The Church in 1985 and 2000 - Gathering, Openness, Sending

Günter Wirth
Manfred Stolpe

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Günter Wirth: As a starting point for my questions to you as official representative of the Evangelical Church of the Union and of the provincial church (Landeskirche), I begin by asking how you would evaluate now in 1985 the predictions of Günter Jacob as they were published in Zeichen der Zeit 12/1967 under the title "The Future of the Church in the World of 1985". Let me state the question generally first and go into specifics later. We must keep in mind thereby the courage that it took for Jacob to venture any kind of prediction with its resulting recommendations, knowing that many of the readers of his hotly disputed article would be around in 1985 to strike a balance.

What does that balance look like to you? Above all, what possibilities, if any, are there for long term church planning, since this concerns not merely the spiritual-theological sphere, but also the general historical sphere - including even the issue whether one accepts the notion of a law of historical development?

Manfred Stolpe: It would be irresponsible for the church leadership to neglect planning and prognosis. It is true that each day produces its own worries, but thank God, we can trust in the guidance of our Lord. He will lead His church in ways unknown to her and guide her in the midst of fear. God has placed His church in the world, however, so that all people might have access to eternal truth. The church lives among people, she is an organization of people, and she carries responsibility for people. The church leadership must make decisions now, and must begin making plans that will have an effect into the next century. For example, when you appoint long term personnel who are barely thirty years old. When you add insurance and social security for the families of staff, the church is assuming responsibility for these people till the middle of the 21st century. The church is obligated with all its workers, buildings and establishments, to proclaim the good news today, tomorrow and in the future. Only when God himself frees us from our task, when He himself takes over the work and has brought our hopes into eternal fruition will our task be ended. This includes our plans for church growth. The church needs to look ahead, to be able to see the present as the beginning of the future, to visualize the church as underway and therefore to be able to reflect today on the possibilities of tomorrow. Faith does not allow the church any
alibi for an ostrich-policy, but calls it to strive where possible to carry out the assumptions and
that is easier said than done. Especially for a church that only after the Theological Declaration of
Barmen (Confessing Church 1934) is beginning to understand that it bears direct responsibility for
witness, service, and order to its Lord. No king or state secretary for church matters needs to break
his head over the future work of the synods and church leadership. The churches must do it by
themselves and they must continue learning how to do it. Ever since our Protestants understood
that they can no longer walk with the help of foreign crutches they have been breathing hard as a
result of a series of difficult challenges. There were the constant problems of daily life. Most of
the time they would be reacting, usually uncomprehendingly, to the process of radical
transformation of the church, a transformation involving such deep-seated social changes that went
well beyond the results of the Reformation and provided completely new experiences for the
Christian churches here. Humanly speaking, what would be easier than to keep silent, closing
one's eyes and focusing on the past.

Günter Jacob was one of the first, probably the first person to understand the complete
upheaval in its world wide ecumenical, technological, political and ideological implications.
Günter Jacob acknowledged this upheaval into which the church was thrown and also saw the new
opportunities that it brings for the church. His article on the "Future of the Church in the Year
1985" builds on earlier reflections. In 1936 he had already worked out the implications of Barmen
in a lecture "Church or Sect", and in 1956 he was declaring the end of the Constantinian age. For
me Günter Jacob is something of an Old Testament prophet. Driven by a deep assurance of faith,
he recognized the signs of the times and also the inertia of the church. His analyses are like bugle
calls. He wants to shake the church awake, to show the congregation the kind of time change that
it is in, and also the kinds of assignments that are coming. Günter Jacob wants to call Christians
to their task in the here and now. He seeks to guide them to objectivity through clear thinking,
and to further reflection. Jacob's prophecy points to the new horizon, the details are secondary.
The value of Jacob's paper "The Future of the Church in the World of 1985" should not be seen in
its details, but sought rather in the direction to which it points. And the direction is right. Today
that seems even more clear than was the case eighteen years ago.

As a well read man, Jacob knew the futurology of the sixties and knew about Orwell's
"1984". With "1985" he built on them and continued the themes further. His prognosis should
not be measured merely against the accident of date.
Finally, one should not overlook the fact that Günter Jacob has been influenced greatly through his active participation in the world wide ecumenical movement. He recognizes the co-responsibility of the churches for the pressing problems of humanity, namely the necessity of preventing nuclear destruction, and of securing food for the world. Already twenty years ago Günter Jacob recognized a common humanity above all religions, ideologies and social systems, sitting in the same boat. In this boat they had to work together for a common salvation, and could not afford additional risks.

