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A CRISIS FROM THE VERY BEGINNING*

Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of the
Christian Peace Conference

by Detlef Urban

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The Beginnings

The Christian Peace Conference (CPC) was founded in Prague in 1958 almost exactly thirty years after the large assembly organized by the World Council for International Friendship Work of Churches had taken place in Prague in August 1928. For the 1928 World Conference, 500 delegates had come to Prague in order to discuss the ways in which the churches might take on and further their mission of peace. The World Council for International Friendship Work of Churches, founded in Konstanz at the time of the outbreak of World War I in 1914, was the first international ecumenical organization. Already seven years earlier, representatives of different churches had met for preparatory discussions. Interdenominational cooperation was established as the working principle and included in the resolution passed at the time of its foundation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, youth secretary of the World Council for International Friendship Work of Churches, emphasized and broadened this idea in his speech at Fanö in 1934 and suggested the establishment of an international Christian peace council.

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Three years later, the World Church Conference in Oxford decided to establish an international body which would coordinate ecumenical cooperation, the World Council of Churches (WCC). Due to theological differences, the World Council for International Friendship Work of Churches did not participate in the preparatory work. At the foundation of the WCC, it was decided to dissolve the World Council in 1948.³

Joseph L. Hromadka, together with Bohuslav Pospisil, one of the founding fathers of the CPC, also participated at the 1928 peace conference. From the point of view of today's CPC, its foundation had become necessary because the dissolution of the World Council had created a gap for the international ecumenical peace work of churches which could not be filled by the WCC, especially since its committees soon came under the political pressures created by the Cold War.

On the fourth and fifth of October 1957, theologians of the Comenius School of Theology of the Church of the Czech Brethren (Prague) and the Slovak Lutheran School of Theology met at Modra near Bratislava. As Professor Hromadka summarized it, they attempted to deal in theological terms with problems posed by the historical situation as well as with new developments. The participants in the conference felt strongly that the political challenge created by nuclear weapons necessitated an unequivocal theological position. However, this would not suffice. The final resolution passed at the conference made clear what was needed: The struggle against the nuclear threat would have to become the task of the whole church and peace efforts would have to become an ecumenical task.⁵

In December a meeting of 200 participants from Czechoslovak churches took place. It dealt with the topic "The Struggle against Nuclear Arms as Task of the Christians and the Churches." The Czechoslovak Ecumenical Council was charged with the organization of a World Congress of representatives of Christian churches irrespective of nationality and denomination for the year 1958.

These efforts resulted in the so-called 1st Christian Peace Conference in Prague a few months later (June 1-4, 1958). Almost 40 individuals, mostly from Eastern European countries, the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, participated in this meeting. Among the participants were such well-known individuals as Hans-Joachim Iwand, Professor of Theology from Bonn, and Heinrich Vogel,

theologian from Berlin, both of whom presented a report.

. . . .

At the First Christian Peace Conference, Joseph Hromadka described the future tasks as follows:

We are gathered here, theologians and representatives of churches, in order to review our theology, in order to revise our theological and ethical standards and in order to examine whether or not our theology is rooted in the spiritual depth of the prophets and the apostles or whether it has not become a type of human ideology.

The first Prague conference concluded with a message to Christianity calling for the creation of nuclear-free zones, the ban and destruction of all weapons of mass destruction, and a meeting of leading statesmen. For the continuation of work, a "Continuation Committee" was founded whose tasks included the preparation of the IInd Christian Peace Conference.

The IInd Conference took place within the year (April 16-19, 1959); one year later, the IIIrd Christian Peace Conference took place. The number of participants rose to one hundred, then to two hundred.

. . . .

Up to 1959, the official church organizations in the West had rather refrained from contacts with the CPC. Only delegates from the Evangelical Churches of Germany who were in Prague upon invitation of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches of Czechoslovakia initiated contacts: Praeses Joachim Beckmann of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland and Praeses Ernst Wilm of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia were the highest ranking representatives. Later on, both demonstrated their sympathy for the CPC. For many years, Praeses Wilm worked actively in the organization. From the churches of the GDR, de jure still a part of the Evangelical Churches of Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Thuringia sent Oberkirchenrat Gerhard Lotz as official representative for the Landesbischof Moritz Mitzenheim.

The German churches were still reluctant and the Lutheran Kirchenamt issued their concern with regard to the CPC in a circular because, although a contribution to the maintenance of peace by the churches was regarded as necessary, a linkage of theological principles and political

interests (a reproach also addressed to the Brotherhoods) was described as not permissible. However, this attitude was not rigorously upheld on the international level and the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Conference of European Churches sent official representatives to Prague.

The IInd and IIIrd Conferences again devoted themselves to the urgent questions of theology, weapons of mass destruction and the problems brought about by the Cold War. Such early organizational structures as the Permanent Working Committee, the Continuation Committee, and a Preparatory Committee for the preparation of a general Christian peace conference in 1961 were elected at the IInd Conference in order to guarantee the continuity of the work.

The Ist All Christian Peace Assembly (ACPA) took place June 13-18, 1961, under the motto ". . . and Peace on Earth." Almost seven hundred participants attended the conference. For the first time, representatives of African churches attended, a tendency which was to continue later on and confirm the orientation toward the Third World.

At the Ist ACPA, the CPC received an organizational structure. A Working Committee (WC) consisting of 25 individuals was elected and charged with the organization of regional conferences until the next ACPA, and to formulate the tasks for the ten permanent committees which were to be established. The formation of an international secretariat was also part of the Working Committee's task.

The "(Advising) Committee for the Continuation of Work" (A)CCW [abbr. CCW, the ed.] consisting of 120 persons was established specifically for substantive questions.

