critically 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

Milos 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 Tomàš 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 charté. 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 ap­
proach to life, corruption and
dependence on alcohol and drugs.

A letter from several dozen mem­
bers 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 forgive­
ness and reconciliation renew rela­
tions between people and in soc­
iety. 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 criti­
cising 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 crit­
ical 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 authori­
ties 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 permis­
sion for ministers to visit prisoners.
. . ." "The synod charges the synod­
ical 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?

MILOŠ REJCHRT.
Informace o chartě, 1988 No. 3.

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