G.W.: The next questions focus on the areas of the political, of the church political, the theological, issues of canon law and on practical problems.

Let us look first at the political. A key moment in Jacob's paper is where he formulated his criteria:

We have been incorporated into the GDR - a high level industrial state within the socialist sphere. We should stop speculating about spectacular events as though our situation would change drastically through some dramatic political proceedings.

Can one say, that with this statement, Günter Jacob spelled out the fundamental orientation for the task of the church in socialism, indeed as a long term task? If so, how does this differ from Moritz Mitzenheim, who was pursuing a similar line of thought earlier? Are you of the opinion that this primary task of the churches in our country, and especially so after the establishing of the church union (EKU) [in 1968], has been followed continually and consistently, including ever new steps toward that goal?

M. St.: At the end of the fifties, Günter Jacob saw clearly that the church in the socialist society of the German Democratic Republic, cannot return to earlier conditions. The church cannot hibernate. She must accept her mandate under the new conditions and must depend on the people in this society. Günter Jacob seeks an open, critical relationship, a definite willingness to dialogue with the governing powers of the GDR. He is not shaped by anti-communism, like so many were in the church earlier. He offers an uninhibited affirmation wherever he can, and says a definite "no" when he feels that his faith requires it. In his church leadership activates during the politically difficult years of the sixties, Günter Jacob proved to be a reliable partner for the representatives of State, when solutions were sought through dialogue. But when a discussion
turned out to be merely a one-way communication of statements that were not to be questioned, he proved to be an uncomfortable partner. Refreshing to the heart was his exchange of opinions with Walter Ulbricht in 1965 about their world views. His many tough but honest discussions with Hans Seigewasser [State Secretary for Church Affairs] brought progress in these years.

Jacob agreed fully with Moritz Mitzenheim, on the fundamental point, that it is this church of the Gospel, in this specific locality—the GDR—which must be there for the specific people in this country and must therefore orient itself toward the society of the GDR, as that society to which God has appointed it, and to affirm this as its place of work. Both men acted as pace-makers in the Conference of Church Leaders (Konferenz der Evangelischen Kirchenleitung), in which Mitzenheim, before Jacobs joined him in 1963, often appeared to be isolated. Nevertheless, the church situations and the church-political requirements in Thuringen and Berlin-Brandenburg respectively, as well as the differing theological orientations of Mitzenheim and Jacob, and above all their quite different temperaments produced numerous differences in their practical cooperation. In his exercise of church leadership, Moritz Metzenheim was oriented toward that which could be achieved, that which was possible and attainable, and tried to reach necessary goals by means of great persistence and caution. Even in his role as church leader, Günter Jacob, on the other hand, remained the prophet. He loved an open, difficult discussion and considered a commitment to clarity, even in the details, as more important than tangible results. Jacob did indeed encourage his co-workers to be tactical and diplomatic, but as far as I know, he seldom practiced it himself.

Out of their understanding about the mandate of the Evangelical Church in a socialist society, Jacob and Mitzenheim concluded that the state must be expected to allow the necessary space for preaching, pastoral counselling, Christian education, and service (Diakonie). Their position resulted in the Declaration of the Bishops Convention of February 15, 1968, in Lehnin. In this statement by a church body which included all of the Protestant church bodies in the GDR, the stance and the expectations of the churches toward socialism in the GDR was stated as follows:

-As citizens of the German Democratic Republic and as Christians, we recognize that as a result of the war which was caused by Germans, there are now two German states.

-As citizens of a socialist state we see it as our task, to help socialism become a form for a more just living together.

-We ask, that the Christians and those citizens who do not share the world view of the ruling party, be permitted to share in the responsibility for our state system without conscience pangs.
-We ask, that the church life of Christian citizens in a socialist state, who are helping in the building up of the state, be recognized and clearly affirmed. With that, we ask for consideration of the fact that the Christian faith expresses itself in daily life, in the fellowship of individual congregations and in the entire church.

