1062 Budapest, Andrássy út. 53. Tel./Fax: (1) 321-77-87

8th April 2010

To: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Please allow me to ask for your help in a situation that involves your department, too. I am the president of the Bhaktivedanta College, which is a state accredited college of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Hungary. Vaishnavism or faith in Krishna is one of the main branch of the Hindu world religion. One of our biggest communities is in England, due to the Hindu population of half a million. In Hungary our church is the fourth largest among 130 religions and denominations. The church is popular because of its charitable and spiritual activities.

I would like to call your attention to the unfair practices of Dr. Mate Varga who works in your department as a researcher. Mate sometimes launches public attacks on my colleague, István Tasi (cultural anthropologist and theologian) and actively tries to block his activities, arousing public indignation in Hungary. Let me cite a few examples.

A few weeks ago the first Hungarian event of the international TED Conference was held. You may have heard TED is a non-professional, open-minded conference hosting artists, scientists, scholars, architects, representatives of different religions. The goals of the conference are defined in their inviting letter as follows: „to share thoughts and ideas; in an informal atmosphere and to cross borders, explore freely, gather insights, be entertained and inspired; in the spirit of curiosity, common sense, creativity, mutual respect and sensible change; in order to gain a better understanding of themselves, others and the world around us, and ultimately to make the world a better place”. (See also: www.ted.com.)

The organizers of the conference invited István Tasi to give a lecture under the title „Nature’s IQ”. Written with his co-author, István’s book „Nature’s IQ” was published in English and awarded „The Best Books of the Year” by USA Book News in 2009. The book presents a spiritual interpretation of the origin of inborn animal instincts. Originally he planned to speak on the subject of the book and the common ethical principles of world religions.

But before the conference thirteen intellectuals (mostly well-known atheists) drew up a petition discouraging the organisers from letting István speak on the topic of his own book. Under the pretext that he is not an ethologist they said he does not have the qualification to speak about animals. But this is a completely irrelevant argument at an open, non-professional conference. Theologians have expressed their opinion about nature for millenia and cultural anthropologists can also speak about different conceptions related to the natural world.

The signatories submitted their petition on the Critical Biomass webpage where Dr. Mate Varga is the most active author. Mate was not only a signatory but he himself submitted the petition to the organizers, he represented and organized the hostile group.

I know that Mate Varga took part in this initiative as a private person but in the footer in his letter to the organizers he used the name of your institution in this format: *Department of Cell and Developmental Biology; Anatomy Building University College London; Gower Street; London WC1E 6BT.*



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It seems obvious that he used the name of your institution unfairly to seem more authoritative in his private letter.

The signatories create a tense situation for the organizers, HVG Publisher, which is one of the most prominent publishers in our country. The attackers also tried to get more signatures on the homepage, thus increasing the pressure on the organizers. Although we all found the attack outrageous István offered not to make any mention of the subject matter of his book this time, in an attempt to prevent any more inconveniences caused by the hostile group. At the same time we would like to express our utmost indignation as to this kind of intellectual suppression.

The Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness issued a press release related to this this scandalous incident in which Mate Varga is the central figure. The press release was broadcast by the Hungarian News Agency. Our international society considers this case as a precedent for a call for restriction of freedom of speech, of ideological and religious freedom and of equality of opportunity. We are examining the possibility of legal action, too.

After all this Mate Varga called István „average Joe who wished to use his freedom of speech”.

Let me mention another example. István was invited to a primary school to give a lecture on ideas about origins in ancient civilizations and in our modern-day societies. Later this balanced presentation was available on the Internet in video format. On his homepage, Mate Varga commented on the recording saying „Unfortunately Istvan Tasi did not go to school to learn but to teach, so to speak.” While this is a childish remark, it is also offensive. Why should a person with two degrees go to primary school „to learn”?

There is every indication that Mate Varga is an anti-religious, militant atheist person who does not know the difference between cultured and uncultured expressions of his world view. From the above it seems Mate is often stepping out of the framework of the intellectual dialogue using unfair methods to prevent opinions different from his from being voiced, and to indulge in personalities.

One could say it is his personal affair. But Mate can easily be identified from his blog and anyone can quickly see he is related to your institution, which is also advertised in his attacking letters. The leaders of our church and the College think these incidents do not shed a favourable light on your University and Department neither in Hungary nor in England. Therefore we think it is our common interest to find ways to avoid such insults in the future.

We hope there are certain shared principles and values we equally consider important to promote and protect healthy public life. I kindly ask the competent persons in your Department of Cell and Developmental Biology to express to me their opinions on this issue and advise me how to avoid such incidents in the future.

Thank you very much for your reply in advance. I wish all of you good health and success in your work.

Best regards,

László Tóth-Soma Phd.
biologist, philosopher of religion
president of the Bhaktivedanta College