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THE LANGUAGE OF LIBERATION: STATE AND CHURCH IN
EAST GERMANY FORTY YEARS AFTER THE END OF WORLD
WAR II
by John P. Burgess

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Contemporary church-state relations in the East Bloc can be considered from several
different perspectives. One approach is to focus on the ideological differences between Christians
and Marxists. Since it is "atheistic," the communist state is presumably hostile to religion and the
church. Another approach is to focus on those social and political goals that Christians and
Marxists share in common. Despite ideological differences, church and state can presumably find
areas of cooperation. Increasingly, yet a third perspective on church-state relations in the East Bloc
has emerged. This position is perhaps best typified by the situation of the church in the German
Democratic Republic. Steering a course between confrontation and conformity, the Evangelical
Church (the major church body in the GDR) has come to identify itself as "Kirche im
Sozialismus" rather than for or against socialism.

The legal status of the church in the GDR reflects the tension which Christians
experience under a communist government. On the one hand, the constitution guarantees every
citizen the right to profess a faith and participate in religious activities. On the other, it establishes
that the GDR is a socialist society under the direction of the Marxist-Leninist party. The party
uses the state to promote a "scientific" world-view freed from the distortions of the religious
consciousness.

One area in which this tension is evident is the press. In the GDR, the mass media are
organs of party and state. "Freedom of press" is understood in terms of what promotes socialism
and communism. The church, however, is not directly subject to the state's regulation of public
language. "Freedom of religion" includes the church's right to publish and distribute materials. The
state, nonetheless, reserves the right to confiscate any publications that grossly violate the
"official" standards. Because the church has only a limited amount of paper, it must exercise self-
censorship.

The church does have other ways to address social issues. Worship services and church
meetings take place openly and freely. Moreover, the church is able to print occasional papers "for
use only within the church." Though sometimes limited in what it can say in its official publications, the church can invite people to hear sermons, participation discussions, and read papers that address a wide range of topics. The church has considerable possibilities to raise a public voice.

One important facet of church-state relations is the common observance of days of social significance. Civic celebrations offer both church and state representatives an opportunity to address social issues. On May 8, 1985, the GDR observed the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. In the GDR, May 8 is celebrated as the "Day of Liberation"—liberation from fascism, liberation to socialism and communism. In the weeks leading up to May 8, party and state coined an "official" language by which to describe the significance of the date. This official language consists of a "standardized vocabulary" of set words, phrases, and topics. Public statements were constructed out of this special terminology.

The Evangelical Church also observed May 8. The church's language extends the range of public discussion. In form, the church's language appears less standardized than the state's official language. In content, the church's language includes topics that the official language avoids. The church, nonetheless, respects certain limits. Explicit criticism of party and state is avoided. Moreover, the church's language sometimes seems vague and abstract. General communalities between church and state, rather than concrete differences, are emphasized. The degree to which the church's language respects or goes beyond the official language offers some measure of contemporary church-state relations in the GDR.

The Notion of "Regulated" Language. The official language of party and state is given in the country's major daily newspaper, Neues Deutschland. As the publication of the Central Committee of the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Unity Party (SED), Neues Deutschland sets the accents in the mass media. Because all organizations, with the exception of the church, stand under direction of party and state, the language of Neues Deutschland "regulates" the language of most publication and public speeches in the GDR.

A striking example of "regulated" language appeared in the weeks leading up to May 8. Several towns and cities observed the fortieth anniversary of English and American air attacks. Neues Deutschland regularly reported on the state sponsored observances.

In previous years, the air attacks had been described as "Anglo-American terror attacks." This year, Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party and Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, gave a major speech in Dresden in which he mentioned neither the role of the English and Americans nor the words "terror attack."
This change appears to be a new language "regulation." Most later observances and speeches, as reported in *Neues Deutschland*, do not mention the role of the English and Americans. A few articles refer to the "English" or "American" bombers or airplanes. But in no case does one find the formulation "terror attack," and words like "English" and "Americans" are employed neutrally rather than in an accusatory manner. It is interesting to compare the articles over Magdeburg and Dresden, for the observance in Magdeburg took place before the new accents were set in Dresden. In connection with Magdeburg, one reads of the "anglo-American" bombers and their "death-bringing load." In Dresden, such formulations are missing. Thereafter, the word "anglo-American" disappears.

The Day of Liberation. On January 11, 1985, party and state issued a "proclamation concerning the fortieth anniversary of the victory over Hitler-fascism and the liberation of the German people." The proclamation, printed on the front page of *Neues Deutschland*, presents the official interpretation of May 8 and delineates the words, phrases, and themes that would appear in later speeches, articles, and reports. The proclamation is quite general and not entirely without contradiction (for example, as to whether the East Bloc anticipates coalition or confrontation with the West.)

Prior to Jan. 11, the topic "Day of Liberation" had received scant attention in the press. Afterwards, the language of "liberation" appeared everyday through May 9 (which reported on the observance of May 8). Front page headlines repeatedly mentioned the "Day of Liberation," and "Day of Victory," or "May 8." *Neues Deutschland* regularly printed public speeches of leading party and state officials who recited the official language. Other articles described key events of 40 years ago, aspects of military history, activities of freedom fighters in the resistance, destruction of German cities in allied air attacks, and the gradual liberation of different towns, cities, concentration camps, and countries. Attention was devoted to the preparations for the observance of May 8 in other countries. The contrast between the attitude in the two Germanies was especially emphasized. Whereas public debate in West Germany raged as to how the nation should understand and observe May 8, *Neues Deutschland* presented the picture of an East Germany fully committed to celebrating the day as the "Day of Liberation." State preparations were reported in all detail: museum exhibitions, contests in factories and places of work, hikes "in the footsteps of the liberators," conferences of scientists and artists, events sponsored by social organizations, new books and films, special television program.