The Church Union established in 1969, a union deeply shaped by Albrecht Schönherr who united in himself the farsightedness of Günter Jacob and the perseverance of Moritz Mitzenheim, this union spelled out its position at the Synod of Eisenach in 1971 as follows: "We want to be the church, not beside, not against, but we want to be the church in socialism." The Synod in Schwerin in 1974 defined the church in socialism as the church that helps the Christian citizen and the individual congregation to find a way in freedom and in commitment to their faith within the socialist society, and who strive to seek the best for everyone concerned.

This position by the Union of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR (EKU) is being continued in a concrete and consistent manner. The Synodal convention sets a yearly signal and serves as clearest point of reference for seeing the development. Thus, in 1985, at the national Synod in Dresden it was stated "Our churches are on the way to recognizing and taking seriously in their own understanding this our socialist society; to see it as the place assigned us by God for Christian witness, and as an opportunity from God to take up the service of the Gospel."

G.W.: If so, one should raise the further question whether this formula has actually become a living reality in its fullness in and beyond 1985?

M.S.I.: The Evangelical Church in the GDR, the larger majority of its office holders, co-workers, and members, are practising this position of the church in socialism. "Church in Socialism" is the briefest description of the understanding of the mandate for the evangelical church in this land. But formulas are also dangerous. They must not lead to empty liturgy. The church in socialism means a continuing mandate, it means the process in which the Church of Jesus Christ finds itself in this society and with the GDR state. This process affects everyone and it has many sides:

-The church must remain the church and therefore her final commitment and freedom is in God. Because of the ideological fronts that is simpler here than in the western society. There can never be a socialist church.
- The Christians can believe that the promises of God are just as valid for the socialist society. Exactly here is where their service and witness are needed.

- Churches and Christians are challenged to see themselves as being concretely responsible for the problems of the world and of their own society.

- Churches and Christians expect from their socialist society that it allow unhindered religious activity, as well as equal rights and equal respect regardless of their world view.

State and society have understood this position. It was taken into consideration in the agreement on March 6, 1978 between the State Council and the Church Union, which was reaffirmed on February 11, 1985, when the Chairman of the State Council met with the Chairman of the Conference of the Evangelical Church Leadership.

The church in socialism is a two-sided process, that must be practised at all levels and in all areas. It requires intelligent and open dialogue as well as a constructive and patient manner on both sides. The church in socialism docs not mean short-term tactical maneuvering, but rather a long-term common journey of church, society and state. It requires a "Fellowship of the Road" that knows that life will always present new problems in which it must prove itself.

G.W.: In this connection I have a question regarding the prediction of Günter Jacob about the possible situation in 1985 in contrast to the actual one - with reference to the situation in the congregations, catechetical instruction, the involvement of and the education of the laity, the role of the pastor, etc.

M.S.I.: Günter Jacobs predictions are radical and alarming for many. A deciding point is the recognition of a situation of church upheaval which is historically unique. Jacob sees the end of the "Early Epoch" of the 2000 years of the church, and forecasts the collapse of the hitherto existing form of the church. Only an insight into the awaiting changes, plus a reformation of the head and body can enable the church in this time of secularization to fulfill its mandate. For those people who grew up without any religion, of which there are an increasing number in society, the church itself distorts the vision for the truth that it claims to hold. A creeping membership loss and the concomitant decline in the financial base, makes the maintenance of existing church life impossible. A parish system that covers all of the territory can no longer be maintained. Pastors will be practising their profession as a side-line job, and will be supplemented by mature laity. The Volkskirche is coming to an end. The Corpus Christianum is being replaced by a church in
the world-diaspora: The collapse of what has been, in terms of personnel and of material, from the medieval age of the *Corpus Christianum* and under the fiction of the identity of the congregation of citizens with the congregation of believers as expressed in the parish system, the collapse of this can be foreseen. This necessary shrinking process will not take place under the banner of anti-Christian decisions and a conscious rejection of the Christian proclamation. Rather it will take the form of a natural bleeding without dramatic conflict, a silent bleeding to death.

