

IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR

The Immediate Past, the Present, and the Future of the Reformed Church of Hungary

by **Loránt Hegedüs**

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Cleansing and renewing ourselves in the truth and love of Christ

(Ephesians 4:15)

One cannot keep silent when the very stones are crying out. Paraphrasing the well-known words of Jesus: unless we call for divine intervention and proclaim His glory, the Christian church will collapse with its very stones proclaiming human sins to heaven. In other words we must speak up when there is a real danger that the spiritual church will be leveled to the ground by a quiet and finite judgment. Today fundamental theological uncertainties are threatening the Church, and certain ethical conflicts are shaking its entire structure. Inner emptiness makes spiritual renewal nearly impossible, and ill-intended attacks by outsiders eat away our moral fiber. Brushing aside the need for repentance and renewal with mind-boggling theological word-games can only mean rejecting God's mercy. Beware: the end might come not with a bang but a whimper. The coming, quiet, but irrevocable judgement will be far worse than the storms we have experienced during the past forty years. At the end God would turn God's face away from callous and manipulative people, resulting in the unavoidable disintegration of our temporal church. The direction in which we are going is like that of our American Hungarian Reformed brothers. Their spiritual disintegration is very far advanced, and they also call out for help from the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says; "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (I Corinthians 11:31). This is the key verse in our present situation. It harmonizes with the spirit of the message of the entire Bible. During the atheistic and total dictatorship of the last forty years, the Church was not merely a passive witness but a subservient partner to the State, endlessly trying to please it by leaning over backwards. Yet the Church has never admitted its sin against the Scripture, nor drawn the vital conclusions needed for its salvation. Instead it has displayed a pathetic avoidance behavior, rather like Adam hiding from the presence of the Lord God, walking in the Garden in the cool of the day. But this attempt is clearly foredoomed. This period, which made the life of the Church increasingly impossible, may best be described in Kierkegaard's words, "Our age is a tragicomedy: tragic because it failed a long time ago; comical because it still exists."

There is a real threat that the Church will speedily disintegrate. After coming out from under the yoke of dictatorship which held it together, it also lost its cohesiveness and became a spiritual wasteland. Currently the two opposing camps of our Church are characterized by the determination to hold onto their positions at all costs on the one hand and by the determination to seize power by any means on the other. The people of the Church are caught between these two opposing groups, in dead center. Many are unable to change; others feel more or less apathetic.

Those who want to hold onto their positions at any costs naturally deny the sins of the last forty years or trivialize them. At most they brush aside the significance of whatever they may personally admit to, without feeling any remorse or fearing any consequences. First I handed in my diocesan report to the bishop's office in November, 1989. I described the essence of my views on these matters in its theological chapter. Later I read it to the eight-member "committee of experts." I waited for their opinion and I did not object to their delay in presenting it to the general assembly. For the time being I was satisfied with the brief mention of the important points of my proposition that they gave before their December, 1989 meeting. I received only one positive remark from them: "It is fortunate that you do not throw eggs at the Church from the outside, but thrash out the difficulties in the house, intending to embark on a new beginning." To this date there were no other worthwhile responses to my questions.

In order to receive God's renewing grace, it is absolutely necessary to admit the sins we have personally committed. To this end we must first repent. But we avoid doing so by charging with unkindness or lack of love anyone who mentions actual misdoings. No doubt some people can ask such questions for selfish reasons or to hurt other's feelings, but a good medical diagnosis refers to concrete symptoms and remedies, even if and when the patient does not like to hear it. According to the Blessed Physician such a diagnosis is an act of love and is motivated by a desire to save life, whereas not giving it may stem from a deadly feeling of lovelessness.