May 8 was also a major topic of discussion in the church. Papers were prepared, speeches and sermons were delivered. In some cases, *Neues Deutschland* reported on the church's statements;
in most cases, they were printed by the church "for use only within the church." Leading church
officials spoke at several state-sponsored observances commemorating the fortieth anniversary of
Allied air attacks. (It was sometimes the first time since the war that churchmen had been given
such an opportunity.) The church also sponsored its own observances to commemorate the victims
of the concentration camps, the losses of the Soviet Union and the Allies, and the death of Dietrich
Bonhoeffer. On the evening of May 8, Bishop Hampel preached in the central cathedral of East
Berlin, and the service was broadcast simultaneously over East German television. In spite of the
domination of the state language in the public sphere, it is reasonable to suppose that the church's
language concerning May 8 also touched most East Germans.3

My analysis is restricted to the proclamation of Jan. 11, the most important political
speeches concerning the liberation, the articles concerning the fortieth anniversary of the
destruction of German cities in Allied air attacks, and the most important church statements
regarding the air attacks and the liberation.

Four major questions re raised by party and state: 1. What does "liberation" mean? 2. Who bears the guilt for the events of 40 years ago? 3. What role did the Soviet Union play during
and after the war? 4. What does "peace" today mean in light of the events of 40 years ago? Insofar
as the church always speaks in a specific social context, it is not surprising that these four issues
also stand at the center of its statements.

1. The Meaning of "Liberation"

According to the official proclamation, the GDR observes "the fortieth anniversary of the
victory of the Soviet Union over Hitler-fascism and the liberation of the German people from Nazi
rule." The GDR thereby aligns itself with the victors rather than the vanquished.

First, the GDR has inherited the bequest of the anti-fascist freedom fighters. The
resistance united people of different world-views and nationalities. In this coalition, however, the
German freedom fighters played the leading role, especially the German communists, who were the
first victims of fascism.4

The official language emphasizes that the German antifascists embodies the "other"
Germany. They represented "the good Germany."5 They were "the best forces of our people."
They saved the honor of the people.7

Second, the GDR belongs on th side of the victors because it has taken advantage of the
new chance that it received through the liberation. The GDR unified the working class, eradicated
militarism and the imperialistic roots of war, founded a socialist society, entered into an
indestructible alliance with the Soviet Union, and opened the way for all its citizens to work together to build socialism under the direction of the SED.\textsuperscript{8}

The official language emphasizes that the GDR has broken with the past. It belongs to "the new world of peace and freedom."\textsuperscript{9} "Through our republic, her flourishing and thriving in the heart of Europe, the world has become a hope richer. . . . Here was broken with the fateful, reactionary past of imperialism and militarism."\textsuperscript{10} The GDR had the chance, "after the liberating deed of the Soviet Union, to introduce a fundamental change in history."\textsuperscript{11}

For all these reasons, May 8 was "liberation." The position of the GDR is fundamentally different from that of many leading politicians in West Germany. "Whoever in the BRD speaks of May 8 as a day of mourning, as capitulation rather than liberation, and wishes to alter the map of Europe, places himself outside history and endangers peace in Europe.\textsuperscript{12} Whoever in the West intends to observe May 8 as a Day of Mourning "would have probably preferred to see the fascistic incendiaries win."\textsuperscript{13}

The official language of liberation often seems stilted, formal, or even liturgical. May 8 becomes more than an historical date. The liberation was a unique event. It has significance for all times and all people. "The history of mankind is acquainted with events and times in which the world-altering power of social progress breaks a course beyond all the dark forces of slavery and death."\textsuperscript{14} The liberation was the day of victory of humanity over inhumanity.\textsuperscript{15} It spared the peoples of the world from extinction and opened a peaceful and happy future to them.\textsuperscript{16}

The church's language reflects more reservation and thoughtfulness about the question of "liberation." May 8 was simultaneously judgement, collapse, and liberation. It was judgment (or trial), for many Germans experienced imprisonment, flight, hunger, and humiliation.\textsuperscript{17} It was collapse, for the degree of destruction and horror became apparent to all Germans: 40 million dead; destroyed cities, above all, in the Soviet Union, Poland, France, and Germany; the murder of the Jews.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, it is important today for Germans to talk about the suffering and the pain that the end of the war brought, for "repressed tears lock up mouth and heart. Unacknowledged suffering expresses itself in depression."\textsuperscript{19}

One should not, however, regard "collapse" only as something negative. "For example, trust broke down that the old German virtue of obedience is an eternal virtue. For example, the belief that science in every case means progress broke down, and also that weapons bring security."\textsuperscript{20} The judgment was "grace" in the sense that "we were awakened out of the stubbornness of our hearts and our certainty of being holy was smashed."\textsuperscript{21}
One church statement insists on speaking expressly of liberation. "Whoever refuses to hear the word 'liberation,' whoever wishes to speak only about 'collapse' and 'catastrophe,' only demonstrates that he himself neither suffered under the murderous system nor was ready to see the agonies of others and to hear their groans." 22

Two other church statements expressly reject designating May 8 only as "liberation". "The end had many names, just as the experience was many-sided, as well as the way people were affected." 23 "This day, the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, was intensely experienced by many. Many ask anew: Where are we coming from?... The destinies thereby are very different, and a person's age makes a great deal of difference for the manner of such questions. And above all in this congregation there are also many different answers to that questions." 24

Even if "liberation" is one of these answers, one must remember that liberation came from without. "We Germans would not have been able to free ourselves." 25 The liberation was therefore painful. 26 But "looking back we experience the war's end as liberation to testify anew of God's grace and to serve God's world anew." 27 The Germans were freed from: the continuation of the war, an unjust political system, a superman ideology (that devalued the other peoples), racial delusion (especially towards the Jews), the extermination of handicapped people, a planned persecution of Christians. 28