We would deceive ourselves, were we to try to calm ourselves by contrasting the reality of the church in 1985 with that of Jacob's predictions. Surely some things are even better than in 1967 and in no way as negative as the year 1985 looked to Jacob:

- Attendance at the Christmas Eve worship service has risen.
- The frequency of communion has increased.
- Income from church taxes has risen and the income from collections has doubled.
- Worship services minus sermons, but with short readings and a lot of music draw the masses. For each student at the church's educational institutions there are from two to four applicants. The number of youth and adults taking part in training seminars has doubled.
- The service ministry of the church in homes and institutions is more productive than before and has become an irreplaceable factor in the general health and social systems.
- The requests for Bibles have risen.
- The church situation is obviously, even in its outward image, better than it was in 1967.

But that would be a deception, because the core of Günter Jacob's statements are correct:

The decline in quantity continues. The normal loss due to the difference in number of deaths and number of baptisms goes on unremittingly. The undoubted interest in much of what the church offers does not usually lead to membership. The official ministries of the church are less in demand. The declining numbers, especially in sparsely settled areas, are reaching significant proportions. Churches are moving their worship services out of the church into the living rooms. The pastoral vacancy rate in just such areas is great. By means of repairing buildings and by a tactic of delayed retreat, the church leadership is trying to retain the parish system, but the result is resignation. Jacob was truly right: The reformation of head and body is due. The form and method of proclamation of the church must adjust itself to the incisive changes so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be offered effectively.

The goodness of God has spared the church a sudden collapse as predicted by Günter Jacob. Several factors have modified or hindered the trend that he described: The predicted
secularization will never usher in an emotion-free era. The need for something that involves not only the mind but also touches the soul, is growing. At the same time highly educated people are searching now more than ever for the meaning of life, for the Truth, and stumble upon the offer of the Church. I presume that there will be no religionless time coming. The separation from the church does not signify the end of religion. In a similar fashion even in the communist society there will be many people who will not be able to find, either in an academically oriented world, nor in personal consumerism, the center of their lives. There remains for us a task for society in general, to provide an opportunity to practice religion and also to be a stabilizing factor.

The loss in quantity has the side effect of fostering concentration. The church of Jesus Christ will not be forsaken by the committed. Whoever has really learned to know God's Good News, can at the most turn his back for a time. Only the hangers on have left the church. The faithful, however, have become more strongly committed. The spiritual life has become more intense (e.g. the Lord's Supper), and the material sacrifice of the individual Christian is rising. With the loss of the large numbers of people, the spiritual and the material endeavors of the congregations are increasing. At the same time the diversity of what the church offers has become greater, so that many people who do not belong to the church take part in church events. New themes, new people and new interest all show how the biblical message constantly makes room for itself. Günter Jacob predicted this. Today we see that the new impulses do not as a rule arise out of the traditional work of the church, but the latter is the point of crystallization for many seekers after God and after truth. Lastly, one cannot overlook the fact that this smaller church possesses an astoundingly broad constituency sympathetic to it. Whatever the motive, the church enjoys trust and support from all levels of society.

Günter Jacob was right that by 1985 the state church would have fallen. It experiences, however, by grace, a soft fall, and it finds itself as church of the people again. May she receive the gift of a new spirituality out of this breakdown!

G.W.: A closely related question at this point is the question of the restructuring of church life, along the lines of the recommendations of Eisenach and its implications. I'm not trying to place myself, with this question, on the side of those interested in the failure of those recommendations. Rather I am asking about the problem of organization, of church law, so that the pragmatic does not get separated from the theological. Might it be, that no act of law can
create such a church, that initial failures must be "sat through", and that such a church is achieved only through theological, and spiritual means?

M.Si: From Jacob's point of view, the Recommendations of Eisenach can be tested only on the tip of the iceberg. They were intended to lessen on a step by step basis the irresponsibly bulky and complex structure of the whole church. As is known, that failed in the province of Brandenburg.

Nevertheless, the path to greater commonalty has to continue. For that we don't need ever more complicated, though well-meant, alarmist final resolutions (by Synods). The process of growing together had its beginning already in 1969 through the cooperation in the union. There is no need for hurry in trying to draw the logical conclusions in structure. Günter Jacob warns against striving for reform of structure, as an unnecessary distraction from the more urgent necessity of theological work.