According to the statute of the CPC, the Working Committee was the central body which, apart from the tasks described above, determined the deputy president of the CPC and nominated the chairperson of the CCW. The members of the Financial Committee, its chairperson and secretary, had to be nominated by the CCW. Only the two top positions, that of the president of the CCW and that of the general secretary who had to direct the international secretariat, were directly nominated by the general assembly, the ACPA. Joseph Hromadka became the first president, Jaroslav Ondra, a minister, the first general secretary.⁷

The radical theological and ethical positions of the earlier con-

ferences showed themselves especially in the working group on "Disarmament" of the All-Christian Assembly. In its report, the group had designed the following steps toward disarmament:

1. Stop nuclear testing due to its genetic consequences;
2. Ban of the production of weapons of mass destruction;
3. Establishment of certain nuclear-free zones;
4. Conclusion of an international treaty on general, total and controlled disarmament;
5. Abolition of all existing weapons down to the minimum necessary to safeguard public order;
6. Abolition of all weapons and armies;
7. Abolition of all military treaties.

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A special committee also dealt with the German question and its connection to the nuclear build-up and the WC and CCW put this item on their agenda.

In the publication Christian Peace Conference, the official quarterly of the CPC (along with CPC-information bulletin published at irregular intervals), President Hromadka published his "Memorandum on the German question" (No. 4/1963). In this memorandum, he suggested that Western policies wanted to turn the Federal Republic of Germany into an economic, military and diplomatic "bridgehead" against the Warsaw Pact countries and he continued:

The distrust toward and the resistance against the Eastern European development toward socialism are more the consequences of an irrational mood than a responsible and political struggle for the future. The future will show whether German churches, in spite of all the justified criticism, will develop at least a sympathetic understanding of the Eastern European contribution to history and its socialist development.

In spite of the domination of Eastern European church representatives and the proximity to the policies of the socialist countries, the CPC could still afford dissent in its own organization. The speeches by Vogel or Gollwitzer, whose ethics were not limited by ideologies, or the Sino-Soviet conflict (with hesitant support of the Chinese position) could not be kept out of the discussions without the loss of the ecumenical credibility of the CPC.

In their attempt to deal with churches in East and West, the CPC could not afford to antagonize the Evangelical Churches of Germany as it

was done by CPC-members in the GDR and organizations closely related to the CPC such as the Federation of Protestant Ministers in the GDR. Walter Ulbricht attempted to deepen the de facto separation of the GDR churches from the Evangelical Churches of Germany following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 by calling for a positive "collaboration of Christians and Marxists." Thereby he attempted to make the churches of the individual provinces of the GDR legal entities and partners. Considerations concerning a "church in socialism" were discussed on a broad level in the church administration as early as 1964. However, a juridical separation of the GDR churches from the Evangelical Churches of Germany was not even remotely considered. A partisan attitude in this question would have had consequences for the position on the German question as a whole. On the other hand, in order not to antagonize the Evangelical Churches of Germany, the CPC had to restrain itself with regard to the German question, in spite of its unequivocal position in this respect. In this light, we have to interpret Hromadka's position taken in the course of the IInd ACPA in Prague at a press conference:

We have no right not to recognize the unity of the church. We, as the Christian peace movement, have no business₁₀ not to recognize the Evangelical Church of Germany.

Hromadka's memorandum concerning Germany was adopted as a position paper for the work of the commission "Peace and the German Question." The results of the work of this commission, which further clarified this position (theses of Basel) also became the basis for the Committee 5 of the IInd ACPA (June 28-July 3, 1964). Two hundred of approximately 900 participants were included in this committee. The results of its work, however, had to be withdrawn due to strong internal dissent.

Martin Niemöller, especially, criticized the thesis of the recognition of both German states and insisted on shared responsibility by the allies as agreed on at the Potsdam Conference, a stand which especially the delegates from the Russian-Orthodox Church opposed. According to Niemöller, it was impossible to request, or even force the Federal Republic of Germany to recognize the GDR.

The existence of two German states for as long as we are without a peace treaty, remains an open question. Neither the German Federal Republic nor the German Democratic Republic is a state, but both are

colonies of superpowers not yet reconciled with each other.

Other members of the West German Regional Committee equally attempted to demonstrate that the question of German unity was not yet solved. Niemöller's position was significant in its implications as it presented the CPC with the difficult question whether or not coexistence includes bloc solidarity and consolidation of blocs--or whether the leading powers in each bloc should not rather renounce their bloc position and find a German solution in accordance with the spirit and mandate of the Potsdam treaty.

After a GDR representative had explained his historical view of the cause of the separation of Germany, the committee threatened to break apart and the members of the West German delegation, who had left out of protest, could only be persuaded to rejoin the meeting due to the withdrawal of the position paper. The final result of the discussions was an account mentioning both positions.¹¹

The election of the CCW also showed the necessity to tolerate relevant minorities. Delegates of the Federal Republic of Germany for this body included, among others, Martin Niemöller, Praeses Ernst Wilm, Oberkirchenrat Heinz Kloppenburg, Professors Heinrich Vogel and Helmut Gollwitzer, Bishop Friedrich Wunderlich as well as Martin Stöhr and Joachim Kanitz, both ministers.

At the IInd General Assembly, two important organizational changes were introduced. The working committee was increased numerically and the number of commissions set up by the working committee was reduced from twelve to five: the Theological Commission, the International Commission, Peace and the Ecumenism, Peace and the Problems of New Countries, Peace Work among Young People. It is important to note that the commissions on "Peace and Cold War," "Peace and Freedom," and "Peace and the German Question" no longer existed in their narrow substantive form.

The committee on "Peace and the Roman Catholic Church" was also dissolved as a "permanent commission." This is closely related to the change of the position towards the Roman Catholic Church which had been criticized at the Ist ACPA in 1961 because it supposedly supported the Cold War spirit. This criticism was officially withdrawn at the IInd ACPA in which Catholic observers and guests participated: "At that time we did

not have faith enough in the works of the Holy Spirit within the Catholic Church." Already at a CCW meeting in June 1963, Pope John XXIII's encyclical "Pacem in Terris" was acknowledged due to its decided commitment towards peace and the renunciation of the friend-and-foe pattern.¹² Of course, no official cooperation with the Catholic Church ensued. However, the CPC developed close ties to the Berlin Conference of (East) European Catholics which is actually an organization working parallel to the CPC.