The liberation was more than a political event. For Christians it has to do with God's forgiveness of sins. 29 Moreover, liberation brings Christians new responsibilities. "Inner liberation assumes in advance that we Germans once again bring to member what the NS-regime poisoned: to say the truth, instead of to lie; to respect justice; to call injustice injustice; to work for those who themselves are unable to procure justice; to make joy, friendship, reconciliation, and peace the sacred bonds between us men." 30 In this sense the liberation has not yet ended, for war and mistrust have not yet been overcome. 31

We must ever again ask ourselves whether we have already used all the chances of this liberation." 32

Summary and Questions. Both church and state designate May 8 as a day of liberation. The church's statements also emphasize the suffering, guilt, reconciliation, and new tasks that are associated with this day. The liberation should not only be celebrated as victory over fascism, for May 8 was also judgement and collapse.

Although the church's language is more nuanced than the official language, it reflects limits that have been set in the official language. First, there are no church statements that directly challenge the official language and point to similarities and differences in their understanding of
liberation. could not the church have said more? During 1985 the research division of the Federation of Evangelical Churches collected and edited relevant texts by GDR writers. These texts often address themes that the church's language avoids. Stephan Hermlin, for example, has written:

And then it occurred to our propagandists to employ this strange formula of "victors of history." In itself an absurdity, because there are no victors of history, and there never have been. This formula expresses the conviction that the future belongs to socialism; but it does so in a rather crude way. One designated himself a victor of history. This formula was immediately extended . . . every citizen of the GDR could now feel that he was a victor of history. By giving this ridiculous flattery to the people and unburdening them, it was then also easier to rule.33

Second, the church's language concerning liberation often strikes one as abstract and unclear. Is liberation something inner or outer? Does it describe an objective fact or a subjective attitude? If liberation is not yet complete, has it ever really taken place? Are there theological grounds for the selection of the word "liberation"? (It is interesting that the term "reconciliation" stands at the center of Bishop Hempel's sermon on May 8. The word "liberation" does not ever occur in his sermon.) Thoughts to just such questions are critical, for the official language that reigns in the GDR mass media speaks exclusively of liberation."
II. The Question of Guilt

The official language scarcely addresses the question of guilt. In no case does one find the suggestion that Germany or the German people bear guilt for their actions. Rather, fascism was responsible. The official language betrays much effort to coin special words and phrases that should describe the gruesomeness of fascism: it was pestilence, barbarism, criminal aggressor, the worst enemy of mankind, superman ideology, racism, anti-semitism, the brown brute, the worst reactionism since the Middle Ages, the most frightening tyranny in all history, the abhorrence of all mankind.34

When the official language goes at all into the question of the cause of Hitler-fascism, it raises a charge against imperialism. "We will never forget what caused this horrible work of extermination and barbarism. It was and is imperialism, the scourge of mankind, which does not shrink from any crime for the sake of profit and in pursuit of world domination.35 Fascism was the "most reactionary and aggressive monstrosity of German imperialism and militarism."36 Most Germans were also victims of fascism and war. Among the 50 million casualties of the war were six million Germans.37 Fascism was principally directed against the communists, but also attacked democrats and Christians.38 Fascism "soiled" the entire nation.39 Eventually the war began by the Nazis hit back at the entire nation. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the destruction of Dresden, Honecker remarked: "The flames of the Second World War, which went out from Berlin, at that time the capital of the "Third Reich," and set the entire world in fire, struck back and also devoured Dresden shortly before the end of the war."40 But the official language never concretely identifies who stood behind Hitler-fascism.

In contrast, the church's statements attempt to address the guilt question concretely. They speak of the necessity of confession of guilt. On the one hand, like the official language they describe the horror of fascism. In contrast to the official language, however, try employ no words especially coined for the occasion. Fascism was "in the German context an unrepeatable, cynical-nihilistic blood and terror regime."41 It was a political system that through lies and state terror trampled the worth, rights, and freedom of people underfoot."42 A victory by Hitler would have meant the end of all human values.43 On the other hand, the church insists that one cannot simply ascribe all the guilt to fascism. Instead of simply accusing imperialism of causing fascism, as does the official language, the church speaks of the failure of the majority of Germans, including the church itself. "We see that the national socialist regime was borne by the enthusiastic support of wide circles of the population, from which the churches cannot be excepted. Fascism was not the work of mere few who had to push their domination over the majority."44
"The majority of the people in Germany at that time . . . were Christians. And we Christians largely faltered before the terror regime of National Socialism."

"I think that each person who consciously experienced what was happening in our people at that time must therefore admit his share of guilt because he did too little to change things." Only one church statement points to the role of economic interests, and even then in the context of the "fateful traditions of our history . . . In the idolization of nation and state, in anti-Judaism, in education to blind obedience and the oppression of social and democratic movements." 

It is important to confess this guilt, for on it depends one's ability to come to terms with history and to experience a new beginning. The church's statements point to three elements of confession:

1. One remembers what occurred and acknowledges what part he had in it. Confession of guilt can be very concrete. Retired Bishop Schoenherr asks himself: "Did you then trouble yourself to find out where the masses of people remained who were transported off to the East? Did you protest when the SA men stood before the Jewish shops in April 1933? . . . Did you think that you had suffered enough when your wife one time was sharply criticized in the "Stuermer" because she had bought from Jews?" Superintendent Jaeger gives concrete examples of how his town of Nordhausen was entangled in National Socialism: the muteness at the time that the Jews were driven out of Nordhausen; the town's production of weapons; the contempt toward other peoples. (He relates how a Frenchman in Nordhausen was beat up and killed.) Several church statements emphasize the special guilt of the Germans toward the Soviet Union, Poland, the Jews, and the Communists.