Secondly we avoid repentance with the aid of false theological views that belittle the misdeeds of the last forty years. The higher the position of the person mouthing such pretenses, the more likely his/her statements will blur the need for true repentance. Such a painfully phony theological opinion is formulated in the Pentecostal issue of Reformátusók Lapja (June 3, 1990) by one of the "authorities" on the issue. According to him we have all been equally guilty of complicity during this era because we all took loyalty oaths to the government and staged no organized resistance. Consequently there is only quantitative but no qualitative difference between the least of the parish pastors who tended and protected their little flocks with faith and love and the high church leaders on their velvet thrones who paraded their injustices to the world as honest deeds. That view, associating itself with the Final Judgement as understood in the Holy Communion, gives us a wrong turn. In front of the Lord's table the repentant killer, the soul-and life-saving Albert Schweitzer, the people as well as the entire clergy of the temporal Church from the last forty years, must confess in unison that on their own merits they could not stand up before the judgement seat of God but deserve punishment, death, and damnation. There is no difference: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." (Romans 3:22b-24). God with his abundant mercy had pity on us, absolved us of our sins, and in front of his throne we have been brothers and remain so. The problem is that the author of the article was not writing about this final pardon that the repentant receive when appearing before God but about one given earlier, for sins committed in this world. He assumes that we are all essentially equal in this respect, with only shades of difference between us. This line of thought is dogmatically correct and understandable in reference to the End, but from the viewpoint of concrete Christian ethics, this is just as impossible as it is for ordinary, everyday thinking. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who suffered martyrdom under Hitler, distinguished for good reason between the conditions of the Last Time and before it. Even the simplest man would rightly protest if he were arrested, for example, together with a bank robber and condemned to die merely for having witnessed the act or for confessing to his pastor that he deserved "punishment, death and damnation." In the historic category preceding Eternity, there is not only a quantitative ethical difference but also a qualitative one, as between the robbers taking the money from the bank and the man taking his Holy Communion. The social, clerical, ethical, and theological consequences of this line of thought have to be made equally manifest. Otherwise in the name of a false eternity, we reduce its meaning to nothing, and serve only to salvage political power for a faction in the Church. We must take heed of the complementary Biblical verse which says: "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." (Malachi 3:18).

Surely there is a difference between the one who earned his/her bread and butter by being an informer to the secret police and the one who was trying to do his/her duty while being informed on, between serving God and serving one's own ends, between the one who ruled others arbitrarily and the oppressed, the one who abused others and the one who was abused. This eternal, qualitative difference is present throughout history. It is found in the story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, as is described in Daniel 1. The only difference is that in our situation the chapters have to be rearranged: after the third and the sixth about the fiery furnace and the lions' den, there came the first and second chapters, lasting for several decades. Those who were thrown unarmed into the fiery furnace of 1965 and struggled for justice and love, those who were harassed by the secret police, who risked their lives many times over, who performed unauthorized funeral ceremonies over the hundreds of revolutionary dead thrown into mass graves, who believed in freedom and justice, may not be equated with those who aimed their guns at innocent people or with the ones who confessed their sins on the eve of the uprising and then, at the end, regretted confessing at all. Some believed that the Russian cannons represented divine justification; others believed that just like Jesus, who himself did not seem to be justified by God on Easter eve, God's truth would prevail in the end over the Communist star.

Certainly there were differences between people. Some died as martyrs while trying to help their fellow human beings; others merely tried to save their own skins and later pretended to have been heroes in order to further their careers. Some, falsely accused, ended up as in the biblical lions' den, in jails and prison camps. Just remember "the unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians!" Some were trying to keep their privileges or advance, as stool pigeons. Some chose to go into exile, and some chose to turn their coats. Some rose to the highest rungs of the social ladder; others were thrown into the pits. Some were driven around in expensive cars on trips abroad, as the privileged representatives of the Communist status quo; others rode bicycles in their country parishes. Some were pampered by the system; others were subject to character assassination. Some received honorary doctorates and professorships; others have contributed to science but were treated as outcasts and denied their doctorates. There is a difference between people with trumped-up scientific achievements and those whose real contributions were ignored for decades. The demigods of dictatorship choked off genuine output and created lies in the evening and the morning for every day of the last forty years. Whoever or whatever they did not speak about was not supposed to exist. Let us

think of Lajos Arus of Gyergyószentmiklós, who made an approximately twenty-volume Hebrew-Hungarian dictionary and commentary in order to help Hungarian pastors of all times, yet for thirty years was not allowed to get his doctorate at his own theological institute. The clear contrast between this theologian and many who only pretend, proves that indeed there is a difference between people. The victims have already forgiven their tormentors, and now it is time for the delinquents to forgive those who decided not to defile themselves "with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." (Daniel 1:8). According to the Bible, there is no other way!