It is probably more urgent to examine the whole structure of the Evangelical Church from the congregation to the entire church as to its qualifications for being an instrument of proclamation. Presently, at all levels, we are maintaining a church organization that embraces the entire population. This cannot be changed through an all-embracing structural reform either, but must be adapted rather through a series of steps to match the needs of ministry. Nevertheless, this new church presupposes a theological, spiritual and religious transformation. It has begun with the church's acceptance of its mandate here in this place. It must be continued with the recognition and discernment of the opportunities of the small group, out of which priority decisions must arise. It is the task of the decision making by the central leadership to make room for new efforts, and to restrain activates that are unnecessary. Church law could be an important means of assistance, if it provides enough flexibility, for example, to allow new, more people-oriented, congregational forms to exist alongside of the parish congregation, or to allow part-time church representatives to work alongside full-time workers with full recognition.

G.W.: Permit me to ask you a question that is at the same time a taboo but which arises out of Günter Jacob's article. When Jacob reflected on his attitude in the Zeichen der Zeit magazine of 12/67, he wrote among other things: "In Evangelischen Pfarrerblatt I took into consideration with thankfulness the objective and helpful contributions in specific questions which I did not answer with sufficient clarity, of Karl Kleinschmidt (who tried to label me an advocate of
Convergence theology!), Herbert Trebs, Gert Wöndelborn, Erich Evers, Walter Feurich, Manfred Haustein and Goetz Bickelhaupt (his article was very understanding)." In other words: It was the left wing that discovered the progressive trend in Jacob's article and sought to get into a dialogue with him about the church. Ultimately this did not come about - and the "Left Wing" who are not at all of one mind, see themselves as before, as "outsiders" when they feel pessimistic, or as "pioneers" when optimistic. In any case, they are those who 20-30 years ago tried to do alone what the whole church is now trying to do. These "Leftists" are not demanding a copyright on their ideas, but they would like to be identified for what they were, and what most of them still are, namely pioneers (including of course their mistakes too).

How can Church in Socialism develop any further, both spiritually-theologically and in society, as long as these "Leftists" are excluded, marginalized and ignored?

M.St.: It is quite certain that the church has failed those members who held opposing views, those individuals who in their secular occupations, or as theologians, church workers and pastors urged accepting the situation in the GDR. They were often isolated, ignored and even suspected. Even when the church as a whole began to recognize and accept its position in the GDR, it was completely overlooked that almost 20 years ago very similar positions had been held by the so-called "Left Wing". This failure to acknowledge is one of the unintended results of earlier anti-communism. Impartial people like Günter Jacob, however, did not base their evaluation on how friendly one is to communism but rather on the relevance of the ideas for the church. The Gossner Mission, for example, who are pioneers connected to the church, could very well count on Günter Jacob's intercession and support, even though they belonged to the high-profile Left Wing. Today there are many examples, like the church members who are known for their work in the CDU or in the National Front, who contribute helpfully in church councils, synods, church leadership and in other positions. Certainly the church needs to make up for a lot with its well-known pioneers. It is possible, however, that for some of those who were once seen as the church's handicapped and excluded ones, they have slipped into an outsider mentality for which there is now no justification. This taboo needs to be broken from both sides.

G.W.: With that I would like to come back to our starting point but at a different level. When you are asked today, and I ask you, what will the church in 2000 look like? What kind of planning process must be undertaken so that the church in the year 2000 as community will be

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able to serve, to be a witness? What kind of criteria or guidelines would you use? Would it be enough simply to continue the approach of Jacob, or should one not rather pull together some new elements for analysis?

**M.St:** Günter Jacob's central statement is this: The biblical message will make its own way and it will also grip people in the future.

This has been our most important discovery and our strongest encouragement in recent years. Even in the secularized world a steadily growing number of highly educated, academically minded people, who are thinking seriously about the necessity of living a conscious, responsible life together with others, are encountering the Christian option. Whatever the developments of ecumenism, of natural science, of technology and culture can bring, nothing that humanity aspires to can equal the grandeur and moral culture of Christendom as it shines forth in the Gospels. This has become even more clear at the present time in light of the threat to human existence through military preparation and social injustice. The teaching of Jesus offers people the chance to live a responsible life, and it shows humankind a way to a more trusting community. The Bible is the living word for people of today and tomorrow. This fundamental fact will continue to influence us whether we live it out or not, into and beyond the 21st century.

