

cratically elected spokesman will call them together. We submit ourselves in every respect to the laws of Hungary which make it possible for us to choose ourselves the participants for the activities described above. We also want to choose democratically a clergyman for any Transylvanian congregation that might be established.

Finally we would like to thank all those from the side of the church or

the state who have been of help to us since our arrival and who made possible the holding of the first Conference of Christian Youth of Transylvania.

We as founders of the Conference acknowledge our present declaration with our signatures and entrust our elected spokesman with the task of publishing this text.

Vizsoly, 9 July 1988

Signs of Moral Bankruptcy

Miloš Rejchrt, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, is also a signatory of Charter '77. Since becoming involved in the human rights movement he has been unable to exercise his ministry, and is now working as a stoker in Prague. Although no longer a serving minister, Rejchrt plays an active part in the life of his church and is the author of many popular hymns. His concern with human rights issues has on occasion brought Rejchrt into conflict with the church's synod, as in 1982 when he defended Tomáš Bisek, a fellow-clergyman deprived of his licence to preach.

The following document is Rejchrt's own account of the 1987 synod, published recently in the samizdat Charter '77 bulletin, Informace o chartě. It provides a clear indictment of what Rejchrt sees as the synod's ineffectualness and hypocrisy, while revealing the concerns of ordinary church members.

At the very start of its meeting the synod of 18 to 21 November 1987 in Prague sent a letter of greeting to the President of the republic: "The delegates of the 25th synod of the ECCB* send their sincere greetings

and respects to you, the highest representative of our state. On many occasions you have declared that the Czechoslovak socialist republic takes account of its believers. We wish to assure you that we will do all we can to build up our country and strive for peace between people and nations." The synod also sent a letter to the Czech Minister for Culture which concluded: "Through our service and contribution we hope to improve the social well-being of our country and contribute towards mutual understanding between people and nations..." These two texts, frequently quoted by the official media (I heard them in Czechoslovak external broadcasts) were the *only* messages to the general public to come from the synod.

Although the message of the 25th synod to ECCB congregations paid no lip service to the powerful of this world, it became clear during the synod that the church, insofar as it is prepared to focus on national and social issues, would evince only standard reactions of "pleasure" and "concern".

We know that the church is also tainted by the moral bankruptcy evident in the world today. That is why this synod is concerning itself

*Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

with questions of morality. But we can assess and deal with these issues only in the faith which warns us against moralising and casting judgement. We are pleased at the interest shown in questions of interpersonal relations, but we are concerned by the consumer approach to life, corruption and dependence on alcohol and drugs.

A letter from several dozen members of the church, including Prof. Božena Komarková and other well-known individuals, was handed to the synod. The signatories of the document suggested that the synod call for a public discussion of the problems of church-state relations on the pages of the religious press and that it elect a commission to talk over with the relevant authorities the dropping of a paragraph of the criminal code concerning obstruction of state supervision of the church. This would bring Czechoslovak law and its execution into line with international agreements . . . The synod acknowledged receipt of the letter, but there was insufficient interest among synod members to debate it. A majority vote decided that the letter should not be read out.

It was proposed that the President of the republic be sent the following letter:

Dear Mr President,

We believe as Christians who have known God's pardon that forgiveness and reconciliation renew relations between people and in society. We therefore respectfully ask you to grant an amnesty to all those convicted, or currently being prosecuted, under paragraphs 98 (subversion of the republic), 100 (incitement), or 112 (damaging the state's interests abroad) for criticising conditions in society and in our state. We also ask you to show tolerance by reducing the sentences of those condemned to long prison terms for crimes against the state

and espionage. We believe that an amnesty for these prisoners would be a step towards putting right serious errors in judging the critical attitudes of individuals.

A reduction in long prison terms for crimes involving state property and espionage would indicate a humane approach towards those justly condemned by law.

With our respects,
25th Synod of the ECCB.

Although this letter was read to the assembly it was not discussed, but was passed to the commission (a body not elected by the synod but by the synodical council), which should in future deal with church-state relations.

The request for an amnesty was not, however, the only item on the agenda which showed that the ECCB had not completely lost its sense of responsibility for issues of social concern. Some proposals relating to church-state relations did pass the voting stage and were thus included in the obligatory synod resolution. The following are examples. "The synod charges the synodical council to seek permission from the authorities for ministers with state licences to conduct services occasionally in other parishes without having to obtain permission." "The synod charges the synodical council to press the state authorities for changes in current entrance procedures to the Comenius protestant theological seminary." "The synod charges the synodical council to request permission for ministers to visit prisoners. . . ." "The synod charges the synodical council to support brother Svoboda's* request for an alternative to military service."

The cogency of these resolutions was, however, weakened by the fact

*Jan Svoboda, a member of the ECCB, wrote a letter to Gustav Husak asking for such an alternative.

that in not one of these cases did the synod apply directly to the state authorities, but without exception charged the synodical council to raise them. Yet how strongly could the synodical council be expected to argue these issues if the synod itself was unwilling to handle them? . . .

The reaction to a youth delegate's contribution clearly showed how eager the church is to avoid "casting judgement" and "moralising", particularly where the moral conduct of its own representatives is concerned. Amongst other things the delegate said: "I was shocked when I heard from pastor Jan Dus* that when in prison he discovered amongst his trial documents a copy of a memorandum which he had sent to the World Council of Churches and the synodical council. The synodical council's copy had found its way to the Ministry of Culture and from there to Dus' interrogators. How can that be possible?" There was no debate of this issue, nor was the question raised answered.

At the synod pastor Jan Čapek was elected as clergy member to the synodical council. The synod acknowledged that there had been some confusion in the primary elections with the result that Jan Čapek was fielded as a candidate for the post of deputy member, although the number of votes he received was sufficient to allow him to stand as full member of the synodical council. The synod now compensated for its

earlier mistake (deliberate or accidental?) by electing Čapek an ordinary member of the synodical council. The fact that at every election candidates need state approval did not appear to pose any problems. Jan Čapek had state agreement to stand as a deputy. However, several weeks after the synod . . . the state authorities took the decision, unprecedented in the history of the ECCB, to refuse Jan Čapek permission to become a member of the synodical council. Now the church has one ordinary representative without state recognition. What will happen? Will other clergy members resign in support of Čapek? Will they respect him as a legitimate member of the synodical council, albeit one whom the state does not recognise? Or will the wrangling over Jan Čapek be seen as inappropriate to the "social advancement of our country" and the whole matter be dropped?

Before the 25th synod Jan Čapek and several other delegates were summoned for friendly discussion to the Secretariat for Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture. Unlike those who are merely "concerned" by corruption, Jan Čapek handed back to the government official the bundle of banknotes he was offered. How long will it be before his brothers in the church leadership also grasp that they cannot taste the fruits of repentance until the synod accepts that the church is more than "tainted" with the world's moral bankruptcy?

*Jan Dus, an ECCB minister, was imprisoned for a year, charged with "damaging the state's interests abroad".