If we want to eliminate such differences in a Biblical manner, then we have to consider that in addition to the qualitative differences between those who bowed and scraped to the dictators and those who tried to preserve their inner freedom, there were other qualitative differences as well. For instance, the guardian of the status quo could be either carefree or inhibited, ready to destroy or to help others, might zealously turn on a bugging device or pretend not to hear statements that would incriminate his fellow human beings. We have to distinguish between the neurotic who was eager to cut anyone's throat, not only to further his/her career but for the fun of it, and his/her opposite, who was trying to save another's skin by bringing damnation down on himself/herself. Some thrived on and others lost their souls in this slavish but voluntary acceptance of the status quo. Some pretended to be instruments of divine mission; others destroyed themselves because they felt that they were being forced to act against God's will. Woe unto those who try to wash away these differences and thereby make repentance and mercy impossible. They offer worthless penances that split the Church.

In order to avoid this deadly destruction, we declare that there are differences among practical, theological, and political decisions, even under a total dictatorship, and these differences concern primarily the essential and not the accidental circumstances.

Absolute loyalty to God created no obligation to take a high position: to become a bishop, a dean, or a professor. Nobody was told to climb the political ladder or die, although he/she could be cajoled or scared. It is said that some would-be informers were threatened with being thrown out of the windows of tall buildings. While it is hard to expect heroism under such circumstances, it is a tragic fact that many informers needed no such threats. Every appointment had to be approved by the State Church Office. It is also true that most of the time people tried to curry favor with this office, whenever they were trying to get higher positions. It was enough for the government to offer a man of the cloth a choice between advancement and a parish in the sticks or to promise to expose some personal or family problems. Thereupon he would agree to be an informer or comply fully and begin his one-way journey down to hell. Many offered their services without being nudged. We can also distinguish between stool pigeons who loved their dirty work and those who suffered constant remorse. One thing is certain. A Judas may be understood but not justified. In that same issue of [Reformátusók Lapja](#) there is an article titled "The Friend." It is shocking, and it generates complete empathy without trying to justify the deed. I remain absolutely certain of what I once wrote as a theological student:

"A secret policeman or stool pigeon does himself a favor if he joins the clergy (although he is invoking the wrath of God.) But a clergyman is making an entirely wrong decision if he joins the police or becomes a stool pigeon, even under duress. A police stool pigeon can get a lot of confidential information while posing as a man of the cloth. But when a man of God turns into a secret policeman and sells his soul to a totalitarian political system, he loses his membership in the Christian service which always requires the total person, and becomes deaf to whatever information he could receive from God through the Holy Spirit."

That is the reason why Judas cannot be justified. Such a justification is a deadly poison and cheap penance, resulting in eternal death and damnation, excluding us from the miracle of precious mercy and salvation. It would also mean that "the comrade in uniform" described in "The Friend" could enter into the human heart with no trouble at all. There is no way to shut him out, which contradicts every divine Biblical intuition and human experience. As we find in Revelations 3:20, we are not even compelled to allow God to enter our hearts. If Satan stands at the door and knocks, then we can send Jesus to turn him away through prayer. We can trust ourselves to Him. He is the one who is responsible for our fates and hearts. The "devil" in uniform, sensing his presence, normally turned away, realizing that a true believer was willing to make any career sacrifice in order to remain loyal to his God. Such a man usually became a security rick, simply not to be dealt with.

It is very important to note that the quality of the lives of the people who accept the discipline imposed upon them by God's mercy will change. These people, attracted to the divine, feel compelled to live on God's mercy. They know that any boastful self-assurance could destroy them at once. Only absolute dependence on God, who revealed himself in Christ, can lead to a freedom from total dictatorship and categorical atheism. The heart, placing its trust in God, preserves its independence from the powers of this world. This can only happen if the believer does

not boast about his faith. (Boastfulness would result in his fall. Just let us think of Peter's denial.) The true believer trusts only in Christ, who alone is able to save him/her, and is able to lift him up whenever he is calling for help.

