

The Renewal Movement in the Hungarian Reformed Church*

GÉZA NÉMETH

The full story of Hungarian Reformed resistance to the anti-church policies of the communist regime cannot yet be told. This is partly because those offering resistance had to struggle alone and in isolation from each other. Only a few came to the attention of the worldwide Christian community. Another problem now is that the relevant documentation is not yet available for research work: it is still being kept in the archives of the Ministry of the Interior and the former State Office for Church Affairs. Although the Hungarian Parliament originally commissioned an all-party team of researchers, the Christian-Democratic cabinet of József Antall subsequently prevented them from starting work, out of what I consider to be false concern for the church: they apparently feared that the identification of what would probably turn out to be a large number of compromised clergymen might embarrass the current hierarchies. I disagree with this decision. As a consequence I now have to rely on my own personal experience and on the few documents which are available from western sources to tell some of the story.

Let me start with an analysis of the 1955–56 *Statement of Faith* which related the resistance theology of the German ‘Confessing Church’ (Barmen, Barth, Niemöller, Bonhoeffer) to the realities of the communist regime. I will then move on to tell the story of the problems experienced in 1971 by the Reformed congregation in the village of Érd, not far from Budapest, which named itself after Martin Luther King. This was a unique initiative in Eastern Europe: to adapt for Hungary the ideas of the great Negro fighter for civil rights. At the time, reports on the events in Érd were carried in the Dutch and Swiss church press and Hungarian pastors living in the USA spoke out about the brute force being used against the people of Érd and the nonviolent resistance on their side; but the story itself and the theology behind it deserve renewed attention today. The nationalism and chauvinism which are reviving after the collapse of communism are confronting us once again with fundamental questions about violence and nonviolent resistance in the struggle for civil rights. Finally, various documents relating to the church renewal movement of 1989–91 will demonstrate how the struggle against communist oppression in the Reformed Church ran parallel with a struggle within the church against the church leadership itself.

*This is an edited and abridged version of an English-language pamphlet by Géza Németh, *Persecution, Resistance, Betrayal: The Liberation Theology in the Reformed Church*, distributed in early 1992. Please note that the translations of the *Statement of Faith* of 1956 and of the letter from Imre Miklós of 5 June 1971 *have not been checked* against the Hungarian originals.

The Statement of Faith: 1956

Genesis and History

The Theological Academy of the Reformed Church in Budapest has been the centre for Protestant youth waiting and hoping for renewal during the years of oppression. Let us mention one fact: the 'Confession' which has spread widely abroad as well as in this country was born there.¹

The basic text of the *Statement of Faith* was composed in 1955 following the example of the Barmen Declaration of the German Confessing Church,² worked on by students and young pastors during the academic years of 1953–55 and finalised at the home of János Pásztor, a pastor in Szentendre. This text was accepted as their common confession by pastors Miklós Molnár, József Siklós, Tivadar Pánczel, István Debreczeni, Lóránt Hegedüs,³ Gyula Bárczay, Zoltán Szabó, Géza Németh and historian Sándor Dizsery.

Zsigmond Rítóók, a Budapest historiographer, prepared a rough German translation to be secretly distributed among the visiting dignitaries at the Centenary of the Theological Academy in Budapest (15 September 1955). Although we were risking the danger of imprisonment we distributed copies to the following visitors: Visser't Hooft, Dominique Michelli and Ethelbert Stauffer. These well-known church dignitaries passed the text to other Christians in the free world.

In 1956 the confession was translated into several languages by Hungarian émigrés, and the translated text was published by the western mass media. When the Executive of the World Council of Churches met in Galyatető, several members had copies with them and distributed them to Hungarian friends and relatives. In this way our declaration of faith spread among Hungarian believers, in spite of the displeasure of state and church officials. It played an important role in strengthening the church renewal movement prior to the Uprising of 1956.