2. One sees signs of forgiveness and reconciliation. "In amazement have we experienced signs of reconciliation. A new relation to the neighboring peoples has developed through their readiness for reconciliation." "The Allies did not return the same contempt toward our people that had been taught to our people and had been so bloodily practiced by them." Hempel in his sermon names the signs of reconciliation that the Germans have received: fellowship with Christians, non-Christians, and Marxists within their own land, with the neighboring countries to the East, and with the churches of the countries of the victors.

3. This forgiveness "liberates to a new beginning." The church refers now to tasks of reconciliation, just as it had referred to tasks that follow from liberation. These tasks have not yet been completed. Over the past 40 years the church has sometimes made bad judgements: for example, in failing to see the reality of two German states, its prejudice against the victorious powers, and its responsibility toward the countries of the third world. The tasks of peace and
justice are as relevant today as yesterday. "Forty years after Ausschwitz we still stand in our theology and church at the beginning of recognizing our guilt."57

A second aspect of the question of guilt has to do with the victors of the war. Who finally bears the guilt for the destruction of the German cities through air attacks in the last days of the war? The official language questions the purpose of these attacks. Although the destruction of the German cities was the result of the war unleashed by the Nazis, the air attacks were not necessary. "The days of the 'Thousand Year Kingdom' had long been counted, the war decided."58 One newspaper article about Dresden states: "All together 75,000 totally destroyed homes, 40 hospitals and clinics, 35 schools. . . . The barracks were not destroyed. The larger freight railway stations were all damaged. Untouched were the headquarters of the air force and the largest armament factories."59 The official language also shows another tendency. The question of guilt, whether in reference to the Americans and English or the Germans, is often not ever addressed.

The guilt of the Allies is treated differently in the church's language. The destruction (even of churches) is not to be understood as an injustice but as God's judgement. It was senseless, but "whoever carries a senseless war without should not wonder when it strikes back in total senselessness."60 "We do not have the authorization to calculate the account of our people in comparison to that of the other people."61 "Reconciliation grows only there where we confess our guilt and do not point at others but at ourselves!"62 This confession can be public and communal.

Summary and Questions. Both church and state deal with the question of guilt. The official language accuses Hitler-fascism. The church's statements emphasize that the whole people bears guilt. The confession of guilt stands at the center of the church's statements. They often suggest than the experiences and consequences of the war can only be understood after this confession of guilt.

Once again the church's statements avoid openly challenging the official language. In this respect several texts by GDR writers seem more thoughtful.

I believe that this mistake of declaring the past overcome is very clearly committed among us. Unfortunately also by many comrades who with a certain self-satisfaction say, we have mastered the past, those over there (i.e., West Germany) have not, they are so to say still in the middle of it. Nobody has the right to say that sort of thing. (Stephan Hermlin)

Thereby an entire generation, and not only one, was deeply damaged in the foundations of its psychological being on this earth. And that is not so easy to repair. It is not over and done with when two years later one says: My goodness but Marx was right. I do not believe that we have "mastered" the time of fascism in this sense. I am speaking now of the individual coming to terms with his entirely personal past with that which he personally did and thought and which he
cannot delegate to another, that for which he also cannot excuse himself along with a mass of people who did the same or worse things. (Christa Wolf)

In this sense most of the church's statements could also be more concrete, for without concreteness they tend to sound repetitious or empty. Only in a couple cases did church leaders describe and confess their personal guilt.

III. The Role of the Soviet Union

The official language concerning the Soviet Union seems especially strictly formulated. Set phrases and words are frequently employed. The following emphases emerge:

1. The Soviet Union came to Germany as the liberator. Most of the political speeches refer to liberation by the Soviet Union or the Soviet "deed of liberation." Although the English and American air attacks are addressed, crimes of the Soviet troops against the civil population are never mentioned. The official assessment of the role of the Soviet Union is overwhelmingly positive. For example: "At no time were there Soviet bombardments on cities in the interior of the enemy, against non-military objects. The idea and practice of such revengeful attacks upon the German civil population were foreign to the Soviet Union."

2. The Soviet Union bore the "chief brunt" of the war, for the fascists wanted to eliminate it. Set phrases and words emphasize the heavy losses: it offered a great "sacrifice," 20 million sons and daughters of the Soviet Union gave their lives, they bore the "heaviest burden" of the war.

3. The Soviet Union was the "chief power" in the Anti-Hitler Coalition. The role of the Anti-Hitler Coalition was especially emphasized as the press reported on the observances in Torgau, where American and Soviet troops met each other in the last days of the war. In his speech the state speaker called both the USA and the USSR "our liberators." The Anti-Hitler Coalition was an alliance with a shared purpose.

But the state's assessment of the Anti-Hitler Coalition is ambiguous. First, it claims that the war was essentially a struggle between socialism and imperialism. The victory of the Soviet Union "was the proof of the political and moral superiority of the socialistic social and state order over capitalistic exploitation and oppression." "In the violent struggle between imperialism and socialism, socialism showed itself to be superior and undefeatable." Second, the victory of the Soviet Union is said to have altered world political arrangements. Socialism became an international system. Third, the articles about the air attacks never mention that the cities to the west of the Elbe River were liberated by the English and the Americans. The liberation, when mentioned at all, was also in this case the deed of the "Soviet Union and its allies."
Sometimes, as in the case of Karl-Marx City (at that time Chemnitz), not even the allies are mentioned: "The 8th of May followed on the 5th of March. . . . In the midst of the ashes sprung hope, and it sowed friendship to the liberations out of the East."71

Moreover, the official language uses set phrases and words to emphasize the role of the Soviet army in the war: the Soviet army was "glorious"; the Soviet people demonstrated "mass heroism"; the Soviet Union was on the "chief front" where the decisive battles of the war took place; its victory "determined the subsequent progress of world history" and was the "triumph of humanism, freedom, and human worth"; its victory was the accomplishment of the entire people under the leadership of Stalin and the Communist Party.72

4) The Soviet Union helped the Germans immediately after the war. It brought assistance in the first hours. "The Soviet Union--that was for many the first bread at a time in which the flames of battle still blazed."73 The GDR thanks its present existence to the "assistance and support" of the Soviet Union.74 The role of the other Allies immediately after the war is entirely ignored.