Towards the Open Break

The contradictions that had developed so far as well as potentially explosive issues which had not yet resulted in controversies could only be contained in one common framework for as long as the objective political conditions in the socialist countries and the subjective ability of leading CPC personalities made the beginnings of a discourse possible. The failure to differentiate between these two factors, as is frequently done by Western observers,¹³ overlooks, for example, that churches in the socialist GDR have much more elbowroom than, say, those of the CSSR where a minister is actually a state employee. Also, foreign and security policies in socialist countries are strictly a monopoly of the state.

Even if, in terms of alliances, it seemed temporarily opportune to set up a transnational organization which essentially represented the point of view of the socialist countries, there always remained a somewhat unknown quantity. Socialist countries always expected international ecumenical relations to pursue a parallel form of diplomacy with the West. This was true also for the foundation of the CPC which was looked at with some suspicion and distrust by the state organs. And even if today's CPC is a calculable and reliable organization for the socialist countries, its activities in the international arena (EEC, member of UNESCO, accreditation as Non-Governmental Organization at the United Nations) still suggest a certain amount of unreliability.

According to state officials, the events following 1968 showed that there were contradictions in the CPC which could not be overcome and these were considered dangerous for their own power base. However, 1968 also showed that it was wrong to equate the CPC with the policies pursued

by the governments in spite of the many affinities that may have existed up to that time. Leading personalities in Prague, especially President Joseph Hromadka, had succeeded in keeping the organization an integral whole.

In 1968, the IIIrd All-Christian Peace Assembly took place literally in the midst of the "Prague Spring." The participation of Third World countries was even stronger than at previous conferences. The virulent question for the international political discussion, solidarity with the peoples and nations fighting for independence, had a lasting effect on the theological and political orientation of the CPC. Already in 1965, the CCW had formulated the "struggle against imperialism" as a strategic task and in 1966 it dealt with the question of solidarity with Vietnam and rejected "all forms of colonialism, neocolonialism and racism" (later on, this was also done by church representatives participating at the conference "Church and Society" which took place at Geneva).

Especially the revolutionary struggle of liberation movements against South American dictatorships and the "liberation theology" developed in Latin America led to an inquiry by Christians from these countries to the Theological Commission of the CPC. The question was which position Christians should take with regard to the use of violence in revolutionary actions. The commission maintained that in analogy to the concept of a "just war" held by medieval theologians, there is also a "just revolution" in the course of which Christians could resort to revolutionary use of force in a responsible manner.

A look back at this IIIrd ACPA also stresses other reasons for the significance of this conference which represented a certain "climax":

Its success must be valued even higher, as it succeeded against a number of participants from capitalist countries who had attempted to use the CPC as a platform for undermining and infiltrating churches in socialist countries and to lead the CPC away from the line established by its statutes and its earlier resolutions. This confrontation within the CPC continued after the IIIrd ACPA. Eventually, it led to a polarization and finally to the separation from those forces which stood not on the basis of the statute of the CPC.¹⁴

This historical view from the year 1980 comes from a leading member of the CPC, theologian Gerhard Bassarak from East Berlin, one of the

vice-presidents of the CPC. He is known as a passionate enemy of Western anti-communism and of the Cold War. However, he often seems stuck in that period himself and uses his historical judgment in a highly selective way. His attacks ("undermining and infiltrating") are ideological formulations at the very least closely related to the philosophy of state security organs of these countries.

The severity of this judgment may also be owing to the fact that it appeared in the Theological Lexicon published by "Union," the publishing house of the (East German) Christian Democratic Party. In a different situation, Prof. Bassarak proved less rigorous in his judgment, although it was just as distorting. In a volume entitled The Christian Peace Conference edited by him in 1981, he wrote on the "History of the CPC":

Some participants who had come to Prague and to the CPC were not so much guided by their desire for peace. Rather, they expected sensations in view of the social instability of Czechoslovakia in 1968. These expectations were not fulfilled. The General Assembly did not swerve from the basic course which the movement had followed since its foundation. Still today, the resolutions of the IIIrd ACPA must be counted among the most remarkable statements of the CPC.

Furthermore, Bassarak accuses the "dissidents" of having attempted to "steer the movement away from its goals" already prior to 1968. Instead of dealing with questions of peace, they had aimed at confronting "different 'forms' of socialism." They had tried to turn the CPC into a conference on "Christian" socialism, but the CPC had successfully warded off these attempts, "although this resulted in the discontinuation of the direct cooperation of some individuals. However, there was no feeling of hostility towards those who no longer participated." It remains up to Bassarak to explain how his claim that there was no hostility matches his accusation of infiltration made at the same time. In light of his statement that different political views should not be cause for division as the belief in Christ which is common to all requires the brotherhood and sisterhood of all believers can only be taken as an appeal for "peaceful coexistence" on the ideological level.

It should be noted that the selective historical presentation by the vice-president of the CPC was made in the recent past, saying that "Socialism cannot become the business of an exclusive group." Thereby

Bassarak defended the rigorous course of the CPC after 1968. But this, of course, was exactly the concern of the "dissidents." They did not want to accept the political pressures following the invasion of 1968 based on the Kremlin's claim that they had the exclusive right for the interpretation of socialism. This pressure was exerted even on an international Prague-based organization such as the CPC and forced Jaroslav Ondra, then general secretary of the CPC, to resign as a result of his activities in the Prague Spring. The consequence was not only a crisis within the CPC groups in the West and between the Western groups and the new leadership under Metropolitan Nikodim but also the resignation of President Hromadka who remained loyal to his general secretary. Hromadka died a year later.