Nothing could be more characteristic of the collaborating church leaders than the fact that this confession had to be published and distributed in *samizdat*. Before the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 it was never mentioned in official circles. When its existence could no longer be denied, it was János Péter, Minister of External Affairs in the communist government and formerly a bishop of the church, who spoke up against it in *Út*, the official paper of the church: 'The Statement includes schemes born of disobedience ... and we can state that no one will embrace this "confession of faith" within the Reformed Church in Hungary.'⁴

Gyula Gombos was the first to publish an essay on the *Statement* in 1960 under the title 'The Confessing Church in Hungary in 1956'. The essay was also distributed as a pamphlet under the title *Lean Years*.⁵ Gombos remarked: 'Perhaps this text will remain unpublished in Hungary for a long time since the Uprising has been crushed. Nevertheless this declaration *is and will remain* a historical document of Hungarian Calvinism, and will survive the present church government.' His prophetic words were fulfilled, albeit three decades later. A second essay, by pastor Gyula Bárczay, was published on the thirtieth anniversary of the 1956 revolution; and pastor István Szépfalusi published the complete text and an edited German translation in a church newsletter.⁶ The full text of the declaration, along with other important documents, has now finally been published in Hungary as well.⁷

The Full Text of the Statement of Faith

'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8)

1 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.' (John 3:36)

The redeeming work of Jesus Christ in men becomes real through the Gospel and bears fruit only by personal faith through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Although we do believe that God in His eternal mercy might supply some providential guidance for a world which is totally ruined by sin, nevertheless we confess that salvation is to be found in a *new creation*, through those who partake of saving grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

We reject as false the teaching that Redemption works through profane history by inducing permanent developments in a positive direction. This type of soteriological sanctioning of Historical Materialism and its false optimism contradicts the Bible and denies the truth of the Gospel. The philosophy of Historical Materialism in this theological disguise is antibiblical. Our official church government has repeatedly affirmed this false teaching as part of Christian doctrine. 'We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' (2 Peter 3:13b) – in other words, we seek the new world order in Christ through continual renewal of the church, and not in certain political or economic formulae. Redemption does not mean that faithless human history develops into God's Kingdom. On the contrary: God's Kingdom unfolds through the history of our own salvation.

2 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation' (Mark 16:15)

We believe that the reason the church exists is to evangelise the world. The church must never under any circumstances give up this mission. If it renounces its calling, it denies the reason for its own existence. The call of the church is to preach Christ crucified and risen. The church must fulfil the role to 'Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season' (2 Tim. 4:2a) regardless of whether it is accepted or rejected by the world. This call must be obeyed even if the state authorities object or forbid it. In the latter case the church might consider itself as an underground church, illegal by civil laws, and take up the cross of martyrdom as a suffering church. The Scriptures and history alike teach us that whenever the church has taken its call seriously it has had to suffer persecution and tribulation. To participate in Christ's suffering is the privilege of the church; to shun it is to take the path of Judas Iscariot.

With growing anxiety we have watched our church government call a total halt to, or at least introduce considerable restrictions on, missionary activities like care for children, young people, alcoholics and drug addicts and work with underprivileged groups such as the Gypsies. Lay people have been forbidden to involve themselves in this kind of activity. Our leaders have given up trying to exploit those possibilities which were left open to the church by the *Agreement* signed by the church and state in 1948. Through dereliction of their duties our leaders have paralysed the mission of the church; and our greatest concern is that they are arbitrarily defining this as a new understanding of 'mission'. We cannot agree with this new definition and we are ready to suffer reprisals for obeying Christ's command only. We regard our obedience to Christ as imperative for all of us and doubly imperative for our pastors.

3 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God' (Rom. 13:1). 'We must obey God rather than men!' (Acts 5:29b)

We believe that our present political authority is appointed by God and that as such it requires our obedience. We pray for it *in all matters that do not contradict God's law*. We are not reactionaries: we oppose reactionary movements. We resist all attempts at political counterrevolution aimed at a restoration of the past. We fulfil our civic duties faithfully and willingly. We confess that our former social order has been condemned by God's righteous judgment; but we also confess, in the light of the Gospel, that the present state and social order bear the marks of sin as well. Just as any other state or social order, the order we live in has numerous features which cannot be approved by the church.

If the church is obedient in faith, then it is its prophetic mission to strengthen the government of the state with encouraging words whenever the authorities serve the welfare of citizens under the principle of general righteousness. On the other hand, it is also the duty of the church to point out errors, failures, wrongdoing and sins or injuries which need compensation.

We note with anxiety that the government of our church is fulfilling the first part of its prophetic mission but remains silent with regard to the second. In this way its service is thrown out of balance so much that the serving church becomes a subservient church. What makes the situation even worse is that the church government gives its approval to various actions of the state against which the church ought to speak out in its prophetic role. The credibility of the church is thus in jeopardy. The church keeps forgetting the prayer of its High Priest: 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth' (John 17:17). Therefore we find it necessary to remind our brothers and sisters that when they stand before the authorities of church or state they (or rather all of us) should obey our Lord's command without ambiguity or dissimulation: yes should mean yes and no should mean no.