The significant quality that differentiates people who live by the rule of mercy from others is a decisive one. They can be told apart by their ability to live by both commandments of love. In all realms of Christian life, harmonizing these two commandments is a natural necessity for all believers. For if one does not like his fellow humans, whom she/he can see, how can she/he love God, whom she/he cannot see? If we are not on guard all the time, total rejection may instinctively follow precisely from a loyalty to God that claims to be absolute. Then the person living under the rule of mercy may become a fanatic for truth, abhorring her/his failing brother/sister for whom Christ also died. Becoming a truth fanatic is a deadly danger. But if we are guided by the Holy Spirit, our mercifulness makes it natural to act in an entirely different manner. Through absolute loyalty to truth (*satyagraha*) and Jesus' moral indignation, we arrive at that ultimate love which is able to understand even a spiritual slave. The basis of this understanding is the idea that I worry such a person more by my mere existence than he can worry me by whatever he does. But God is primarily responsible for my being and for my being just so, and I cannot help it. On the other hand I can understand such a person better than such a person can understand me or even himself/herself. Such is the quality of understanding without justification, and "the matter of quality becomes a matter of strength." (László Németh).

Only when we reach this qualitative level can we expect the Lord to begin a recreation; through Christ the old will pass as a new chapter in history begins, and verily yea, all things will be renewed. At lo and behold, ours is such a time!

It is impermissible to erase the existing differences by false theological steps or to act like a chameleon for similar reasons. Rather we have to accept differences--and I emphasize, all sorts!--from everyone admitting his/her sins. We have to be understanding. To sum it up we must be ready to begin again through God's mercy, through the absolving blood of Jesus. Not the pretentious washing away of difference but its acceptance, free of negativism, will renew us.

Nobody should carry over her/his guilty conscience, her/his past as an informer, together with her/his old power and position, into the new historic era, because it will destroy her/his soul. And, if many people manage to do just that, the institutionalized dishonesty that follows will destroy the present ecclesiastical life. Instead of a damned and guilty conscience, let us choose the purifying fire of the soul. The eternal Word of God inspires us to make such a choice, and in our church there is a desperate and urgent need to do so. As we are moving from an old dictatorship to democracy, there is also a unique ecclesiastical and historical possibility to act in this manner. Cleansing our soul and drawing the necessary conclusions are painful, but there is a real chance for all of us to start anew. The life of the Church of Christ always contains the seeds of a fundamentally new beginning, and these seeds can grow with God's help. Without cleansing there can be only collapse and decay.

Trying to seize power at all costs is so clearly anti-Biblical that I do not even want to waste your energy on it. At the same time it is so pervasive and omnipresent, on television and in the other media, that I must voice my opinion about it. Firstly there is the ostrich's attitude:

"Let's pretend that nothing happened and go on doing what we have always done." Secondly there is an even worse attitude, that of the bully who wants to show how to do the job all by himself/herself. The truth is that He alone, the Lord Jesus, is able to accomplish the task ahead. He alone can give us the prophets and enable the people to listen to them. Many are needed, not just a few! (cf I Corinthians 14:32). Are there not enough people among us with a prophetic soul and mind? I believe there are. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, and John all share one feature: not one of them wanted to be a prophet, but their circumstances forced them into that role. This feature distinguishes the true prophet from the charlatan, in my view. Let us listen to the preachers, motivated by warmth and love, heralding the full, the pure, the applicable and timely, but at the same time the eternal and supreme Word of God. Let us say a definite no to all manipulators and cheats!

If needed, with steadfastness and prayer, let us elect our emissaries just as the apostles did. Cleansing our soul and being reborn, let us stand together: both the new and the former officeholders and make a concerted effort, to the best of our abilities, to accomplish God's will. Even if we all outdo ourselves, we can barely qualify to meet God's standards for the great tasks he has meted out to us!

There is a similar need for renewal within the multitude that represents the dead center between the two

polar forces, trying to attain or hold onto power. This renewal is hard to initiate. The dictatorship of the last forty years caused the decay of all ethically oriented institutions. It left us with a sort of silent majority, believing that they should leave everything as is because their opinions do not matter anyway. The survival of such of view would be the final proof to the world that we are still the unauthentic church of the Kádár regime. Their so-called "positive ecclesiastical policy" was so successful that it has become second nature. We continue playing that role to this date. The state tested out its policy on us first because the Roman Catholic Church was thought to be too big for the purpose and the other denominations too small. We met their requirements, and were their first guinea pigs. They wanted to know how many people they could liquidate with the silent consent, and even the approval, of the leadership and without popular protest. We performed beyond their expectations. Then the other churches followed in our footsteps: some doing as well, others surpassing us. We must not remain the last stronghold of putrefied clerical conservatism, nor can we become the last supports of the Prague Peace Conference.