Prague 1968 and the Consequences for the CPC

It is possible to take a less offensive position toward one's own history than Bassarak has done. Such a "neutral" position, however, may prove to be no less selective in the end. The book Voices for Disarmament: 25 Years of the Christian Peace Conference published in Prague on the occasion of the 25th anniversary may serve as an example.¹⁶ Of the "remarkable statements" made at the IIIrd ACPA mentioned by Bassarak, it contains only a report of the Working Group B (International Problems). This report also hints at the controversial positions, but there are no other comments on the consequences of 1968. The compilation of documents for this volume as a whole, however, suggests that this attempt at reconciliation (which for the most part should not be confused with an attempt to come to terms with one's historical problems) with those who had been expelled, was part of the policy of the CPC leadership under the present President, Hungarian Bishop Károly Tóth. This is confirmed by the fact that at the celebration commemorating the anniversary, the dissidents were invited and given an opportunity to speak for the first time since the crisis of 1968.

In the report of the above-mentioned Working Group B of the IIIrd ACPA (March 31-April 5, 1968) the following two problem areas were discussed: 1) the question of the treaty on the ban of nuclear arms; and 2) the question of a security system for Europe.

The question of non-proliferation had become topical at internation-

al negotiations since not only the superpowers but also Great Britain, France and China had acquired nuclear weapons. As long as the USSR and the U.S. were the exclusive owners of these weapons, it was easy for Christians in Europe to reject nuclear arms on theological and ethical grounds. As we have seen in the case of the Brotherhoods in Germany, the difficulties arose at the point where the stationing of or even the power of disposal over such weapons became a national political problem. This required political opposition on ethical grounds.

Additionally, one of the basic questions was whether the international constellation of power should be reenforced through a further consolidation of the blocs and a mutual military threat. Certain countries (France, China) did not want to renounce their right to produce nuclear weapons of their own (Article 2 of the Nuclear Arms Ban Treaty) because they were afraid that such a renunciation would weaken their national sovereignty and also the international balance of forces. Thus they did not sign the treaty. Similar concerns were also expressed at the IIIrd ACPA:

Some participants [of Group B, the author] expressed their fear that this draft only reaffirmed the balance of power but not the balance of obligation. Thus it could only be accepted if comprehensive measures of disarmament were taken at the same time. Otherwise the non-nuclear powers would be at a disadvantage and remain without protection. Other members of this group, however, held the view that the non-proliferation treaty was a step forward. It represented a prerequisite for further steps on detente and disarmament. Treaties on a step-by-step nuclear disarmament of the nuclear powers would have to follow, but these measures should not be a precondition for the non-proliferation treaty.¹⁷

Hromadka's Theology: The Search for a Place in Socialism

At a meeting of the West Berlin Regional Committee Helmut Gollwitzer stressed that the governments that had changed the political situation by military force were responsible for the resignation of the general secretary. He emphasized that

so far these governments had tolerated and supported the work of the CPC although they had to know that the CPC would not follow a one-sided pro-Soviet line and that it provided¹⁸ an opportunity for free political discussion.

The development within the CPC also proved those Western critics wrong who had identified the CPC and Joseph Hromadka with Soviet communism. Whether this can be done after the turn of events of 1968 still remains in question, even though there should be no doubt as to the position of the majority.

The theologian Adalbert Hudak, then Professor at the University of Erlangen, West Germany, Christian-Socialist member of the Bavarian Parliament, later member of the Federal Parliament, discussed the Christian Peace Conference in numerous publications. In Hromadka's theology, he detected

a penetration of the Bolshevist conception of history into theological thinking, expressed especially in the new understanding of atheism, the biblical justification of socialist society and the questions of peace in a nuclear world.

Bishop Otto Dibelius, too, accused Hromadka of belittling the dangers of communism and the Federal Government of West Germany at first believed that a denial of visa could "keep away the supposed theological Trojan horse of the communists."²⁰ Also the Czechoslovak authorities had second thoughts about permitting Hromadka to leave the country.

Martin Stöhr thinks that Joseph Hromadka's theology does not fundamentally contradict the socialist order of society. He was closer to socialism than to the bourgeois democracy. Communism, for him, was radical humanism as expressed by the early Marx, and he was convinced that the human being would not let himself/herself be manipulated.

Already in 1948, he had designed a program of "socialist humanism" in which he demanded

to put less emphasis on violent methods of agitation, threats, propaganda, deportation, trials and police control but rather inspire the most noble feelings within humans such as sympathy for the poor, the weak, the helpless and the destitute. Man's eyes should be opened for that which represents the heart of socialist humanism.

Stöhr interprets this as

a warning of an anthropology which considers man exclusively the product of his social and economic environment, similar to the way in which man in the West becomes a product of his society due to the free play of liberalistic forces.

According to Stöhr, the influence of the tradition of the Bohemian Brethren on Hromadka

made it impossible for him to follow any one of three ways out of the dilemma which might have preserved the church at the expense of its significance in the history and the world: Firstly, the theory of two worlds which would leave the world to follow its own laws and reduce the validity of the biblical message to the realm of the church. Secondly, the retreat to the realm of worship which permitted islands of non-conformist and free life in a totally different world, both in terms of organization and orientation. Finally, the insistence on rights and areas of freedom for the church to be granted by the state.²¹

From this point of view, Hromadka's theology was not only relevant for an ecumenical peace movement but also for a basic conception of church, for social and political responsibility of Christians and finally for those who live in socialist countries. Those who deny the existence of Christians, or a "church in socialism" from the very beginning, will find little stimulation in Hromadka's considerations.