4 'And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.' (Eph. 1:22)

As far as the inner life of the church is concerned we confess that Jesus Christ is the only Lord of the church and that his words have exclusive authority. Our Reformed forefathers intended to secure this principle by means of synodical and presbyterian church government.

It is our duty to declare that every form of dictatorial rule in the church is anti-Christian, because it contradicts Christ's Lordship. Today, however, the government of our church is trying to enforce its decisions by means of intimidation. It disregards open resistance from the congregations, thus offending against all Reformed traditions: it appoints pastors to congregations by force; deprives, demotes or suspends others without due cause; fabricates accusations against those pastors who do not share the view of the governing clique or who dare to criticise it; rejects and suppresses any counter-opinion; and brands those who dare to voice their views as heretics, disturbers of the peace or enemies of the church.

This behaviour on the part of the government of the church is made worse by the fact that it is not only administrative decisions that are forced down the throats of church members: new and in many respects dangerous theological tenets, created by the church leaders, are forced upon the pastors as expressing the only valid doctrinal position, the only valid interpretation of the Scriptures; and pastors are forced to comply with these dangerous newly created 'doctrines' or face the risk of arbitrary dismissal.

The exclusive clique character of our church government as described above means that our contacts with world Christianity are also in the hands of this small

clique. As a result our contributions at meetings of worldwide church organisations reflect the opinion of this clique but are presented as the testimony of the whole of Hungarian Christianity. In the same way, when visitors come to Hungary they have no opportunity to learn about the real status of the church. Thus our ecumenical service within world Christianity has become a matter of deception and falsehood rather than of building and maintaining real brotherhood.

The clique system is responsible for the misuse of our financial resources as well. While the salary of pastors is well below the minimal living standard, the leading office-holders of the church receive disproportionately higher salaries as a reward for their immoral actions past and present. The prodigality of official banquets, receptions and travel is beyond imagination. This luxurious squandering might be appropriate for people zealously serving political interests, but it does not accord with the example of Jesus Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head (Matt. 8:20) and who became poor for our sake.

Under these circumstances we must state that we are unable to accept all the decisions of our present church leaders. Absolute obedience to them might mean disobedience to Jesus Christ. This is particularly true as far as 'directives' regarding the content of our preaching are concerned – when these directives are in line with programmes which are incompatible with the gospel and which thus corrupt our preaching.

In all these areas we firmly refuse to cooperate. What is more, we feel obliged by conscience to raise our voices for synodical and Presbyterian church government, for putting our finances in clear and decent order and for freedom of conscience in our preaching and teaching. We shall work for these changes according to our strength as God's grace permits us. We ask our brothers and sisters to make their decisions on church policy in the same spirit and likewise to guide those who are seeking advice.

'Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his", and "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness".' (2 Tim. 2:19)

The Martin Luther King Church in Hungary (1971)

In this section I propose to demonstrate how the communist state controlled the church and how the puppet bishops were used to execute the decisions of the state authorities. The first subsection comprises excerpts from a letter of recommendation written in 1982, which contains a concise summary of the attempt to build the Martin Luther King memorial church eleven years earlier. The second subsection is a strictly confidential report written by Imre Miklós, State Secretary for Church Affairs, in which he gives 'permission' (or, in plain English, 'orders') to the 'competent authorities' to proceed against me – that is to expel me from the church. The third subsection comprises my comments and the fourth is a letter to me from the widow of Martin Luther King.

Letter of Recommendation

18 June 1982

To whom it may concern

First Hungarian Reformed Church
United Church of Christ
344 East 69th Street
New York, N Y 10021

I, the undersigned minister – a former YMCA secretary and youth pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the old country, then Reformed minister in Montreal (1967–72) and in New York City (1972–) verify that Rev. Géza Németh has been known to me in Hungary since 1956. He was born there in 1933 and studied theology at the Reformed Theological Academy in Budapest. Thus we have a common Alma Mater.

During the well-known revolution of 1956 the so-called Church Renewal Movement – in which I had the privilege to be one of the leading members – had the intention of entrusting the Reformed youth work to him. After the defeat of the uprising he was detained for his participation in the events and put into a concentration camp for one year. Afterwards, he became an assistant pastor, then a minister at Érd, a suburb of Budapest. His wife is a chemical engineer by profession. They have three sons, co-workers in the cause of the Gospel.