For the sake of all of our faithful and their clergy, we must at last grasp how far we went during the atheistic and total dictatorship of the last two score years, without violating the Scriptures and when we wandered beyond the boundaries of Scripture and ethics. Only after answering these questions will it become clear how far we must go in order to satisfy the Word of God and what are the new limits set for us in a democratic, historical era. Naturally both historical perspectives must be integrated in the history of salvation, stretching from Christ's Coming to His Second Coming.

According to the previously-quoted article in *Reformátusok Lapja* since everyone of us took a loyalty oath to the proletarian dictatorship of the Hungarian People's Republic, foregoing any organized resistance within the Church, we all without exception tied our own hands. We became ethically unfit to pursue the truth and so to say, we forfeited our rights to do any historical criticism.

This claim, however, lacks any practical, theological, or political basis. One of the greatest and most thorough works in this field is Helmut Thielicke's Theological Ethics. It proves, on the basis of Scripture, that we do not pursue our faith among abstract ideological systems and ideals. The Covenant with Christ is the one which includes the transitional Covenant with Noah. The rainbow seen by Noah is an expression of God's guarantee not to destroy humanity again for its sins but to tolerate the presence of sin for our sake. Man receives the New Covenant through the cross of Christ. God will extend this covenant to the end of time, and at last His justice and love will conquer once and for all in Paradise. God, who sacrificed Himself on the cross, does not accept a final compromise in all the history of salvation. However precisely for the sake of the above-mentioned last solution, God recognizes a compromise at this historic period preceding the last times. God tolerates sin until the time will come to accept or reject God's final mercy. Otherwise the sinful world could not survive. False ethical conservatism ignores the transitional character of the sinful world and its historical periods and regards the temporary nature of the divine compromise as final for humankind. It forgets that the historical powers of the sinful world come and go, and with 20/20 hindsight they all look ridiculous.

There always followed a living hell when phony radicals, forgetting about the sinful nature of man, tried to create a paradise on earth. In this world external order always became an inner chaos whenever false conservatism used temporary divine compromise, a good thing in itself, to justify devilish opportunism and the reduction of human standards. This lowering of standards justifies the laws of the alienated world and makes a virtue out of necessity. Whenever agreement seems to be vitally needed by such people, opportunism appears to be the best means to further their career. False conservatives like to call themselves "super-progressive." They call hastily committed sin: "unavoidable fate." When it is compulsory to make a small adjustment, they fulfill the expectation several times over, in order to be recognized and profit richly from it. They have no guilty conscience. They do not examine to see if there is a need for compromise. To them the need for opportunism is always self-evident; it is the focal point of their actions. They become, then, people of the world in a total dictatorship and are its trusted cadres.

The Christian believer knows that God's long suffering and compromise are only temporary, and limited to places throughout the history of salvation. The divine, transitional nature of this compromise permits the person to take advantage of only the smallest, temporary measures for the sake of practical results. This is comparable to a bandage on a wound which prevents infection while it heals. The Redeemer uses the Holy Spirit to protect our wounded souls from dangerous compromises that in the end would ruin us. He will guide the Christian to give what belongs to God (the business of salvation, immediate, and final responsibility) and render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's (taxes and honest service) and never to render unto Satan the things that are Satan's (treason, informing on others, provocation and institutionalized lies).

In view of the history of salvation, it was necessary for all citizens to take a loyalty oath if they wanted to

live in Hungary after World War II. This was true for clergymen and believers too. In view of Noah's Covenant, and according to the prophecy of Jeremiah, we had to take on the yoke of the Babylonian king.

Romans 13 says: let every person be subject to the civil authorities. Some thought they could easily wait out this "Babylonian rule" but Albert Bereczky and his followers gave, in harmony with Jeremiah, the prophetic answer:

"It might be a very long wait," and that proved correct. This *modus vivendi* which has foundations in Scripture, was accepted by all those who took the loyalty oath, according to which they rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's. Thus they could stay in office.