Exactly these basic convictions occasioned the first CPC president's support for the experiments of the Prague Spring. He closed his passionate memorandum titled "Save Humankind. Peace is Possible" at the IIIrd All-Christian Peace Assembly with the following words which, although they did not mention a concrete situation, had to be understood by everybody:

We are in the midst of a current of events which has caused the formation of centers of political power and military rule. But every day an increasing degree of differentiation in regional conditions, cultural traditions, political convictions, social progress, scientific and technological development occurs The social and political questions cannot be solved through the influence and the pressure of the big powers. Even the three centers of international politics, of which I have spoken, are unable to dominate the nations in terms of power politics and militarily, economically, or politically are unable to force onto them their model of a future society. Even if these states would come to terms with each other (something that cannot be expected in the near future), they could not force the smaller and smallest nations to submit to their plans.²²

Hromadka's plea for the right of self-determination, his claim to be Christian in the world in which one lives, neither piously loyal to the state nor (necessarily) anti-socialist, had brought about his positive attitude towards socialism in Czechoslovakia, but this sympathy was neither undivided nor unconditional. And this is why, in the course of the events of 1968, he recognized that socialism could also become a "monolithic system of power" in which the state and the fight for power would no longer take into account the interests of human individuals.

Our people have attempted a synthesis between true socialism, true personal freedom and cultural maturity. If it should be stopped on the way to achieving this goal, a skeptical, cynical, apathetic and irresponsible mood would ensue or reappear. Another generation of young people would become the victim of a feeling of helplessness suggesting that any initiative or progress on the part of the weak results in violent punishment by the strong.

The Cardinal Question: A Movement Beyond Blocs?

The military intervention in Czechoslovakia was justified by the so-called Brezhnev doctrine of the "limited sovereignty" of socialist countries, an aggressive theory based on the policy of "socialism in one country" which had been practiced for years and which claimed that the building of socialism had to be accompanied by extensive security measures against the outside world.

The non-monolithic ideological character of the CPC had involved this organization in the discussion centering around a humane, democratic form of socialism. As a result, many members of the organization questioned the acceptability of the concept of "peaceful coexistence" as practiced by the USSR.

Already in 1968, Aaron Tolen (Cameroon), member of the International Secretariat, had written a letter to Jaroslav Ondra in order to specify his position taken against the military intervention:

It is altogether impossible that we sanction an action whose only justification is the defense of 'bloc' interests or certain spheres of influence. If we approve of such measures taken by the East, we are no longer qualified to condemn them with regard to the West. If we agree to the intervention in Czechoslovakia we are no longer in a position to condemn the interventions in the Dominican Republic and in Vietnam.

This warning of a bloc-related philosophy corresponded to the support of "socialism with a human face" and the rejection of the authoritarian style of leadership practiced by Metropolitan Nikodim which incorporated Soviet interests into the organizational structure of the CPC.

The entry of representatives of the Third World into the ranks of the organization and the concern with questions dealing with revolution and liberation in these countries already several years prior to 1968 had resulted in a decided support of national revolutions in the individual departments of the organization. The leadership became increasingly distrustful especially against the Youth Commission.

The views that had developed in that commission corresponded to those of the Western youth, student and protest movements of the sixties; a strong stand was taken against bureaucratic repression of any kind and support was given to a democratic process with the participation of all individual human beings.

Consequently, this commission was the one to condemn Soviet intervention of 1968 most forcefully. Some went so far as to distance themselves from "capitalist and communist imperialism" following the schism and declaring their loss of faith in either group. Peaceful coexistence for some members of the committee meant "the attempt at global domination by the two superpowers" and they rejected the fact that this philosophy should be the only basis of the CPC.²⁵

The French Regional Committee, too, declared in their letter to Metropolitan Nikodim following their expulsion that they were against the acceptance of the status quo in the sense of a division of the world in spheres of interest and that this could not be the meaning of peaceful coexistence. Shortly before, the new general secretary Janusz Makowski (Poland) had addressed Georges Casalis and other French members and rejected the definition of coexistence as an instrument of a "pax russo-americana" as an "ultrarevolutionary slogan."

Furthermore, Makowski had left no doubt that the preservation of peace had to be tied to the acceptance of the political and military blocs as well as necessary "corrections" within those blocks: "The events of the year 1968 did not stop the process of detente. Possibly, they even contributed to it."²⁶

This just served to confirm the critics' fears and it defined the course of East-West policies which have essentially remained the same until the present day.

The Present-Day Crisis of the CPC

Following the break, CPC policy was oriented towards the consolidation of its political course. It undertook great efforts to compensate the loss of Western Regional Committees and members through an intensification of its contacts to other organizations working on a transnational basis. But this just confirmed its isolation and its orientation towards the East as both the "Berlin Conference of European Catholics" as well as the "World Peace Council" are known for their relatively uncritical acceptance of Eastern European security politics.

Ever since the IVth ACPA (September 30-October 3, 1971), there has been an increased number of activities everywhere in Eastern Europe attempting to consolidate Christians and Churches from socialist countries. Numerous representatives of churches appeared at the World Congress of Peace Forces organized by the World Peace Council in Moscow in 1973. At times, church representatives were part of individual national organizations. This was true in the case of the delegation from the GDR Peace Council, where three of the 53 delegates were official representatives of the Evangelical Alliance of Churches of the GDR.

In the past years, similar international meetings were held at different locations in socialist countries, sometimes with strong church representations. Sometimes these were assemblies solely composed of religious representatives (1977, 1982). The CPC's contribution to such conferences was rather significant. Although such meetings were also attended by participants, guests and observers who held different points of view, differences of opinion have rarely become public knowledge. Also, international church bodies had oftentimes limited their participation by assuming observer status.

Following the IVth ACPA, the CPC increasingly attempted to restructure its work according to regional considerations which also resulted in a restructuring of the organization.

Apart from the Regional Committees, continental CPCs were founded in Africa, Asia and Latin America. However, they are still directly

responsible to the central organization.