It is the function of the church to plan its structure, its regulations, its way of doing things, on the basis that all people everywhere, every day, until the end of the world, need the good news of Christ. That is the clear mandate. This does not in any way mean that the institutional church, this shabby baggage train of the eternal truth of God with its inadequate drivers and brakes, has any right to claim a stable membership or that it has the right to restore the old state-church relationship. No, first one must start with the assumption that the institutional church, in spite of all its loyal congregations and many magnificent pastors and church workers, is obstructing its own way. With that I do not mean the external shortcomings, or personal weaknesses, but rather the insufficient reaching out into the world. The center of the church, the worship service, is not a mission into the world, but a separation from the world. It is a tremendously important remembrance and assurance for the members who know the Gospel and who, on the basis of the rituals and forms used in the worship service, are reminded of what they know.

However, in the year 2000 about 90% of the population will be unable to remember because there will be nothing there to connect them to the formulas and rituals. The church of
Jesus Christ as a conveyor of Good News must learn by the year 2000 to translate its concerns to the modern person who does not know the naked man on the cross and sees Santa Claus as a caricature of the loving God. The really open worship service that is supposed to have influence beyond the initiated, must be comprehensible to the ever increasing number of biological strangers to the church. This includes using modern advertising to attract people. This is legitimate because church bells are not enough anymore. However, the conveying of the Gospel is still at the forefront. There are elements noticeable today already, which the church needs in order to carry out its mandate to all, all, all in the year 2000:

Sermons that speak to and meet the listener where he/she is with his/her problems and which are livable in the light of the Gospel.

Meditative readings from both old and new texts that stimulate thinking and lead to prayer. Music and art that can lead both the listener and observer to deeper concentration and a conscious lifestyle.

The self-less service to the severely handicapped, to the helpless elderly, or to the social outcasts which can not be produced through money or honors, but through which Christian motivations can be recognized.

The offer of an experience in community in the diverse forms of Christian groups or circles, including smaller and larger special gatherings, which are able, through experiencing the joyful family of God, to encourage the individual to live life.

It is not the form that is central, but rather the content of the message. The question is whether we really are at the core of the message with the way we interpret the Bible according to our needs. In spite of top notch theological, philosophical and linguistical performance in the Evangelical churches, there is still too little emphasis on the salvation that Jesus offers to every person specifically, as well as to the whole world. The church has more to say than that. Günter Jacob called this the vital question - whether she can translate the New Testament witness into the realities of the modern world.

With the help of the ecumenical world, especially the pressure of our brothers and sisters in Africa, Latin America and Asia, our churches are beginning to be a concrete witness to the world. In addition, the basic groups of our churches, such as the youth groups and young adults have discovered again the meaning of the complete biblical witness of shalom into this world. The World Conference in Upsala in 1968 called it the cry for peace and the call for justice for the hungry and the exploited. The full assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in
Vancouver in 1984 urgently challenged the churches and Christians to strive hard for peace, to preserve all of creation, and to work for justice. The Union of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR and its member churches support this understanding as a concrete mandate of the church to the world. Therefore, through the church's stand against the arms race - especially against nuclear weapons and the Star Wars plans - it fosters dialogue, the easing of tension and the building of trust between states of different social orders. At the same time it urges the use of the resources that have been set free due to a halt in the arms race, for the developing countries. This mandate will remain till the year 2000. -Hopeful efforts like the Geneva summit in November 1985 show us that there is much work to do. The churches in both German states will receive a growing mission and responsibility to find ways of reconciliation between military alliances. War must never start on German soil, peace must start on German soil. This is a continuing mandate. There is hope in the way that our churches have taken hold of the biblical message of peace and justice in the world: The year 1985 has brought a record participation of individual churches in the "decade for peace and justice" [10 day event], as well as record results in collections for Bread for the World.

There is a deficiency in the specific proclamation to the individual person today. The translation of the biblical message into the life of the individual generally has little relevance to the concrete problems that people wrestle with. I hope that the preaching of the Evangelical Church will learn to be more clear cut. That will be the more difficult part of the message, but it is just as important as the message to the wider world. The effectiveness of the struggle for peace and justice in the world depends on the efforts to change the people in front of the pulpit and in front of the church. The target fields for a concrete proclamation in 2000 to people in our land can already be identified:

- The life together of male and female, sexuality, the rising divorce rate and its impact on the family, and new forms of co-habitation by members of the same sex.
- Life style and consumerism in the face of ever increasing want on the one side, and on the other side, the recognizable limits on raw material, energy, water and air.
- The natural tension between co-responsibility for the productive achievements of society and participation in the decision-making process of society in the presence of current concerns over the lack of participation and an insufficient feeling of being taken seriously.
- The witness of the Bible can be translated unequivocally into the concrete problems here and now. To the issues just named there is the possibility of providing clearly stated parameters...
for action. The problem that a church that is oriented towards preservation and security faces, is the fear of antagonizing the state or the individual person with unpleasant words that might provoke anger. The church would gain in credibility if it would surmount this inhibition. The church's mediation of the biblical message is at the same time a pastoral mission which shows itself to be not loveless, but understanding, not pompous but trustworthy.