The official language seems especially stilted, formal, or liturgical in reference to the Soviet Union. It seeks to express the Soviet Union's eternal and unique deed of liberation. One theme is "salvation." The Soviet Union "accomplished an immortal, world historical deed for the salvation of world civilization."75 Along with the other members of the Anti-Hitler Coalition the Soviet Union saved mankind from barbarism.76 A second theme is "thanks." The GDR thanks the Soviet Union, the Anti-Hitler Coalition, and the freedom fighters. These thanks are eternal and always in memory.77 The thanks to the Soviet Union are especially strongly expressed. Among the slogans at the state-sponsored demonstrations before and on May 8 were: "Thank you, you Soviet soldiers," "Glory and Honor to the Sons and Daughters of the Brave Soviet People," "Glory and Thanks to Our Liberators."78

A third theme is the unique accomplishment of the Soviet Union. "Thanks to the glorious deed of liberation by the Soviet Union . . . our land has been resurrected out of the ruins."79 The Soviet Union "illumined the noble concepts of freedom, equality, and brotherhood as a greeting to all mankind."80

The church's language does not treat the role of the Soviet Union so completely as the official language. Indeed, the official language may have first made the church more attentive to the role of the Soviet Union. Several church statements confess the special guilt of the Germans toward the Soviet Union.81 The sacrifice of the Soviet Union was memorialized at a church
gathering at the Seeleower Heights. One church statement reminded the church that the peoples of the Soviet Union "paid the greatest blood ransom." The difficult experiences with the Soviet Union immediately after the war are not addressed, and in only one case are they even alluded to. Hempel in his sermon asks: "Are not many of us still so disposed in our perceptions--which we find hard to grasp--that we hold the Western European culture far more valuable than the Eastern European? And sometimes I think that we still have not forgiven the Soviet soldiers the hardness that they brought along in the execution of victory." Here forgiveness is required without first speaking openly and concretely about the pain. (Although Hampel asserts: "We may also speak of our hurts," he himself does not describe them.) But in this indirect way Hempel does succeed in touching a topic that is completely avoided in the official language.

Summary and Questions. The church's language concerning the Soviet Union is cautious and restrained. It congresses guilt toward the Soviet Union and communism, but concrete problems and differences with the Soviet Union and communism after the war and in the present are not addressed.

The church's language therefore raises a fundamental issue. It is certainly not a matter of calculating one's own guilt in comparison to others'. But if the church insists on truth and justice, why is it silent about the Soviet Union? Is it because the church still stands at the beginning of recognizing its guilt toward the Soviet Union (not only in the Second World War, but also during the Cold War), or is it because the church wishes to avoid controversial themes in order to avoid unnecessary tension with the party and state? Can the church come to terms with history without speaking concretely about political arrangements in the GDR since the war? What are the limits that church can respect while neither striving for rash confrontation nor succumbing to quiet conformation?

An initial step would be to attempt to speak about the Soviet Union more concretely and with more nuance. In this respect Hempel's sermon is important. He describes how he experienced the end of the war:

The 8th of May began for me in the morning around 4 o'clock in a road trench near the Czech city of Most. It sounds as though fabricated. I awoke; next to me sat--for the first time live--a Russian soldier, scarcely older than my own 17 years. I know how frightened I was: Now it is going to happen! But he only chewed on his bread and looked at me, neither friendly nor unfriendly. He broke off a piece of the bread and gave it to me. It was sour. He had not smiled. He said: "damn it, go home!" And then he stood up. One also finds help in a statement by the writer Christa Wolf:
Only after the war . . . did the Russians become for me concrete persons. But you wouldn't believe how long it takes before an abstract notion people--be it as a ghost, be it later as an ideal--fills itself with life, with a bunch of different faces, with relations that mean much to one.  

IV. Peace

Both in the articles about the destruction of cities through air raids and in those about the Day of Liberation the concern for peace stands at the center of the official statements. A close reading of these statements reveals the following emphases:

1. War must never break out again.
   a. The vow. The state-sponsored observances include a "confession" to peace. Speakers refer to the "vow": "War never again." After the liberation the surviving resistance fighters and anti-fascists took this vow, just as did the American and Soviet soldiers who met on the Elbe.
   b. The lesson of the war. Speakers often refer to the "lesson" or "moral" of the war for today. The content of this "lesson" varies: to bring all forces together to prevent a nuclear inferno; to fight against war before the weapons speak; to secure peace and socialism; to do everything for peace.
   c. The insanity of a nuclear war. The vow from yesterday must be sworn again. The lessons of war admonish us today. For a war with atomic weapons would destroy the entire world. In an atomic war there are neither victors nor vanquished. There is "nothing more important than peace." Peace is the "highest" or "most precious" good.

2. Peace is presently threatened by the West.
   The most aggressive circles of imperialism, especially the United States and NATO, seek to attain military superiority. . . . They strive for world domination with their policies of atomic armament and extortion. They strive to eliminate socialism violently. "If world peace is threatened to the utmost today, it is on account of the most reactionary and aggressive circles of monopoly capitalism, this military-industrial complex that determines the policies of the US-American administration. These circles would like to lead the entire course of world events back into the barbarism of imperialistic domination." The official language does not expressly call the West "fascistic" or "militaristic," but no doubt is left that its policies have such tendencies.

