

**STATEMENT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE  
REFORMED CHURCH IN HUNGARY ADOPTED ON  
12 JUNE 1990 ON JEWISH RELATIONS**

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (1 Pet 3,15). This hope obliges us to clarify our relations with the Jewish people, and believe in the roots in which we, as Christians, were grafted. Some aspects of the current situation necessitate our opinion: the stifled emotions of recent times and the spectres once thought disappeared are re-emerging, pushing nationalism and racial hatred into the forefront and requiring that the fight be taken up against the portrayal of the enemy. Our society is polarising to a substantial extent, and the worrying malaise often fuels anti-Semitism. We were shocked by the anti-Semitic desecrations of graves and other acts of vandalism, which we resolutely condemn. The greater freedom afforded during the process of democratisation brought many emotions to the surface, whose significance may not be either exaggerated or belittled. We are aware that the increase in economic difficulties can lead to the search for scapegoats in certain circles. We want to make people aware of these phenomena and use our own resources to fight against them; by means of our theological stances and by applying all other means we wish to achieve social and religious peace.

Seeking a relationship between the Jews and the Christians is not a new endeavour within our church, in fact, it has long-standing traditions: the history of the Hungarian people and the fate of our church bring us particularly close to our Jewish brothers. The church which set off down the reformation path in the 16<sup>th</sup> century has often compared itself to the Jewish people, and compared its historical ordeals with the fate of the chosen people. The awareness of the close affinity between the Jews and the Hungarian people led to our church being the first in 1881 to propose that the Jewish people be declared an equal denomination. Outstanding reformed theologians enriched the religious life of our church by means of their comparisons with the Jews, particularly Mór Ballagi during the last century. We recommend that this special tradition be studied.

We were even more saddened with the persecution of Jews that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which peaked with the Holocaust during the Second World War: an attempt made to systematically eradicate the Jews. The Reformed Church in Hungary today still examines its own conscience in front of Almighty God, when it recalls this stigma of Europe that led to the horrifying consequence of 6 million murdered Jews (including 600,000 Hungarian Jews). In these critical times, our church proved to be weak in its faith and deeds, not that it could have prevented this genocide. Although the evangelical work of the Lord and the Budapest Scottish Mission in saving the Jews shone some light in these dark times, our church nevertheless has to repent that similar to Cain it shirked the question of the Lord: - "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4,9). This voice of repentance spoke in the resolution of the General Synod Council in 1946, which was followed by a statement from the National Reformed Church Free Council: "Under the weight of responsibility and in light of the negligence and crimes committed against the Jewish people ... we ask, albeit belatedly, for forgiveness in front of God from the Jews in Hungary." (Bp., 1949. 73. 1.) We have to emphasise these manifestations of responsibility and remorse again and again, whenever we are dealing with Jewish-Christian relations. We are grateful that there are now more opportunities to do so, particularly with the establishment of the Hungarian Ecumenical Council, whereby our church was one of the main initiators.

In the course of dialogue between Jews and Christians we primarily want to prevent waking the memories of bitter past experience in our Jewish brothers. We fundamentally believe that true dialogue and cooperation is only possible if both parties preserve and indeed strengthen the identity of their property. One cannot ask Christians not to believe in the faith underlying the New Testament: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2,11), and not to consider him the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Nor can we ask of Jews to deny the principles of their faith; we can only hope together with Paul the Apostle for the circumcision of all believers' hearts (Rom 2,29), and that we do not become cursed and cut off from each other forever (cf. Rom 9,3). Our reformed church predecessors identified this duality and this is why they emphasised that the peoples of the Old and New Testament are both part of God's redeeming alliance, and this is why they should consider not only themselves but also others the people of God, the Creator and the one Eternal Lord. The grace and alliance of God links us with our Jewish brothers.

To reinforce this faith within ourselves, we need to ward off the temptations of so-called Christian anti-Semitism, whose most dangerous manifestations are the references to allegedly anti-Semitic Biblical passages. The texts can only be interpreted in their context, and any – perhaps damning – passage heard in a given situation cannot be manipulated universally and eternally. Otherwise, this may give rise to a similar impasse as when the Jews were accused of murdering Jesus Christ. Although this absurd thesis has never been professed by any Christian church, the verification of anti-Semitic interests rears its head again and again throughout history. To counter this we deem it necessary to profess our faith again and again, based on which the outcome of Jesus' crucifixion was that he achieved peace and "made the two one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2,14).

In light of the above we must solemnly emphasise four things:

1. Let there be peace in the Holy Land, between the faiths accepting the Old Testament as the Holy Scripture.
2. We express our joy that our country has established diplomatic relations with Israel, thus declaring the high regard in which we hold the national independence of the Jewish state.
3. With our Christian conscience we declare that we stand beside the Jewish people living in Hungary, and are ready to support them in their troubles and cooperate with them.
4. We resolutely condemn the desecration of graves and the latent or open manifestations of anti-Semitism.

Our faith in Jesus Christ obliges us to sort out our relations with the Jewish people in this spirit. And although when determining the principles of dialogue we primarily bear the current situation of our country and society in mind, we are nevertheless convinced that by doing so this will also exert an impact internationally and ecumenically. We hope that the work of the Ecumenical Council will be integrated into the activities of international organisations; we believe that our work can serve as an example to resolve other conflicts – discord between Jews and Palestinians, Israelis and Muslims. We are convinced that in this way our God will bless His people, Jews and Christians alike: "You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest." (Isa 9,3).

## **RESOLUTION**

**The General Synod reinforces the statement adopted on 12 June 1990 by the Reformed Church in Hungary on Jewish relations**

**RCH 12<sup>th</sup> Synod Cycle**

consultation material for twelfth session

**21-22 November 2007**