At the IVth ACPA, Metropolitan Nikodim was appointed president and Károly Tóth, bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church, became general secretary. At the Vth ACPA (June 22-27, 1978), Tóth was elected as president and he is still in office today. The Czechoslovak minister Lubomir Mirejovsky became General Secretary and Metropolitan Filaret (Kiev) became the new chairman of the CCW.

In the course of the Vth ACPA, a hesitant opening occurred, but without an attempt to summarize and come to terms with the events of the past ten years. The years of crisis were also excluded from the historical account of the development and the function of the organization given in the report of the president. Nevertheless, it was the first time that those like-minded individuals who had been expelled ten years earlier, were invited and came--for the most part as guests. However, it was hardly more than a gesture of protocol.

The attempt at broadening its orientation resulted in a number of questions and problems on the agenda with which the CPC had to deal in the years following. On some points (such as peace and the Third World) there was some progress, others still point to the ongoing crisis of the organization. The following three problem areas serve to demonstrate this crisis:

1) The challenge by the Third World, the problems of hunger as well as political and economic injustice, mostly caused by the industrial nations, had to receive more attention as part of a comprehensive work for peace. The East-West conflict which is not confined to ideology and in which wealthy industrial powers play the role of contestants, will no longer automatically be in the foreground. Following the Vth ACPA, CPC-experts predicted that the role of Christians from Western industrialized nations

will not be more but less significant in the future
. . . This is a natural result of the general
ecumenical development and reflects the priorities
in today's global problems.

This challenge can be best demonstrated by the fact that there were two resolutions calling for disarmament: one relating to Europe and another to the problem of development. The main report was given by a

vice president from the Third World, a second report by the vice president from the Federal Republic of Germany, Herbert Mochalski, who presented the CSCE process as a model for the solution of international conflicts in the Third World and other regions in the world.

Apart from maintaining a representation in Third World countries (especially Africa) the CPC tries to answer this challenge by intensifying its work in the World Council of Churches. At the General Assembly of the World Council in Vancouver in 1983, the CPC introduced a resolution of its own stressing the connections between hunger, justice and peace. Although differences of opinion between the CPC and the WCC are numerous, the CPC refrains from public polemics. Instead, it supports the programs and attempts to improve contacts through regular consultations.

The work of the CPC at the U.N. and her organizations is not without importance. As one of 500 Non-Governmental Organizations, of which only 10 percent participate actively in the work of the U.N., the CPC wields some influence, especially since its orientation does not differ from that of the Russian Orthodox Church, another Non-Governmental Organization. But its work within the U.N. is also the result of an experience which Bishop Tóth formulated as follows: Churches are always part of the central systems of communication. In the end, this consideration should also be interesting to other Churches in Eastern Europe or the GDR, who view their ecumenical work as part of their international work for peace. One of the future questions will be whether or not the turn of the CPC towards the Third World will be one-sided and follow the course and interests of the socialist countries.

2) At the General Assembly in 1978, Bishop Tóth stated in vague terms that the CPC's judgment of socialism in the Eastern European countries is not necessarily the same for each country. (It had always been stressed that a pro-socialist orientation was not a requirement for working within the organization, especially since this could not be a theological (!) topic. However, the events of 1968 showed a clear political decision.) The presence of "dissenting" participants from the ACPA was also an expression of the new strategy of alliances. Tóth himself recently stated that a policy of alliances is more important than ideology.²⁸

Properly understood, this statement may have significant importance

for the future of the CPC. As a result of this policy, for example, the Waldensian Professor Paolo Ricca (Rome) was able to present a commentary on the report of the Theological Committee which reflected eurocommunist thought. (Although this commentary was not included in the volume documenting the meeting, certain rather innocuous aspects from the discussion of the commentary were included in the report of the working group.)²⁹ Ricca posed a crucial question, namely whether the CPC politics is the soil required for the growth of theology or whether it is the other way around.

At least for the present, the formulation of a policy of alliances must be seen as a declaration of intent. For the near future, the CPC has left no doubt that it advocates alliances with a narrow political spectrum which does not significantly differ from that of the governments in the socialist countries:

The development of the Non-Aligned Movement since 1961, presently comprising almost one hundred countries, has successfully counteracted this policy [of NATO countries, D.U.], as have the increased military power of the Warsaw Pact system and the growing peace movements in many Western countries.³⁰

Church-inspired peace initiatives in the GDR called "peace movements" in the West are not mentioned by the CPC. Rather, the official line of a "uniform peace movement" in socialist countries is repeated:

In socialist countries, there is a peace movement as well, but it has developed under different conditions and has to deal with different governments. . . . The partner they are addressing is--as opposed to the capitalist countries--their own government which is trying to carry their mission of peace into international politics. . . . There are no objective grounds for a contradiction between a peace movement supporting the policies of peace of the government of its country and a peace movement resisting the peace-threatening policies of the governments of their countries. . . . Therefore, we should not develop a strategy which might be applicable to all situations.³¹

The CPC will not accept ethically radical Christians as long as it is not willing to take up the ethically motivated political arguments of earlier years criticizing military logic and systems of weapons of mass destruction also within its own sphere of influence. This fact, and its silent support of armament of the Warsaw Pact countries will not lend

credibility to the CPC among the Western peace movements. (In this connection, it might be only fair to admit that the shift to the Third World did not occur primarily on the grounds of prophecy, but that it was caused by the irrecoverable loss of Western partners.)

In this connection, the position of German CPC-members should also be mentioned. When thousands of members in the Evangelical Churches in the GDR called for the introduction of a Social Peace Service [as an alternative to the military service, the translation], the CPC was quick in its attempt to prove itself as an (internal church) critic of such naive pacifism. At the same time when the GDR youth were harrassed because of their sticker "Beat Swords into Plowshares" (according to Bishop Hempel "an error with symbolic significance"), a meeting of the CPC of the GDR with the CPC of West Berlin took place. All the participants of this meeting came up with what was a warning not to use the Bible as a weapon in the political struggle or to demand unilateral disarmament on the part of the socialist countries. As a consequence, Dorothee Sölle criticized the CPC-working group by saying that those who understand theology as work for liberation would have to accept the Bible as the most important weapon in the struggle for peace.³²

3) Paolo Ricca's demand to review the relationship between politics and theology is at the heart of the present-day crisis. The problem is not just the policy formulated by the CPC but also the tensions between the general formulation of theological statements and concrete proposals for political action.