In 1971 Rev. Németh's congregation began – bona fide – to build a new chapel in their diaspora area, with the knowledge and consent of his responsible bishop, Rt Rev. Szamosközy. But the action was soon brought to a standstill by the State Office for Church Affairs, a Soviet-controlled organ, and the existing building destroyed. Rev. Németh, his church and his friends tried to protest against this arbitrary action – but in vain. Finally, the presiding bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church, Dr Bartha, brought action against Géza Németh who – as a consequence of it – was deprived of his ministry.

Since that time he has been working as a travelling arts agent in order to sustain his family. On the other hand, his humiliation and trials proved to be a blessing in disguise. As an agent he was relatively free in moving about the country and besides his commercial job, to preach the Gospel in Reformed, Free Church and even Roman Catholic churches, at the request of the local pastors. His Christian witness has deeply impressed his audience, especially young people everywhere and in all these years many of them have come to living faith through his service [...]

Yours in his service,

Rev. Julian Nagy

Report from the State Office for Church Affairs

Strictly confidential

Budapest

5 June 1971

RECORD

Since his student days, that is over the past fifteen years, the Reformed pastor Géza Németh has maintained a disrupting, slanderous, demoralising and openly hostile attitude. His main aim has been to discredit the bishops who are loyal to our state and enjoy respect both home and abroad.

Despite his behaviour our bishops exercised tolerance, repeatedly granting pardon and leniency to him. When he was released after his internment from 15 November 1956 to August 1957, he was appointed as pastor to Érd. Furthermore, he was permitted to publish his essays and allowed to travel abroad.

Géza Németh rudely abused the bishops' confidence and forgiveness. At meetings of church ministers he let himself get carried away, uttering insulting statements against his bishops. For example: he demanded that not only the crimes of fascism should be condemned but the concentration camps of Siberia as well. He branded

as 'Stalinism' the receptions given by our bishops to foreign dignitaries for the good name of our society. He demanded that this 'Stalinism' should be brought to public notice and condemned by the church ministers.

He had built up contacts in the West, mainly with reactionary Dutch clergy. On the basis of his malicious information the western mass media initiated a campaign against the Hungarian church and its leadership.

In 1956 [i.e. the year of the Hungarian Revolution – Ed.] Géza Németh visited Romania. There he established contact between a Romanian physician and a citizen of a western country. As a consequence he was expelled by the Romanian authorities.

In his work as a pastor he used impermissible methods: for example, he persisted in visiting party members and other persons who ceased to attend church; and he organised young people's groups and urged them to take part in youth conferences.

He was repeatedly rebuked by the State Office and by the local authorities. Several times he was summoned and taken to task for his unlawful behaviour. The promises he made on these occasions he never kept; his behaviour became more and more provocative.

In 1970 he committed several illegal acts in connection with a building project which was therefore halted by the local council. He was given permission to build a flat but he adapted it so that it would be suitable as a chapel as well. When the local council learned of this irregularity building permission was withdrawn. Then he fraudulently approached two members of Parliament (Dr Frigyes Wild and Dr Janka Márk) and asked for their help in changing the council's decision. When a conference for world peace was convened in Budapest he attended the meeting, disregarding his bishop's prohibition; he announced at a plenary meeting, 'We are going to build a church and name it after Martin Luther King', and invited Pastor Abernathy, the successor of M. L. King, to visit Érd and bless the walls of the church. His contact in the Netherlands sent 10,000 guilders to the treasurer of the Érd congregation towards the building fund.

After all this Géza Németh was summoned to appear before the local district council, but failed to do so. When the city council summoned him he did appear, but expressed his opinion that he did not feel responsible to these civil authorities for his pastoral actions.

In the opinion of the church authorities Géza Németh's pastoral activity is unacceptable because it involves destructive intrigue and undermines the authority of the bishops. Over the years he has recently broken church discipline. His unceasing attacks on the authority of the bishops are demoralising his colleagues. For these reasons the church authorities intend to initiate disciplinary procedures and remove him from the ministry in accordance with our laws.

By deceitful manoeuvring Géza Németh has gained the confidence of some of our comrades working in various government agencies. Unfortunately, on some occasions he has received their support. He has used his pretended loyalty towards state functionaries to conceal his harmful activities against the bishops.

He has cleverly created contradictory opinions about himself and his actions. Thus he has become ever more daring and in the end he has impudently transgressed the laws of the country.

In agreement with the Executive Committee of the Party Secretariat in the County of Pest we hereby give free hand to the church authorities to discuss the Géza Németh affair and bring it to an end. The competent authorities should proceed against him for his illegal actions and his intolerable behaviour towards officials of

state and church.