However no one was allowed to render unto Caesar what belonged to God. The image of God, the semblance of Christ, the personality, conscience, belief in the Ultimate Truth, prayer and the praise of God, were never meant to be Caesar's. Albert Bereczky correctly foresaw the lengthiness of the period. We are grateful that we were able to carry on at all, to praise God, to serve Christian life in accordance with God's sacrifice and love. But Bereczky also prophesied falsely, when in *keskény út* [narrow path] he praised Mátyás Rákosi. Woe unto Daniel if all of a sudden he began fawning all over Nebuchadnezzar; "then he would have ceased to be Daniel." (Walther Luthy). It was the right of Daniel not to irritate the lions, but prostrating himself in front of them could have done him no good either.

Authenticity for us does not depend on taking or not taking a loyalty oath (although Karl Barth refused to do just that for Hitler for twelve years). Rather it depends on whether one made a biblically permissible compromise to survive a critical period that lasted several generations or instead compromised oneself by bending over backward to please the system. One became an unbeliever every time that the latter was done. (Education, abortion, the disastrous Bod-Nagymáros power plant provide some examples on this subject). The attitude of the clergy in these matters varied greatly, but generally speaking it fell painfully short of expectations. As a result honors were lavishly distributed by the atheistic government. But according to Lajós Fulep the pastors--who instead of going to foreign lands chose to go into the remote areas to tend small flocks, who struggled to support their families and cared for the meek--made the right choice. They lived at the mercy of local authorities, who sometimes were more tender-hearted than the high priests and protected the powerless pastors from their own superiors. These clergymen lived as paupers. Their parishes were overburdened. Although the government stepped up its attempt to curtail religious liberty, these men kept on praying, preaching, maintaining and building parsonages and churches, making God's promise real for all who were ready to receive their strength from the invisible power of mercy. The steadfast survived. Looking back we are not taking an example from Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt, nor are we rubbing salt on wounds. We only try to correct a historical view. As the waters below reflect the sky above, the past should reflect into a better future. The point is not to condemn or justify the past but to build the future upon the Word of God. Let us remember the pastors who were unfrocked by the government yet remained loyal to Christ's church and are still awaiting reinstatement. What about the younger set, who chose Christian service as their profession, against all odds? No person should be idealized, according to the Word of God. But at least we should not smear the young, saying that they have a bad record and will eventually commit the same mistakes that their parents did. I hope and pray that all of them will be better than their elders.

Regarding the lack of organized resistance and collaboration by the lay leadership, let me say that the 1956 uprising and the resurgence of church life were cruelly suppressed. Hungarians received no international support at that time. Let us not forget the courageous Confessional Statement, dated shortly before the uprising, that only afterwards became well-known through the press. Remember that most of the lay leaders joined the movement to renew the church, following the revolution. Children under age were held in jail for so-called counterrevolutionary crimes until they were of age and then executed. Western governments kept silent, then tried to justify their inaction. The only possible course left was moving to and fro between active and passive resistance of passive and active compliance. The fact that there was active resistance is well-documented, and its memories remain. Following the example of András Azékhárosi Horváth at small country churches, on Sundays, holidays, and funerals, pastors dared speak about religious awakening, spiritual apathy, institutionalized lies, irresponsible abortion policy leading to negative population growth, and for a social order based on Christian principles. Passive resistance was frequently a war of nerves, requiring the help of the Holy Spirit, and causing many sleepless nights. Collaboration in this situation meant passive compliance, in harmony with the motto of János Selye, "Fight all the time, when the cause is noble, but do not resist when it makes no sense."

Under a total dictatorship, this was the only possible way to preserve oneself. Only in such a way could we follow the Word of God, act positively, and could keep our congregations alive in spite of the government's effort to

make them wither away. We would do all sorts of social welfare work. We referred to the holiday celebrating the conquest of Hungary by the Soviet army as "April 4" instead of "National Liberation Day." The simple pastors avoided calling October 23, 1956, a "counterrevolution." Pastors worked as masons' helpers to repair their churches. They pursued their scriptural studies without any political or titular rewards. They subjected themselves to the higher powers that be, in the world and the church, prayerfully, but without surrendering unconditionally, recognizing that the last word always belongs to God, even when He appears to be silent.