The most aggressive circles of the West threaten all of humankind. "Once again the most aggressive representatives of imperialism threaten to burn the world." The vow of Buchenwald
is today the demand to stop the atomic arms build-up and to disarm those who would obliterate the existence of mankind with Star Wars. Heaven must not become the forecourt of hell.

3. The GDR intends to strengthen peace. The GDR supports the negotiations between the US and the USSR in Geneva. It affirms the peace initiatives of the Soviet Union. The GDR is a "peace state" because it has exterminated the roots of war (i.e., imperialism and militarism). Peace is "state doctrine."

On the one hand, the GDR emphasizes its relations with the Soviet Union, including their economic, ideological, political, and military cooperation. Certain words and phrases are employed over again to describe this relationship: the GDR has an "indestructible" friendship with the Soviet Union; this friendship is a "life element," "a matter of the heart"; the GDR and the Soviet Union share an "inviolable" military alliance; this alliance is "forever and never again otherwise."

On the other hand, the official language asserts that the GDR is ready to cooperate with all forces of peace. "Today it is a matter of unifying ourselves in order to save the peace for mankind and to create a world-wide coalition of reason and realism against the danger of atomic war. Whatever position one comes from, whatever way of organizing society he holds to be better, whenever his philosophical and political views on other issues may be, all that must not be an obstacle to a rational interaction of states of different orders next to and with each other."

Socialism and the Soviet Union are the leading peace forces. The Soviet Union has preserved peace in Europe for 40 years. Through the growing potential of socialism and the Soviet Union the forces of peace are becoming ever stronger. The GDR stands on the side of the Soviet Union but also cooperates with other peace forces. The official language betrays ambivalence around this point, for it clearly defines the nature of "cooperation" and the extent to which the GDR is ready to accept the position of those peace forces that perhaps also criticize socialism and the Soviet Union. When the official language attempts to resolve this tension, it "co-opts" the other peace forces. The peace program of the Soviet Union is for all. Socialism embodies the future.

Moreover, it is not clear with whom in the West the GDR will cooperate. On the one hand, the GDR asserts that the members of the Anti-Hitler Coalition despite different world-views and social systems can work together because today they once again have a common enemy, the danger of an atomic war. The meeting in Torgau is a symbol of this coalition. On the other hand, the GDR emphasizes that the nations must build a coalition against the American administration. "It is important to unify world-wide all forces of reason, realism, and good will.
against the dangerous arms build-up and confrontational course of the Reagan administration."112
"If all peace-loving people . . . work together, the incredibly insane plans for an American world rule can still be thwarted before the abyss of war is reached."113

Once again the language concerning peace is stilted, ritualistic, and liturgical. "Peace must and will conquer war."114 "Today socialism is incomparably stronger, more powerful, and more influential than in the past. Its reality and its politics encourage those throughout the earth whose hearts long for peace and progress."115 The slogans at the state-sponsored observances are also of liturgical nature: "Peace, peace, and once again peace!" "Long live peace for all people of the earth!"116

Those formulations taken directly out of the political arena provide a more concrete picture of the peace policies of the GDR: "peaceful co-existence"; a peace order for Europe; the special duty of the two German states to prevent war; equality and mutual security; no military superiority for the most aggressive circles of imperialism.117

The church's statements have three dominant themes:

1. The Christian message proclaims peace. Here the church appeals to biblical or theological language. "The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives us the certainty that God will help us over all guilt to new life in community and peace."118 "Out of the fullness of the Christian peace witness I remind you that God sent his Son into the world that we might have peace through him. That applies not only to a special sphere of religious experience. It applies to the entirety of our everyday life."119 The Christian message of God's peace grounds new responsibilities for Christians. "We have both the freedom and duty to be people of peace."120 When it has to do with peace and justice, Christ "does not allow his people to withdraw into a corner; they are obligated to the entirety of creation."121 The state's official language links peace with socialism. The church's language emphasizes the significance of God's peace for society and the world.

2. Preserving peace is an urgent task. We live in a "threatened world."122 "I really don't understand how the arming of space should positively contribute to peace."123 But the threat to peace comes not only from the West. East Germans are also entangled in contradictions: "We know: more weapons do not bring more security, but we continually install more weapons because we say that the others do."124 In contrast to the official language the church does not designate the GDR only as a "peace state." "We hope that the prioritization of the military in nearly all spheres will soon come to an end in our country."125
Both church and state emphasize that the preservation of peace is more important than anything else. The church’s language sometimes shows similarities to certain phrases of the state’s official language: the "vow" at the end of the war; the "obligation" that war never again begin from German soil; "peaceful co-existence"; a peace order for Europe; the special obligation of both German states; mutual security.126

But the church’s language also makes a distinctive contribution to defining the present day task. It condemns a policy of deterrence.127 Moreover, peace depends on eliminating false images of the enemy and on educating people to peace.128 The church emphasizes the relationship between peace and other pressing tasks, such as justice, truth, and the well-being of the third world.129

3. Christians cooperate with all in order to preserve peace. Christians support the long, difficult work of reconciliation among the different churches, between Christians and Jews, and in families.130 They support the deepening of relations between different nations, Governments must learn to negotiate with one another.131 Christians can work together with others whenever it is a matter of peace and justice.132 Perhaps they could "be parliamentarians of reconciliation and peace. Those are the people who without weapons, without power, without privileges but with verifiability, accountability, and willingness to take risk go between the fronts and interpret. Interpret, for example, . . . that one must ever again begin with trust, even when it brings so little success.133