Imre Miklós
Secretary of State for Church Affairs.

copies to: Comrade István Katona
Comrade Mrs F. Cservenka
Comrade Ferenc Vadász
Dept 1 files

Analysis and Comment

The strictly confidential letter from Imre Miklós was addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Less than a month later, on 3 July 1971, bishop István Szamosközy began the disciplinary procedure. As a result a pastor was dismissed and a partially built church demolished (the church was rebuilt on a different site 15 years later). At that time church disciplinary procedures were decided by communist party executives. The bishops were mere bystanders who rubber-stamped their decisions.

It is clear from this letter that the basis of the charge was not just unlawful building activity: my whole attitude towards the church leaders was under judgment as well. The main fear was clearly that my critical stance might discredit bishops who enjoyed a good reputation abroad and bring cases of Stalinist manipulation into the open. Furthermore, Miklós realised that my outreach activities and my contacts with Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries and with Christian individuals and organisations in the West might well mobilise other intimidated pastors. It is interesting to note that Miklós' remarks indicate that the party line was not entirely firm as far as my activities were concerned. I was able to gain the confidence and support of some party members. Miklós was apparently trying to reach unanimity within the party apparatus before the disciplinary procedure began.

The spark that ignited the witch-hunt was the Martin Luther King church. In those days a strictly confidential regulation was in force which forbade the building of new church premises in new towns or cities. The Martin Luther church was in Érdpark-város, which was not a new town but a newly built residential area of the city of Érd. This is why the bishop first permitted the building of a new church there. When the city council – under pressure from the party – halted the construction and ordered the demolition of the already existing walls, the congregation and I as their pastor resisted this decision.

Firstly we organised several petitions, but in vain. The congregation then compiled a *White Book in Defence of Truth*. It included a letter written by the president of the church council and addressed to János Kádár, First Secretary of the Party. Also included were several protests and petitions sent to various authorities. The petitions carried the signatures of 418 members of the new congregation. Supporting telegrams were sent to János Kádár by ordinary workers. Writers, sculptors and other intellectuals also lent their names and support.⁸ This was one of the most significant protests in Hungary since the 1956 Uprising. Common folk and intellectuals, Christians and Jews, reform-minded communists and anticommunists all united in defence of this tiny church building which thus became a symbol of the demand for liberty.

The congregation contacted the widow of Rev. Martin Luther King: her reply is reproduced below. The congregation and its pastor followed Rev. King's teaching on nonviolent resistance: solidarity between workers and intellectuals in resistance

to autocratic power; willingness to suffer persecution and imprisonment; open but peaceful demonstration of one's beliefs. When I was declared guilty, the congregation sang Psalm 35 as well as the great black leader's theme song: 'Plead my cause, Lord', and 'We shall overcome some day'.

The mission statement in the above-mentioned *White Book* reads:

We believe that the Lord is with those who are in solidarity with the victims of war, poverty and discrimination. This is why we regard Martin Luther King as a messenger of Jesus Christ for today. We believe that the blessing of Mr Abernathy on the walls of the chapel and on the forehead of our persecuted pastor are the seals of the Holy Spirit. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:10).

When I brought this shameful case into the open and in the presence of the peace conference invited Mr Abernathy to bless the walls of the church, reports appeared in Dutch, Swiss and overseas Hungarian newspapers. Regrettably, however, the World Council of Churches remained silent. Gyula Móna, the party chief in charge of church affairs, who had invited Mr Abernathy to attend a peace conference in Moscow after the conference in Budapest, later informed me: 'It had been decided that if Abernathy had declined to leave for Moscow, as a protest against our dealing with the church and its pastor, we would have dropped the case.' But Mr Abernathy did attend the Moscow peace conference. Perhaps this is why the senior bishop Dr Bartha was told to go ahead with his church disciplinary action.

After my dismissal as a pastor I continued to work among young people for 20 years. I was of course constantly threatened by the security police because of my 'illegal' outreach. A new church building has now been built – 15 years later. The ruins of the first building have been kept as a memorial monument to Rev. Dr Martin Luther King. 'We shall overcome some day.'

Text of Letter from Mrs Luther King

Mrs Martin Luther King Jr
234 Sunset Avenue, Northwest
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

Reverend Géza Németh
Erkel u.2
ERD Hungary
18 October 1972

Dear Reverend Németh

I want to send you greetings across the miles.

