

Composing a Hungarian Rhapsody: The “Small Committee’s” List

Following is a statement by the “Small Committee,” as they call themselves, on the recent activities in Budapest to reunite the Adventists in Hungary. Readers will be pleased to see that their account and that of Jan Paulsen’s essentially coincide (see pp. 18-20 in this issue). Except for spelling, the wording of the report has been reproduced without editing for English usage.

— The Editors

Report on the negotiations of September 11-13, 1989, to the brethren living abroad.

Budapest, 28. Sept. 1989.

Dear Brethren,

First of all we thank you for your sympathies and prayers.

We have much pleasure in informing you that the negotiations led by the representatives of the General Conference and Division ended with a positive result. This happened unexpectedly, for the immediate antecedents of the negotiations had been depressing indeed and as from human point of view there had seemed to be little hope. The working of God could be clearly felt and we believe that it was His Spirit who actually changed the course of things into positive direction.

The following were present at the negotiations, as the representatives of the General Conference: Brother Alf Lohne, General Conference Vice-President, whose participation we had asked for, brother J. R. Spangler, general editor of *Ministry*, brother Jan Paulsen, president of the Trans-European Division, the Union Committee and the Small Committee with their full membership.

At the beginning of the negotiations all the participants were together. The aim and the main aspects of the negotiations were given first by brother Jan Paulsen, then by the Union president and finally by brother Oscar Egervari, on the part of the Small Committee. The following were said, in sum, our part by brother Egervari: These negotiations were initiated by us because we hoped that in these changing external circumstances (the political reforms in the leadership of the country, the ceasing of the State Office for Church Affairs and the Council of Free Churches) meritorious negotiations could be carried on and positive result could be achieved. We sincerely want the restoration of the unity. “It was not of our own will that we found ourselves outside the Church organization. It follows that we are always ready to unite with the Church as a whole in spite of its sins and faults. Although to belong to the church in

reality is not identical with an official organizational connection, we wish to live in the most complete unity with our brethren. We also want to make the preparations for Jesus’s second coming, including the evangelistic work together with all those S.D.A. believers who strive to fulfill this with all heart and according to the right principles. We want a unity which is in accordance with the above mentioned aims of faith. We cannot accept a unity being contrary to the principles of truth, which would cause spiritual destruction and would start further division.”

After the first introductory meeting with all participants, the negotiations with the world church leaders followed without the presence of the Union Committee. We laid before them the questions in which the settlement of the basic faith principles was required before any discussions about the practical questions of the reunion could be held. These can be summarized in the following four points:

1. We want the leaders of the Union to annul the 518 decrees of disfellowshippings by declaration. The General Conference, the Euro-Africa and Trans-European Division and, at last, the Union, too, have acknowledged that they were unlawful. Most of the decrees were pronounced not by the churches but by the conference or church committees. What is more, the conference committees and the ministers carried out the command of the Union Committee which obeyed the commands of the State Office for Church Affairs. A collective annulment of these decrees is the only reasonable and acceptable step to correct these most unlawful disciplinary measures.

2. We asked a declaration of the Union Committee to correct and dissociate themselves from those statements and deeds concerning the ecumenical movement and connections which were, indisputably and definitely, in opposition to the biblical faith principles of the Advent movement, and caused discord and crisis in our church.

(We presented to the leaders of the General Conference and Division the list of the most shocking deeds and statements.)

3. We asked the present leaders of the Union to state that they dissociate themselves from every unlawful open or secret cooperation with the State, holding political positions, and partaking in political activity, which unfortunately, has been the practice of recent times. We asked for a solemn declaration which compels them not to cooperate with the State and not to secretly maintain any dishonest relation with it in the future according to the biblical principle of the separation of State and Church.

4. We need a declaration which guarantees the absolute freedom of conscience. Today there is discord between the

representatives of historical Adventism and those of the so-called new theology within the Adventist Church all over the world. This phenomenon is gaining ground in Hungary, too. Although we feel ourselves in fellowship with the whole of the church, we do not agree with standpoints divergent from the Scriptures and the original Adventist faith principles. We feel the biblical teaching and arguing against these our Christian duty. Since we have already experienced being disfellowshipped from the church because of protesting for religious reasons, we need a guarantee that we will not be attacked and marked as off-shoots and that the lawfulness of the biblical discussion of religious questions will be acknowledged by everybody.

All our requests were considered equitable by the representatives of the General Conference and Division as ones that had to be fulfilled. Brother Alf Lohne took a standpoint on the annulling of the disfellowshippings and complete rehabilitation just as firmly and justly as he did it for the first time in 1977. It was good to experience that none of the leading brethren tried to justify the Union's improper deeds and statements concerning the ecumenical question. We bear witness that each of them behaved in a true and Christian way. In the afternoon the brethren talked to the Union leaders, as it used to happen at the previous negotiations. Three points remained without any real change. A debate developed about the request of correcting the improper deeds and statements concerning the ecumenical question. But of the Union Committee members only brother Jenő Szigeti, the Union president, tried to justify his own statements and deeds. However, none of the Union Committee members raised his voice in defense of brother Szigeti's arguments and standpoint and finally they also accepted and signed the declaration enclosed. The fifth point of the declaration was proposed at the final drafting by brother Paulsen. Saying that by it we would make the declaration—containing exclusively the accomplishment of our requests—more easily acceptable for the Union church members. On the other hand improper things might have been said and done by some of us, too. So, we readily agreed to the adding of this point to the declaration.

The negotiations ended with our signing this declaration. Thus consequently only the above mentioned theoretical questions were cleared up. The questions of the practical way of the organizational reunion are to be discussed further on by the coordinating Committee, mentioned in the point of the declaration. We have agreed that until September 1990 organizationally everything will remain in the present state, that is: the churches of the Union will stay under the leading of the Union and Conferences, and our churches

will continue their work under the leading of the Small Committee. We insisted on having one year of preparation for the organizational unity. We asked for adjournment of the conference election from spring 1990 to September of the same year when the final decision will be made. For if all preparations go properly and reassuringly, and the organizational reunion is established, our churches will also be able to take part in the election. This request of ours was also accepted.

There have remained difficult practical problems to be solved by the Coordinating Committee. Brother Paulsen will visit Hungary at least four times in the following year. Since the negotiations he has already sent a letter informing us that the next day of negotiations will be November 14. Our tasks are the following now: To send to the Union Committee the list of the names of the members who are to be rehabilitated so that they could forward them to the conferences and churches and thus on their basis the annulling of the disfellowshippings could be made. Also, the Union and its president have to prepare the declaration of correcting their deeds and statements contrary to our faith principles. Besides, we have to discuss what is to be done on both sides for the sake of real brotherly advance based on true faith principles and for the preparation of organizational unity within one year.

Please, continue to remember us in your prayers, that the Holy Spirit lead our every step in conscientious consideration so that we could avoid anything that means lack of principles or any harmful compromise but do everything that serves the unity according to God's will, and the growth and prosperity of God's work.

We hope that these events in Hungary will have positive influence on the whole world Church as well. We believe that our startling experience will hold back leaders and ministers, any time anywhere, from trying with unlawful measures to silence brethren who raise their voice for correcting the faults of the Church in Christian spirit. Our hope is that the calling for renewal and reformation will find place and will be preached within the Church Organization so that the up-to-date, urging message of the preparation for the last events can reach every Advent believer in the world as soon as possible and, as a result, a sanctified remnant will be prepared to receive the latter rain and finish the great work of world-evangelism.

With sincere brotherly greetings:
Oscar Egervari, Susan Vanko,
Károly Sonnleitner