

Question:

What was the life of a practicing pastor of the Reformed Church in Hungary?

Answer:

One has to divide the consideration of the question in time up to 1948 and after 1948, when the state and church agreement was reached. Up to 1948 the pastors were in constant and open resistance to the state, this was the opposition of all the pastors. One can say, after 1948 this opposition became a passive kind of opposition. Up to 1948 a group of the pastors of the Reformed Church, took active part in the Smallholders Party and in the Peasant Party. My senior pastor at Kormend was active in the Smallholders Party, while an assistant pastor in Kormend, I was responsible for the youth work in the church, which went extremely well up to 1948. I also taught 23 hours of religion in the schools, furthermore up to 1948 we had active women's circles, a girls group and a choir. To the youth group, met once a week on Tuesday and we had all kinds of lectures and talks for them, varying from religious subjects to subjects of political interest.

Then in 1948, I went to the church in Eger, and in that year begins the battle between the official leaders of the church against the rest of the church. These leaders of the church were Bishop Janos Peter, Bishop Bereczky and Imre Kadar who can be called the big ~~XXXXXXXX~~ cannons, along with Istvan Finta and

Tibor Barth. These fellows began the movement within the Reformed Church, to make an agreement between the state and church. At the Miskalco meeting of the Reformed Church district, a heated debate and fight ensued from the pastors against these leaders, who wanted the agreement. Most of the pastors said that "we do not need such an agreement which would provide certain subsidies from the state", the pastors said that "our members will be able to support us through voluntary giving", but the leaders of the church said that "we need the agreement and we need the subsidy from the state".

The second big move on the part of the state through the official church leaders, was to have the pastors of the Reformed Church make a pledge of loyalty to the state. Up to this time, we as pastors had no particular obligation to the state, but everyone of the pastors was called in to the church district office, where we had to make this pledge of loyalty to the constitution and to the Coalition Government of August 1948. This pledge (Hűségeskületétel) happened in February 12, 1949. We pastors were called to the church district office for 10 a.m. in the morning, however we got together at 8.00 a.m. in the Bishop's office. A debate ensued among the pastors during those 2 hours, and some of us felt that the time had come when we must call a halt to this kind of enforced behavior. Others felt that we should be submissive to the government, both of these sides quoted the Apostle Paul, for spiritual support. Those who did not

make the pledge, were put out of their pastorates. With this, the passive opposition became more and more intense, as already in 1948 the Smallholders Party and other parties had been pushed under. Reformed Church, through its official leadership was pushed more and more to the Left, the leaders of the church who refused to co-operate with the state, had been replaced and these new leaders pushed the church officially at the top to the Left.

Summer instruction courses for pastors:

In the Tiszavidek district, as in the other districts of the church, the top leadership of the Reformed Church, now wanted to reach down to the level of the pastors and begin an intellectual re-education of the pastors. This was attempted through summer instruction courses, a new theology was introduced to explain the new situation in the country, so that the church should be willing to adapt itself to the situation found in Hungary. The starting point of this new theology was Bishop Bereczky's narrow road. He said "the church has to be penitent for the nation's role in the war, its participation in the Jewish question and the nation's opposition to Socialism. Secondly this penitence<sup>is</sup> is already judgment, and thirdly God changes the penitence<sup>is</sup> and judgment into grace, that is that the Russians are here and want to help us, we must co-operate with them and give them our entire support, and the whole of our convictions much revolve around this". Theologically

speaking, the ~~the~~ three point basis was under-pinned from the scriptures. Moreover the idea of cosmic redemption, which comes from the theological thinking of the Moscow Patriarch, Metropolitan Nikolai was introduced into this new theology, through the summer courses. They said that God is the ruler of the world, and Christ redeemed all the world, therefore the world is all good, Communism is in the world and therefore is good. The individual is only a part of the redeemed world, and is automatically redeemed, saved as a minute particle or grain of sand in the world. At one of the summer courses, I asked the lecturer "well, why does Christ say do not love the world to his followers, and why do we need the church if the world is already saved or redeemed", I did not receive any answer from the lecturer, he said that he would talk to me later in person. When he did talk to me in person, he did not answer the question but he offered me a position in another church, I said I was not interested. During this time, many pastors were removed from their churches and others were suspended from their duties, by the church office of the Reformed Church. At Szikszó, there occurred an election battle over one of the pastorates, which lasted over a year. A former AVH man, who now had become a Reformed Church pastor, wanted to be elected minister of the church. Through various means and maneuvers we were able to keep him out of the church, and he was not elected <sup>to</sup> ~~through~~ the pastorate of that church. During this struggle, I was arrested for two days, and 11 members of

the consistory, laymen, were arrested for some time. The area of Szikszó became the so called internment camp for pastors, whom the church wanted to get rid of, that is to put them out into the sticks, away from their former large churches or influential positions.