I have been informed of your struggle to build a church named in honor of my husband, and I hope and trust that eventually, God willing, this will come to pass.

My husband once said, 'Sooner or later, all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood.'

Let us hope and pray that mankind may yet learn to sing that song of brotherhood. Best wishes to you.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs Martin Luther King, Jr

Activities of the Church Renewal Movement 1989–91

22 April 1989 Reformed Church, Budapest-Rákosszentmihály: 32 participants decide to revitalise the Church Renewal Movement of 1956.

3 June 1989 Ráday College, Budapest: the nucleus of the new movement holds its first public forum and forms six study groups on ethics, law, mission, ecumenism, theology and rehabilitation.

12 October 1989 The College in Debrecen: the forum declares that a new election of church officials is essential because the present church leaders were appointed on the demand and approval of the state. The decision provokes a defence of the old guard in the semi-official church newspaper *Reformátusok lapja*.

27 January 1990 The movement registers as a religious corporation under the name 'Református Egyházi Megújulási Mozgalom' (REMM): 'Renewal Movement of the Reformed Church'. A certificate of registration is issued by the court on 2 April 1990.

8 February 1990 REMM calls upon all sister churches in Hungary to secede from the Christian Peace Conference. Baptists, Lutherans and even the diocese of Maros in Romania concur with this appeal. The Hungarian Reformed Synod, however, decides on the advice of Dr Károly Tóth to grant the CPC a 'period of grace' to renew itself.

REMM issues a letter to every synod emphasising the importance of new elections.

26 May 1990 Budapest, Ferencváros House of Culture: an ecumenical conference with the participation of victims of persecution decides to create an Institute on Religious Persecution and a depository archive for documents relating to the history of the last 40 years.

23 August 1990 Rákosszentmihály: REMM participants nominate new candidates for the top posts in the church. The congregations elect six out of the eight proposed candidates.

The Prime Minister is requested to declassify all secret documents in the archives of the former State Office for Church Affairs. He refuses, stating that only Parliament is competent to decide on this matter.

26 January 1991 Budapest: at the General Synod of Reformed Churches in Hungary it is proposed and seconded by pastors György Szabó and István Török that Dr Lóránt Hegedüs be elected as Presiding Bishop. Carried. The conservative forces dissent.

Spring 1991 Well-attended diocesan conferences are held in Tiszáninnen and Pápa.

6 June 1991 REMM organises an ecumenical conference in the premises of the former State Office for Church Affairs. This is a turning-point for the Hungarian churches. Prominent leaders of church resistance movements attend, including Zoltán Balogh, Zoltán Dóka, József Éliás, Géza Németh and Gábor Roszik. The conference is addressed by Dr István Tökés Sr (Romania), Rabbi Tamas Raj, Éva Vadas and Tibor Vásárhelyi (Chairman, Committee of the Restoration of History). The President of the Hungarian Republic, Árpád Göncz, sends a congratulatory telegram.

The conference repeatedly urges the concerned agencies to declassify the

above-mentioned secret documents, including the names of those clergy who served as informers to the State Office for Church Affairs.

A commemorative plaque is solemnly unveiled on the wall of the former State Office for Church Affairs with this inscription:

The State Office for Church Affairs used to occupy this building. In memory of the victims of religious persecution under communism. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.'

With prayers and the singing of the national anthem the conference symbolically closes one of the darkest periods in the history of our country.

Notes and References

- ¹ *Reformáció*, vol. 1, no. 1, November 1956. This was the first Reformed church paper issued after the Hungarian Uprising.
- ² 'Barmen Declaration (1934): the statement drawn up at the first Synod of the Confessing Church at Barmen ... to define the belief and mission of the Church in the face of the liberal tendencies of the Nazi German Christians' (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*).
- ³ Lóránt Hegedüs is now the first freely elected senior bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary.
- ⁴ *Út*, 7-13 October 1956.
- ⁵ Gyula Gombos, *Lean Years* (Occidental Press, Washington DC, 1960).
- ⁶ Gyula Bárczay, *Thirty Years: 1956-86* (Bern, 1986); István Szépfalusi, 'Pastoral care of Hungarians in the Lutheran Church of Austria', 19 February 1986.
- ⁷ *Confessio*, no. 2, 1989, pp. 118-21.
- ⁸ Some prominent intellectuals who supported the petition were: Tibor Déry, Gyula Illés, Imre Dobozy, Mrs Mihály Váczi, Agnes Nemes-Nagy, Miklós Borsos, Ferenc Sánta, István Simon.