It is not difficult to describe the politics of the CPC above and beyond that which has already been said. It becomes especially clear when looking at its position on the NATO decision on the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe and the ensuing deployment of more missiles by the Warsaw pact and the proposals for new security politics.

At the meeting of the Working Committee in March 1982 as well as on other occasions, there was an unequivocal rejection of the Brussels resolution by NATO. Following the introduction of new weapons systems, the development of the neutron weapon and new strategies of warfare, the CPC has reiterated its rejection of nuclear weapons. In this case, it was relatively easy to identify "Western imperialism" as the principal enemy,

especially since the U.S. developed new weapons technically lowering the nuclear threshold and her ruling political elite theorized about a "winnable nuclear war." This unequivocal and one-sided position by the CPC was favored by the fact that, for the first time since the foundation of the organization, mass movements in Western European countries protested against the same military and strategic plans and against the same weapons as the CPC itself.

But while large segments of the Western peace movements have since started to criticize the threat coming from a security policy based on weapons of mass destruction from both sides, the CPC still criticizes the U.S. as solely responsible for the arms race, but has not criticized the weapons systems of the Warsaw pact countries.

Concerning international-regional conflicts such as Afghanistan, the CPC position remains unchanged from 1968: "Protection is necessary, even though it would be desirable that Soviet troops were removed." But this is only possible if there is a guarantee that there are no "subversive actions of interference from abroad." And while the strong guerilla movement in Afghanistan already forces the Soviet leadership to make semi-public statements concerning thoughts of a possible troop withdrawal, a CPC-minister in West Berlin still maintains that the stationing of Russian troops is necessary in order to prevent massacres among the native population!

Concerning the deployment of new missiles by Warsaw Pact countries, the stationing of new nuclear weapons in the GDR and the CSSR, the CPC of the GDR has already released a statement which will probably reflect the line of the organization of a whole.

We are deeply concerned, but we will have to have understanding when the Soviet Union and her allies introduce military counter-measures in view of the beginning of the stationing of nuclear weapons in Western Europe. Given the historical experience gained so far, a one-sided falling behind would not further but endanger the cause of peace.

This is not the first time that the GDR regional conference proved to be especially "true to the line." On the other hand, the regional conference of the GDR approved the WCC declaration of Vancouver banning the weapons of mass destruction (with four votes against and six abstentions).³⁴

Even if the CPC analyzes the rearmament of the USSR as a reaction to that of the West, the question would remain, if they were to stay with the old principles, whether the rearmament is politically necessary and acceptable from a Christian point of view. There are no clear positions taken in this respect. Instead, the CPC is hiding behind objectively necessary processes of action and reaction for which they must show "understanding."

This also permits the support of new political concepts such as that of the security partnership designed by the Palme Commission in which Eastern and Western disarmament specialists participated. This concept was not only put into more concrete terms by the Swedish government, but also accepted, in its essentials, by the churches and the government of the GDR, by the (West) German Social-Democratic Party and by the CPC. As long as it seems clear who is responsible for international tensions, concepts can be designed which might possibly never become realizable goals. This includes the creation of nuclear-free zones, the abolishment of all military alliances, industrial conversion (change from military, industrial production to the production of goods used only for peaceful purposes), education, especially of youth, according to a philosophy of peace and disarmament, etc.³⁵

For the CPC "understanding" for present-day rearmament processes means to leave the legacy of the founding fathers and to identify with a military-political concept based on the "balance of terror." Whether this is presented as a historically necessary experience in the course of the building of socialism does not make much difference. The thoughts of Heinrich Vogel, which were diametrically opposed to this attitude, were not only presented in 1958 at the foundation of the CPC, but also one year later, because of the large majority of the founders of the CPC identified with it!

Still, there have been a few interesting nuances in recent times: At the WC-meeting in 1982, Bishop Tóth dealt with the doctrines of military policy and wrote shortly afterwards:

The states justify the incomprehensible arms race with their claim to national security. But this claim changed into the opposite--as a result of the threat originating from the weapons of mass destruction. The aspiration for greatest possible security

has led to the greatest possible insecurity experienced so far. This absurd situation clarifies the meaning of national security: only military points of view dealing with defense against external dangers are considered; other, similarly important questions of security such as economic security, participation in political decision-making, etc. are neglected. The basic ethical question of today is: Is it possible to guarantee the security of the peoples, i.e. the preservation of world peace with weapons of mass destruction?

Here we have to deal with the strategy of deterrence--the 'equilibrium of terror'--which is the foundation of the relevant security systems today. The deterrence theory does not view nuclear weapons as instruments designed for warfare. Rather, they should serve, as it is termed, as a means of threat, in order to keep the other side from using similar weapon systems. This threat, however, is only credible, if there is no doubt concerning the intention of an actual use of these weapons. It is this policy of deterrence which causes the never-ending arms race--at the cost of a clear picture of balance of power with regard to the other side. Peace maintained by deterrence is nothing but a peace of terror and the symbiosis of violence and fear. Therefore, theology is justified in questioning the ethical grounds of deterrence and in declaring that the security of mankind cannot be founded in instruments, which endanger continuing existence of the creation as a whole.³⁶

It remains to be seen whether or not the CPC in Prague will take a stand against the stationing of nuclear short and medium-range weapons in the CSSR and the GDR.