In 1967 Günter Jacob spelled out in six theses the tasks that he saw for the church, as it adjusts itself to the upheaval of its context, its form and its calling. These tasks apply fundamentally for the coming year 2000, and for 1985 they might be applied as follows:

1. Bible study is to be strengthened so that proclamation and Christian education can become concrete.

2. Young Christians starting with age 15 or 16 should be invited to be active and critically involved. Every local church council, and every Synod should have young people represented on it.

3. In the appointment of pastors to parishes, the burden must be distributed more fairly. Withholding an appointment, or not administering a vacant parish ("white spots") could be a final option, in order to avoid too great a financial burden. Before that, there is the possibility, however, to smooth out inequalities between large cities and out of the way places, to offer pensioners a post not as an act of mercy, but to appeal to them to serve, and also to draw on the reserves for the preaching ministry from the large number of staff in service agencies and in the church administration.

4. A major resource of the church are the church elders and other willing church members. Possibilities to increase their supervision and training must be intensified, so that they are able to speak to the realities of this world in the light of the biblical message. Helpful beginnings are the teaching letter program in Thuringen, and the discussion groups of retired Bishop Schoenherr. Here the church must plan carefully for increased activity.

5. Church members should get stronger support when they show through their cooperation in the productive sphere, in the sciences, in culture and in politics that out of their understanding of the biblical message they wish to seek the good of the state and of the world in constructive solidarity. The efforts of the Gossner Mission are a beginning, they encourage others through a sharing of experiences.

6. A conversation between Marxists and Christians in our country, a conversation based on serious, mutual exchange of information about motives and fundamental understandings has
begun. The Luther celebrations of 1983 provided an opportunity, that should be utilized but with care. Understanding and impartiality are the main goals, which must be expected at all levels. Out of these should grow mutual respect and uninhibited openness which would be of value for all citizens. Christians and Marxists, now and in the foreseeable future, are dependent on each other. The necessary pragmatic cooperation must be extended through dialogue about life, faith and world view.

I should like to add two emphases for the realization of Günter Jacob’s theses, which might describe the way of the evangelical church in the next millennium: Gathering and Openness.

Gathering is needed for those people who are already Christians. They must be reassured, even by means of the traditional forms, and they must be visited and encouraged to become involved to the point of making a financial sacrifice.

Openness is needed for those people who are not yet Christians. They must be able to understand what the church really is about. They need understanding, space and patience. The church must develop transitional forms for baptism and membership. The church must also listen carefully - perhaps it will be from outside that new elements of proclamation will come forth. The church must be open to all the burdened and heavy laden, the frustrated and the embittered ones. But in all the necessary and conflicting discussions with newcomers it must remain clear, that in the church the only ultimate issue is the message of Jesus.

Q.W.: In your last comments you focused on the church and the world in the year 2000. How would you rate, in this connection, the proposals that Mikhail Gorbachev made on January 15, 1986 - the ideas of entering the 21st century as a nuclear weapon free world?

M. St.: The proposals that Mikhail Gorbachev has submitted stand as an encouragement for those who see the "Race into the Year 2000" not as an armaments race, but one for disarmament. The vision of ridding the world and space of all atomic weapons by the turn of the century is realistic, if, as Gorbachev said, the "logic" of the arms race will be "definitively" rejected. Those like us in the Evangelical Church of the Union who have always warned against the spirit and logic of deterrence, and those, who like us have joined with the World Conference of Religious Representatives to celebrate the 2000th birthday of our Lord in a world of peace, can only welcome the proposals of Gorbachev vigorously, and to call on all those who are addressed by it, to respond constructively from a new perspective.

Translated from German by Margaret Sawatsky, Winnipeg, Canada.