The removal of a pastor from his charge, was done<sup>24</sup> in a number of ways. One method used effectively on young bachelors was planting a woman in the house of the pastor, as in one case a woman was placed in the attic of the bachelor pastor, and when the pastor returned to his house, the AVH were there immediately to ~~search~~<sup>search</sup> the house for arms or some other reason, and in the search they would be able to locate the woman, who accused the pastor of having an affair with her, and the charges would begin to multiply. By such tricks, pastors were dismissed from their churches and sent to such places where not even a railroad or bus stop traversed within 10 or 15 kilometers. This pastor, who ~~had~~<sup>had</sup> been a dangerous element in the church, thus was out off from communications, while he served such a out-of-the-way congregation. However, it was these places and these areas that were so called out-of-the-way, that became the centers of opposition against the church leadership. The Szikszó circle of pastors was called "Fene Vad Banda", the devil's wild band by Bekeffi, who was assistant to Bishop Peter. Bekeffi had to visit the Szikszó area every month, in order to try to keep things in hand. At the Gályatető meeting of the Central Committee of the World

Council of Churches, many letters and minute books and innumerable creeds or confessions of the resistant<sup>ce</sup>~~le~~ church were placed in the hand of the executive secretary of the Council Viseer't Hooft. By these means the resistant church in Hungary wanted to give a real picture to the Western and world leaders of the Protestant Church, telling them what was really going on in the Hungarian Reformed Church. A 25 page book of minutes with documentation and official records concerning finances indicating the enormous pay of Bishop Peter and other documents showing how the State Religious Affairs Office handles matters concerning the Reformed Churches, its pastors and its people, were given to the World Council Church's Secretary. When the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches opened in Hungary in 1946 August, the official leaders of the Hungarian Reformed Church, such as Bekeffi and others, talked about the great unity that existed in the Hungarian Reformed Church. After such talks, the executive secretary of the World Council of Churches got up, reached into his pocket and pulled out all the letters and other documents which were there, placed them on the table and said, "what do all these letters mean, which letters have reached me, if you say that there exist strong unity in the church". Spiritually the revolution was there, in Hungary after the World Council of Churches meeting. At various area conferences and meetings of the Hungarian Reformed Church, the pastors dared to talk about all problems,

moreover they did not even care to request permission for certain things, which previously needed the permission of the bishop or the Dean of the church. Bekeffi, one day at one of the area meetings, said that he will dismiss 500 pastors at one swoop, if such things continue. The next day he returned to the meeting and tried to change his drastic statement, he was much softer, apparently the Religious Affairs Office of the State got to him, and made him change his attitude.

The fight to subdue the church during 1948 to '56 came from two directions, first from the state, and second from the church officials. If a pastor was called "balok"<sup>BLACK</sup>, he received no help nor protection from anyone. For example, a pastor Szabolcs called Bekeffi on telephone, to ask him how he should bury a former aristocrat, a count. Bekeffi, the assistant to the bishop of the church district, said that he would call the pastor back and tell him what kind of services he would be allowed to conduct. Bekeffi telephoned the pastor, and said that he had talked to the State Religious Affairs Office, and the answer was that the pastor would be allowed only to say a prayer, and that would be the funeral service. The pastor followed these instructions, and the day after this funeral service, which was merely a prayer, the Communist news paper attacked the pastor publicly and said that the pastor in a sermon, during the funeral service had said that all the former aristocrats counts and dukes should have their former estates returned

to them, among other things that the pastor had said, that would be reactionary. After this news paper attack, Bekeffi called the pastor by telephone, and forced him to resign from his post.

Bekeffi and the other new men in the official church leadership, had surrounded themselves with a new "court" or entourage, that did their bidding or were more Communist than the Communists.

In my own congregation, only after a long fight could I conduct family worship services in the homes of the individual families. These services were allowed from March to Easter, and they were allowed only if the individual family asked for such a house worship service to be conducted. Confirmation instruction and teaching for each year was allowed only from January 1st through May, and this was to be done only in the church building. Religious education in the schools was handled in this way by the Communists, two days were designated on which registration for religious instruction will take place. On the first day, the forenoon hours or morning hours were available for registration, the next day the afternoon would be given to registration. The children had to be accompanied by at least one parent, and both parents signature had to appear on the registration application. According to the law, no one else was suppose to be in the office of the school principal, when the registration for religious instruction took place. However, the days on