The Evangelical Churches of the GDR have taken an unequivocal stand. Especially at a time when the nuclear super powers start to manufacture "small" nuclear weapons for military use, this should be a warning that those who have the nuclear potential at their disposal also hope to remain spared from the enemy's potential, that they are trying to create a cordon sanitaire effectively lowering the nuclear threshold. From the point of view of the CPC's original philosophy, criticism would have to be elementary and not just start at the overkill-potential. This is only possible from a theological-ethical point of view. It remains doubtful whether the theology will be the ground from which the policies of the CPC will grow (as Ricca wondered).

But there are signs for a return to theological considerations,

especially under the present president, Károly Tóth. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary, Tóth published an essay titled "Disarmament as a Theological Problem" in which he referred to its relationship with ideologies:

Frequently, ideological differences are misused as apologetic pretense for the continued escalation of conflicts. One of the central questions which must be asked by the churches and by Christian theology is that concerning the possibility of overcoming the ideological barriers in order to cooperate on concrete steps towards disarmament. At this point, we would also have to deal with the problem of enemy profiles, and the use of ideological positions or anti-positions in order to justify the arms race would also have to be questioned. Therefore, the aspiration towards disarmament should cause Christian theology to modify the importance of ideologies and in those cases, where ideologies are useful, state distinctly and clearly which real needs are expressed through them.

This hesitant attempt at a return to theology and ethical radicalism is due also to the fact that the CPC feels confirmed and encouraged by positions taken by churches in the West (status confessionis of the Reformed Church, pastoral letters by Catholic bishops, etc.).

To a significant degree future developments will depend on the question of whether or not the CPC will find more response among partners in the West than it has so far, some of whom have only recently come to condemn weapons of mass destruction in a way the CPC had done many years earlier. Whether this is finally going to lead to intensified contacts will depend on the CPC itself. There is a possibility, though the probability is small.

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NOTES

¹A. Hudak, "Die Aktivitäten der Prager Friedenskonferenz," Erneuerung und Abwehr, 1/81, p. 9. [Note: Footnotes #1 and #2 were unmarked in the original text of Kirche im Sozialismus.]

²Gerhard Finn, "Konkurrenz im Friedenskampf. Mit dem Antifaschismus gegen Raketen," Deutschland Archiv, 11/83, pp. 1175 ff.

³Cf. Gerhard Bassarak, Die Christliche Friedenskonferenz (Berlin, 1981), p. 5f. Cf. also F. Siegmund-Schultze, "Vor 50 Jahren: Weltbund für internationale Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen," Ökumenische Rundschau H. 13/1964. And Károly Tóth, "Auf der V. All-christlichen Friedenskonferenz," Dokumentenband, pp. 136 ff.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Cf. Bohuslav Pospisil, "Die Prager Christliche Friedenskonferenz," Hefte aus Burgscheidungen/DDR, o.J., Nr. 33, p. 12.

⁶Joseph L. Hromadka in "Aufgabe und Zeugnis" (Prag, 1958). Quoted from Stimmen für Abrüstung. 25 Jahre Christliche Friedenskonferenz (Prag, 1983), p. 19. Will be quoted as Stimmen subsequently.

⁷Concerning statutes and organizational structure in the early period cf. Georges Casalis et al. Christliche Friedenskonferenz 1968-71 (Wuppertal 1971), pp. 196 ff., and Roland Gerhardson, Christen und Kommunisten (Köln, 1966), pp. 103f. Structure and statute of the CPC have changed several times in the course of the years.

⁸Stimmen, p. 47.

⁹Quoted from Um den rechten Dienst am Frieden. Die Prager "Christliche Friedenskonferenz" (n.p., n.d.), p. 11. Cf. also A. Hudak, Die Deutschlandfrage in der Sicht der Prager Allchristlichen Friedenskonferenz (Wolfenbüttel, 1967). It should be noted that this conservative contribution reflects the style of the cold war propaganda.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹Ibid., p. 18.

¹²Cf. Stimmen, p. 56.

¹³Cf. A. Hudak, R. Gerhardson.

¹⁴Theologisches Lexikon, "Christliche Friedenskonferenz" (Berlin/GDR, 1981), pp. 192ff.

¹⁵G. Bassarak, p. 7.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Stimmen, p. 67.

¹⁸For the complete communique as well as the documents relating to the break, cf. G. Casalis et al., Christliche Friedenskonferenz 1968-71, p. 103.

¹⁹A. Hudak, Die Theologie des Lebens und die Prager Friedenskonferenz, 1961. Quoted from Martin Stöhr, "Josef Hromadkas christlicher Realismus. Zum 80 Geburtstag am 8. Juni 1969," Junge Kirche, 6/1969, pp. 310ff.

²⁰M. Stöhr, p. 314.

²¹Ibid., pp. 317, 312.

²²Junge Kirche, Beiheft 1/1968, p. 24.

²³Quoted from M. Stöhr, p. 318.

²⁴G. Casalis, p. 91.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 93ff.

²⁶Ibid., p. 167.

²⁷K. Geyer, H. Kloppenburg, H. Matthes in Junge Kirche, 8/1978.

²⁸K. Tóth, "Kirche im Socialismus," Standpunkt, 5/83, pp. 120ff.

²⁹Cf. Junge Kirche, 8/1978.

³⁰From the position of the CPC at the WCC-hearing "Nuclear-Waffen und Abrüstung" in Amsterdam, 1981. In Stimmen, p. 133

³¹Ibid., pp. 129ff.

³² Cf. Junge Kirche, 7/8, 9, 10/1982.

³³ Neue Zeit, 12/3/83.

³⁴ Neue Zeit, 11/20/83.

³⁵ Declaration of the CPC concerning the Second U.N. Special General Assembly for Disarmament (June 7-July 9, 1982), Stimmen, pp. 147ff.

³⁶ In Christliche Friedenskonferenz, I/1983, p. 5, Cf. also in Stimmen, pp. 142.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 11f.