With God's help they resisted as best they could, although not in an organized manner. That would have been impossible. So the body of Christ still functioned, no matter what some of its individual members were doing. The communities of believers were steadfast in seeking the truth, and I am convinced that God helped our denomination to survive, for the sake of these groups of saints.

To blame us for not resisting in an organized fashion is an unfair oversimplification. This is especially true if we think of the words of the prophet crying into the wilderness, of the Confessional Statement before 1956, of the lay leaders joining the renewal movement, and of the possible forms of resistance.

Whatever was passive Calvinistic compliance during the dictatorship could of course become active dissatisfaction among the difficult circumstances of a new, developing democracy. Such could become a tragic and irreparable mistake.

Stating all of this, we do not intend to anger anybody. All we want to do is bring the beckoning light of the word into the surrounding darkness and counter an outmoded opinion. Spiritual renewal must go hand in hand with theological renewal. We have to establish a fundamental and through unity among the various schools of thought on the subject of grace. They should be constructive, complementing each other, and we should all correct one another in accordance with the Holy Scripture.

In the life of our church, we should distinguish between the following trends:

- 1) Historical Calvinistic;
- 2) Political actualistic;
- 3) Pietistic fundamentalist;
- 4) Liberal existentialist;
- 5) Charismatic and enthusiastic;
- 6) Intellectual and dogmatic, supporting and skeptical;
- 7) Traditional denominational;
- 8) Ecumenical and modern
- 9) Eclectic and uncertain;
- 10) End-of-twentieth century scriptural theological trends

We wish to maintain the theological unity of our denomination along with the necessary renewal of theological training and continuing education.

This is the only way to a true organizational and constitutional renewal. We need a new national council and must reduce the bishop's office to a four-year term renewable only once. We need a truly democratic synodical representation of elders, rotating from one quarter of the membership to another, allowing everyone to share in leadership and service.

This is the only way we can form a truly supportive alliance and learn with our brothers living in the Reformed parishes beyond our borders and practicing their faith. We must share in the life of our Hungarian brothers, scattered and living as minorities. There was a time when we were not allowed even to mention that they existed. Yet, unofficially, responsible pastors and their flocks visited them, taking advantage of bus package tours, and we were always happy when we would send Bibles through official channels. Writing doctoral dissertations about them is no longer sufficient. The most important is that our congregations here and abroad could meet each other. Our brothers in Christ and fellow servants of God who live in the West, therefore, should not be forced to remain the exclusive guests or the leaders of our church whenever they are invited to or vacationing in Hungary. For this would give them a one-sided view, and it contradicts the spirit of Christian brotherhood. We should try to know and understand one another, so that we could love one another in a meaningful way, furthering the cause of eternity.

All this may only be accomplished in harmony with Ephesians 4:15--"speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly." So "let our lives lovingly express truth in all things . . . Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into him" (The Amplified Bible).

1) *Alethia*: We must expose the truth in the spirit of Christ. I would like to quote Ferenc Deák, who said around the time of the Compromise of 1967: "We must not lie."

So let there be light! We have to settle our differences along these lines.

2) *Agape* is the key to exposing unpleasant truths, and this exposure must be followed at once by a new beginning, stemming from eternal love. We shall not hurt a hair on anyone's head, yet we have to take one step ahead whenever we have the chance. Consequently our aim is to grow, not to settle scores with each other.

3) Growing in Christ: "*Salus ecclesiae suprema lex esto!*" [The salvation of the church must be the highest law.] Consequently we should participate in purification and renewal.

The salvation of the Church demands selflessness from individuals. Everyone should be steadfast. Theological mediation and renewal is required. The so-called two-way street of the past (peace and socialism) resulted in inaction. Instead we need to try dynamic new ways and methods but without breaking up the Church! We need unity and sacrifice to serve the cause of Christ, the salvation of the world and the glory of God. In order to achieve this, we must face up to the past forty years in the framework of historical continuity, maintain whatever was worthwhile in it but cast away its sins and its errors. In this new historical period we want to start something new, to have a new beginning, to proclaim in a brave and challenging new world that Jesus is the Lord everywhere.

So let it be. Amen.