which I went and I accompanied my children to the school, I found a crowd outside the office, waiting to get in to register their children. Some of them had been there the previous day and had not been able to get into the office. The tactic was as follows: to take one family into the room where the principal was, and in the room there were at least three other men, the Communist Party secretary, the local council secretary or president, and another Communist secretary from some other organization. They would try to convince the family not to let their children take religious education, sometimes threaten them, and thus use up the precious time of the two days allotted for registration, so that very few people would be able to get into the principal's office to actually register their children. Thus, in one morning, only two or three families would get into the principal's office, days at the most six families or so. When the second day in the afternoon our registration came to an end, the principal would say "I am sorry, the time is up, wait until next year to register for religious education". When on the second day in the afternoon, the principal came out of his office, I said to him that I would report this situation to the proper authorities, and tell them that I have been here two days, and I could not get in to the office to have my children register for religious education. I was immediately rushed into the office, and they registered my daughter for religious education. The <sup>other</sup> ~~utter~~ people who were in the office,

all party men, were sitting reading papers, as if they had not been observing what was going on.

In 1954, there were many retirements forced upon pastors, whom the Communist regime did not like.

For weeks at a time in 1951 and 1952; we in our house did not have any bread nor even lard; my boy asked for a bread and I was not able to give him any. After 1953, normal economic life returned. The pre-revolution standard of life was not much below the standard of life in Austria and wages found in Austria. If one would look for material or financial reasons for the revolution, in 1956 they would be difficult to find. If revolutions occur, because people do not have food nor money, then the revolution should have occurred in 1951 and '52.

The churches developed internally into very healthy and spiritual congregations, they gave generously, the little churches and the big churches. My own congregation contributed 25,000 fts. for renovating the church. It is a fact that the Reformed Church of Hungary, built more new churches in the last 10 years, than during any other period, <sup>equal</sup> ~~same~~ period in its history. 80% of the congregations remained loyal to the church, a deep spiritual life developed. The cause for the revolution can rather be found in a psychological cause, the people finally were disgusted with all the lies and falsity that they continually heard. In fact the radio station during the revolution finally had to say, in order to clear its own conscience, that we lied

day and night and the Hungarian people do not want to hear lies any more. The Hungarian Revolution was a revolution against the intellectual oppression and limitations placed upon the people.

Whatever organization took place, in order to organize a revolution, occurred and happened after November 4th and not before.

#### The Revolt

On November 8th, the Red Cross asked for a cease fire, and Kadar also gave a call for cease fire. The revolutionaries thought the Russians had also accepted the cease fire, when they accepted the cease fire. However, while the revolutionaries held their fire and also held various fronts within the city against the Russians, the Russians began to occupy the city during this cease fire. Also during this cease fire period, they began arresting children on the block basis, by shutting off streets and searching the apartments for children in that block.

From October 29 through November 4th, the only revolutionary party that was organized, was the Revolutionary Youth Party, Forradalmi Ifjúsági Párt. The leadership of this party consisted of 10 people and after the second Russian attack on November 4th, we got together in order to decide what to do in this new situation. We decided to find some kind of Communist organization, which was a social organization of the Communists, and to take over the leadership of that group, and thus support the leadership of that group and

the organization to our own program and our own plans. The decision was made to take over the Hazafiás Népfront through its central organization in Budapest, this occurred on Friday. We met with the Hazafiás Népfront (Patriotic Peoples Front), and we got our 10 member committee elected into the Népfront. Then we changed the name of the organization to Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront, then we, under the name of this organization published an eight point proclamation. Among these points were: one, that we can not talk of a counter revolution, and that we recognize that this October 23rd Revolution was a rightful and just revolution. Second, we asked for immediate discussions for the withdrawal of the Russian troops. Third, the government should recognize that deportations took place, and these deportations should be ended. Fourth, the government and authority should make a list of every arrested person, and this list should be published or displayed on the district court doors, and those who are really revolutionaries should be released. Fifth, those whose crimes can really be proved, should be investigated and then persecuted. Sixth, we asked the assurance of the Magyar Néphatalom and asked that every plant should provide from 10 to 15% of its manpower, to form and to set up to peace militia, and then the immediate dispersal of the AVH and the prosecution of the AVH. This statement was sent and personally given to the government, through Földes and Fehér Cabinet secretaries who presented this

statement to the Cabinet.

Our proclamation and memorandum received and answer from the government, for almost every point we listed. They said that they knew <sup>of</sup> ~~one~~ train of deported men, and that 3000 people have been deported on this train, and the government have taken steps to eliminate any further attempts for deportation, and the return of these 3000. They also said that the workers militia had begun to be formed.