Cooperation between church and state must rest on trust and openness. Yet, the church statements often only allude to the difficulties of Christians in the GDR. The church hopes that "also those who think differently will be able to express their convictions without fear and act according to their conscience."134 Only one sermon clearly addresses the problems: Christians should remain in the GDR and serve the common good. They have learned that they can work together with Marxists. But they must act according to their conscience. "A long time ago a pastor told me that an elder had come to him and said: I can't hold out any longer. For a month I have been unable to sleep right. Everything that we talk about in the church council, everything that you unsuspectingly tell me, I have to report. I can't continue this living in lies any longer. . . . to seek 'the good of the city' means here very simply: to refuse such demands."135

Cooperation also rests on contact with others. Here the church directs its concern to the restrictions on travel that affect most people in the GDR. "We ask the Allies of the Second World War . . . to promote cultural, economic, and scientific cooperation as well as the meeting of people over the borders!"136
Summary and Questions. Like the official language, the church's language puts most weight on the theme of "peace." Although church and state have different starting points (Christianity and Marxism-Leninism), the church only alludes to the different consequences for peace and (with a couple of exceptions) does not address them more specifically. The church supports dialogue but wishes to avoid controversy and disagreement.

To be sure, one finds only a few words and phrases that both church and state employ in their statements, and most of these belong to the common political vocabulary of East and West. But one cannot entirely separate form from content. Insofar as the content of the church's language remains general and abstract, its form is not radically different from that of the official language. Both the official and the church language, for example, constantly appeal to the word "peace." This word appears so often in state and church statements that in both cases it often becomes empty and predictable.

There is a danger in appealing to political language that seems at first to be neutral but actually has a very specific meaning. The church, for example, employs the phrase "peaceful co-existence" as referring to different countries peacefully living with and next to each other. But this expression comes from Lenin originally and has a very specific meaning in Marxist-Leninist philosophy:

From the Leninist principle of peaceful co-existence follows that socialism will be able to triumph over capitalism without war. The socialist states therefore have two historical tasks: 1. To defend the peace against imperialism, which refuses to come to terms with peaceful co-existence, 2. To support the struggle of the international proletariat to eliminate imperialism and the triumph of the socialistic revolution in individual countries, i.e., to develop a special strategy and tactic of fighting imperialism that will be effective above international relations on a bilateral, international level. The policies that meet both of these objective requirements are the policies of peaceful co-existence.137

Conclusion: Official and Church Language

Church-state relations in East Germany (and, I would suggest, in other communist countries) can be assessed by comparing the language of church and state in their statements concerning events and observations of national significance. An examination of the East German church's language suggests neither that the state practices oppression nor that the church practices accommodation. The church quietly and carefully seeks to extend the range of public discussion and addresses controversial issues. Nonetheless, church-state relations dictate that the church avoid open confrontation with the state. The church can sometimes address difficult issues that the state avoids. The church can sometimes bring greater nuance and thoughtfulness to the issues that the
state does address. But the church must respect certain limits set in the official language. It is indeed "Kirche im Sozialismus," not a persecuted minority, yet an institution vulnerable to state pressures. The church lives in the tension between "freedom of religion" and "a society under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party."

The form of the church's language is for the most part different from that of the official language. The church's language is less stilted, ritualistic, and liturgical. Although the church's statements appeal to biblical and theological language, one finds no set words and phrases by which to describe liberation, fascism, or the Soviet Union.

In regard to content, one finds that the official and church statements share common emphases: especially liberation, the question of guilt, and peace. (The role of the Soviet Union in the war is not a major concern in the church statements. When the church does address the relation between Germany and the Allies, however, it does concentrate on the Soviet Union.) It is another question how these concerns are developed. The church sometimes addresses them with great care and nuance. ("Liberation," for example, is treated in the context of "collapse" and is regarded as still incomplete.) These different concerns are also ordered differently. Whereas the official language places the most weight on "liberation," the church's language returns again and again to the question of guilt. The church also has other major emphases, such as reconciliation, that do not appear at all in the official language. Sometimes the church can carefully touch subjects that are ignored in the official statements (for example, that the Germans have not yet forgiven the Soviet soldiers), but it is a great exception when the church statements direct criticism against party or state.

In no case have I found church statements that openly challenge the official language. Neither the question of "language regulations" nor the question of "language tabus" is taken up. It is the statement of several GDR authors that are more open and concrete. Although the church's language is not regulated, it does respect certain limits set by the state's official language. I would suspect that the church's language is often general and abstract because the church fears that more specific and concrete language could lead to confrontation with the state. So long as its language remains general, it can emphasize the common concerns of church and state—for example, the church can assert that both church and state share a common concern for peace. Where one to address questions of peace and justice more concretely (for example, in regard to disadvantages of Christians in education, the militarization of society through para-military instruction in the schools, or the censorship of church publication), differences would be readily apparent.
In some areas the church's language does speak concretely and therefore represents a significant "extension" beyond the state's official language. This extension of language occurs not only in the framework of specifically Christian rituals, such as a sermon during worship. In speeches at both church and state ceremonies, church representatives spoke concretely about the suffering during the war and their personal guilt. Such statements acknowledge feelings of sadness, remorse, humility—feelings that seldom come to expression in the political language of either East or West.

1 See the newspaper articles about the state-sponsored observances in Halberstadt (Neues Deutschland, 9. April 1985), Plauen (11. April), Potsdam (15. April), Wismar (16. April), and Zerbst (17. April). The role of the English and Americans is not mentioned at all in the articles about Cottbus (16-17. February), Karl-Marx Stadt (6. March), Dessau (8. March, Jena (20. March), and Nordhausen (6-7. April).
2 See the newspaper articles about the state-sponsored observances in Magdeburg (Neues Deutschland, 17. January 1985) and Dresden (14. February).
3 Since most East Germans receive West German television and radio, they would also have heard Western reports about the East German church's commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war.
8 "Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag."
12 "Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag."
15 Sindermann, "Menschheit siegte."
17 "Wort zum Frieden," Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR and the Evangelical Church in Germany on occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War.
18 Ibid.
20 Bishop Hempel, Sermon from the worship service commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Press-Information No. 21, Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, 1985.
22Retired Bishop Schoenherr, Address at the ceremonies in Buchenwald to commemorate Dietrich
23Demke.
24Hempel.
25Schoenherr.
26"Zeichen des Friedens und der Versehnung setzen," Common word of Aktion Suehnezeichen in the
GDR and Aktion Suehnezeichen/Friedensdienste in West Berlin concerning May 8, 1985.
27"Wort zum Frieden."
28"Zeichen des Friedens."
29Schoenherr.
30Ibid.
31Demke.
32Superintendent Jaeger, Address in Nordhausen on occasion of the ceremonies commemorating the
fortieth anniversary of the destruction of Nordhausen, in "8. Mai," Evangelical Consistorium of
Division of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, April 1985, p. 4.
34"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag"; E. Honecker, "Eine welthistorische Tat, die auch das deutsche Volk
befreite," Neues Deutschland, 23-24. March 1985; Axen; Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden";
Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."
36Honecker, "Eine welthistorische Tat"; Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."
37"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag"; Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."
38Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."
39E. Honecker, "In unserem Land lebt die Einheit der Antifachisten fort," Neues Deutschland, 6. May
1985.
40E. Honecker, "Es geht heute um das ueberleben der Menschheit und um die Existenz unserer Erde," 
41Schoenherr.
42"Zeichen des Friedens."
43Ibid.
44Ibid.
45Jaeger.
46Bishop Forck, Address at Sachenhausen concentration camp, Press-Information No. 21, Federation
47"Zeichen des Friedens."
48Schoenherr.
49Retired Bishop Schoenherr, Address at the memorial for the Jewish retirement home, Press-
Information No. 21, Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, 1985.
50Jaeger.
51"Wort zum Frieden"; "Zeichen des Friedens"; Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dietrich
Bonhoeffer; Schoenherr, Address at the memorial; Demke.
52"Wort zum Frieden."
53Demke.
54Hempel.
55"Wort zum Frieden."
56Ibid.
57"Zeichen des Friedens."
60 Jaeger.
61 Schoenherr, Address at the memorial.
62 Jaeger.
64 “Dresden—40 Jahre danach.”
67 “Aufdruf zum 40. Jahrestag.”
68 Honecker, “Eine welthistorische Tat.”
69 “Aufdruf zum 40. Jahrestag.”
73 “Aufdruf zum 40. Jahrestag.”
74 “Eindrucksvolles Bekenntnis.”
76 Honecker, “Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale.”
77 Sindermann, “Menschheit siegte”; Sindermann, “Im Kampf fuer den Frieden”; Honecker, “Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale.”
78 Hager; A xen; Honecker, “Bewegende Manifestation.”
79 Axen.
80 Sindermann, “Im Kampf fuer den Frieden”
81 “Wort zum Frieden”; “Zeichen des Friedens”; Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Demke.
82 Bishop Demke, Address at the memorial site on the Selloewer Heights, Press-Information No. 21, Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, 1985.
83 Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dieter Bonhoeffer.
84 Hampel.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
88 See the newspaper articles about state-sponsored observances in Magdeburg *Neues Deutschland*, 17. January 1985), Dresden (14. February), and Potsdam (15. April).
91 Sindermann, “Im Kampf fuer den Frieden.”
92 “Aufdruf zum 40. Jahrestag.”
93 Honecker, “Es geht heute um das Ueberleben.”
94 Hoffmann; Honecker, “Eine welthistorische Tat.”
95 Honecker, “Der welthistorische Sieg.”
"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag."

Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."

Axen.

Sindermann, "Menschheit siegte."

Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale"; Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."

"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag"; Hager; Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale"; Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."

"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag"; Hoffmann; Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale." Also see the newspaper articles about the state-sponsored observances on the anniversary of Allied air attacks on German cities.

"Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag."

Hager; Tisch.

Honecker, "Bewegende Manifestation"; Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg"; Hoffmann.

Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale."

Honecker, "Eine welthistorische Tat"; Hager.

Honecker, "Bewegende Manifestation."

Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."

Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."

Sindermann, "Bundnis aller Kraefte"; Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale.

Hoffmann.

Axen.

Hager

Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."

Honecker, "Eine welthistorische Tat"; Sindermann, "Menschheit siegte"; Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden."; Axen; Hoffmann.

Honecker, "Eine welthistorische Tat"; Honecker, "Bewegede Manifestation"; "Aufruf zum 40. Jahrestag"; Sindermann, "Menschheit siegte"; Sindermann, "Im Kampf fuer den Frieden." Also see Honecker, "Die DDR verkoerpert die Ideale"; Honecker, "Der welthistorische Sieg."

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Church President Natho, Address in Dessau on occasion of observances on the fortieth anniversary of the destruction of Dessau, General Communication No. 9/85, Territorial Church Council of the Evangelical Church of the Anhalt, 8. March 1985.


Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

v. Biela.

Hampel.

Demke, Sermon.

v. Biela.

Zeichen des Friedens"; Demke, Sermon; "Wort zum Frieden."

Wort zum Frieden"; Hempel; Stier; Demke, Address on the Seeloewer Heights.

Wort zum Frieden." Also see v. Biela.

Wort zum Frieden.; Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Demke, Sermon.

Hampel; Stier; "Zeichen des Friedens"; Schoenherr, Address at the memorial.

Wort zum Frieden."

Schoenherr, Address to commemorate Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Hempel.
134v. Biela.
136"Wort zum Frieden."