Then our organization, Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront began to contact all the other revolutionary groups and attempt to unify our ~~boys~~ <sup>views</sup> and have them agree, ~~that~~ that they would work through our organization, that is have us deal with the Kadar government only, so that we would have a united front. Almost all the various workers councils, union groups, attached themselves to us, and said they would conduct discussions with the government only through us, or we would do the discussions? The ~~many~~ <sup>Council</sup> ~~social~~ workers, the autobus drivers, the MAV workers, the taxi drivers, the post office, the Writers Union and many others. The group that was out, did not join with us, was the Balazs group, which was really not a large group. It was through our efforts that the various strikes were organized throughout the Budapest area and other places, this was the reason that the Kadar government could not get things into hand, and control situation. We had them guessing and we were carrying on discussions with them, we planned our last act

which was still missing, for November 24th a Monday, on which we wanted to hold our last uniting meeting of all the organizations in the Budapest area. However on November 23rd, Kadar called in Balasz, and made an agreement with him, and thus told Balasz to announce over the radio himself, that he had made an agreement with Kadar. This then, made our meeting for the 24th impossible, moreover Dezsö Por, a writer who was our press man informed on us to Kadar.

It was our effort, that organized the one hour silent strike and we also organized the women's demonstration in Budapest. In our office safe, we had the kader sheets of the Central AVH Office, and from these sheets we discovered the order of the government from top down. In first place was Rakosi, second place Gerö, third place Janos Kadar, fourth place Andras Hegedus. At the bottom of the kader sheet of Imre Nagy, underlined in red pencil, was the statement that he is not trustworthy. We also discovered from these kader sheets, many individuals whom we did not suspect as working informers or paid informers for the state, but turned out to be so. One such was Jozsef Tersanszky, I am still very sorry that I did not bring out the kader sheets, which we had in our possession.

The Kadar government of Hungary, still does <sup>not</sup> dare to publish anything about our group, which was known as the Pöitcá group. Our work had tremendous achievements, we were still in contact and talked to Imre Nagy at 4.30 in the afternoon,

just before Imre Nagy was kidnapped. In fact after his kidnapping the city bus enterprise said to the Russians, that they will strike if Imre Nagy does not go free.

I believe that the Russians did not even tell the Hungarian leaders, that they were going to kidnap Imre Nagy, because immediately after the kidnap<sup>ping</sup> of Imre Nagy I called Murosan and he conferred ~~xxxx~~ in a very surprised way with Kadar, both of them did not know what happened. They said that Nagy is at home.

Even in January our organisation was working.

When the Miskolc battle came, the Russian commander said that he would not interfere, if the revolutionaries do not harm his soldiers. However, the Russians were run out of Miskolc; 12,000 to 15,000 Hungarian revolutionaries, <sup>were</sup> ~~then~~ ~~he had~~ in the Bükk forest, we saw to it that food was transported to them, it was a tremendous operation.

It was not until December, that the Kadar government began to rule the situation in Hungary. During the day, we took the Kadar placards off walls, which they had put up during the night and had spread various kinds of leaflets in the streets. We put up our own placards during the day, this indicates that we had rather free movement and they feared our group. The <sup>Csepel</sup> ~~Escaped~~ workers, the Writers Union, the old Peasant Party Right Wing, all worked with us among others. We made no distinctions, as to groups who would work in the organization.

I believe, one reason among others for the Russians arresting

or kidnapping Imre Nagy, was that he had the document, which the Soviet Mikoyan had signed on November 3rd, by which he agreed to the withdrawal of the Russian troops. I believe that this document now is in the hands of the Yugoslavians. For the purpose of this Russian withdrawal, on November 3rd, Malter was called in, it was to be a kind of ceremonial withdrawal, by which the Russians would not lose face and it would be similar to the withdrawal that occurred in Austria. <sup>It</sup> Was for this reason that the Honved, army, did not make any preparations for continuing the fight. It was this document signed by Mikoyan, that caused the deception and it was a deceiving document. On December 8th, I left the country, both my name along with the name of my wife had been placed on the black list. Our organization, Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront, continued to work throughout January and even in February, under the guidance of those who remained.

Interviewer's portrait rating: The respondent now is the director of the spiritual life of Reformed Church Hungarians in Germany, and is pastor of the Hungarian Church in München. The importance of this interview is in two areas, first the report of a pastor, who has served in number of churches in Hungary, under the new church leadership, and this experience reflects the various means by which the Communists aim to re-educate and ultimately to eliminate the Christian church. Secondly, the importance of the interview is found in the role which respondent played in the Revolutionary Youth Party (Forradalmi Ifjúsági Párt) and the Magyar Függetlenségi Népfront.