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**WHITE CANDLES VS. RED FLAGS:
RELIGION AND THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL**

By Max L. Stackhouse

Dr. Max L. Stackhouse (United Church of Christ) is professor of religion and society at the Andover-Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. He is the author of several books and articles, many of them dealing with religion in the GDR. It was an article by Prof. Stackhouse which was the inaugural piece by which OPREE started its publication in February of 1981 (Vol. I, No. 1).

The first drafts of this bit of history are in. The photos of candle-light vigils that gradually overflowed the churches and spilled into the public squares, the interviews with young German couples carrying the baby and back-packs over the Hungarian border, the headlines about the collapse of the regime, the CNN footage of dancing on the Berlin Wall, and the NBC commentaries from world leaders east and west have now been filed. The drama of the end of the German Democratic Republic has shifted from the collapse of Communism to discussions of how much it will cost to clean up the economic mess and of what role the reunited Germany will play in Europe generally. Fresh stories involve not only the reappearance of neo-fascist sects at the margins of political life but scandals about who worked with the secret police--which had its nose pressed against every window into the common life and yet could not grasp what was going on in that society.

One can see the change. When I was in Berlin as a visiting professor and ecumenical visitor in the 1970s and '80s, I often walked to the Alexanderplatz to attend a church where wonderful organ concerts were held or to sit with students at a sidewalk cafe and discuss the problems of the world. To get there, I would pass several landmark buildings. The ruins of the old Jewish temple on Oranienbergstrasse always evoked a silent prayer, for that was an 'attack point' on "Crystal Night" when Hitler's goons began their slaughter of the Jews, and it was further destroyed by Allied bombs and by Soviet troops in the final taking of Berlin. Today, it is being rebuilt in all its splendor, and the Nazi goons, the Allied bombs, and the Soviet troops are gone.

Not far away is the old National Museum, where I saw exhibits of the weapons heroic farmers and workers (as the authorized doctrine had it) had used to fight the feudal (=Roman Catholic) and bourgeois (=Lutheran) princes at the dawn of the modern world. This was an exhibit that ended with the quote from Lenin: "The thought of Marx is all-powerful because it is true." That museum is now "closed for repairs." Nearby stands a monument with an eternal flame to commemorate the unknown heroes and martyrs who died in the struggle to liberate East Germany and which was always guarded by goose-stepping soldiers. Today, it has no guard but a Russian peddler with a small table selling Soviet military hats, belts, boots, insignia, and other paraphernalia.

Further down the street is the Dom, a Protestant cathedral built by Kaiser Wilhelm with a certain resemblance to St. Peter's in Rome. For decades, the church, bombed by allied raids and damaged by years of weather and neglect, was blocked off. Weeds grew from its nooks and crannies. Across the street is the massive Palace of the Republic where, for some twenty-five years, Party officials used to gather behind polished brass and glass walls which, ironically, reflected the stubborn old image of the Dom. Now, the massive cathedral is being rehabilitated and parts are already dedicated to a library and classrooms for the theological department of Humboldt University, the former citadel of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. And the Palace, closed and dirty, has its ramps covered with anti-Communist graffiti. Kids with punk hair skate-board on its ramps, while its stairwells smell of urine and are cluttered with fast-food wrappings. What was past has revived; what was said to be the wave of the future is dead. Such changes dislocate meaning. Everyone says that there is much to rejoice about and that present trends will not be reversed; but I met no one who did not express some ambiguity. When Dr. Ilse von Loewenclau, who had been a visiting professor in the United States of America, pulled on a handsome coat and I complimented her on it, she commented that after all they did some things well. A welder nearing retirement said he would probably be better off under the new arrangements, but he wondered about the purpose of his life since every institution with which he had been connected was about to be bulldozed. Several said it was simply too fast.

Learning the new ways of doing things has left everyone in shock. People look a little drab and helpless, as everyone feels in an airport at midnight when the last flight has been canceled. Besides, compared to what is in the West, buildings have an old machine-shop look. The brick needs pointing; the wood needs painting; the drive needs repaving, and the piles of rubble from World War II, from unfinished Communist projects and from renovations now in progress with Western money need removal. They are taking down East Germany and putting up someplace else. The new life is not yet home. A friend's wife explained the feelings: "It is like waking up in a strange place that you always wanted to go to. You know who you are, and you know where you are, but it is not your bed, and it

doesn't feel quite right. It's like making lunch in someone else's kitchen. You can do it, but you don't know where things are and how things work. It's awkward, and you can't think about things you want to think about while you are doing it."

Ways of thinking are changing. The education system is being revamped, and teachers are being retrained. A newspaper in Erfurt shows a photo of a waste basket full of Russian books on Marxist philosophy and socialist economics below a desk full of English books on management and computer technology. Professors in the universities are having their books and articles examined to see whether their work meets scholarly standards or whether they had advanced through academic ranks only by repeating Marxist-Leninist dogma in a system where being politically correct had immediate implications.

Such changes affect every level of learning. In April, I joined the thirty-some parents gathered to rededicate the "Little Tree Nursery School" in a former garage they had rehabilitated in Falkensee. The young Bürgermeister, who spoke of the contributions of the church to society, referred also to the relation of past and future. "This school," he said, "was first founded before World War II. But it was taken over by the Nazis. After the war, our parents founded it again, but it was taken over by the Communists. Our task now is not only to found it again but to prepare the children for a future that must be different from the past. That means taking responsibility for the spiritual and democratic principles of our new society--for the sake of these children and their children." The parents applauded, but the men gathered in small clumps and spoke of new rumors of plant-closings--the old branches of the centralized state can neither compete nor be propped up any longer.

The future remains uncertain, with unemployment hovering at 15%. Although new firms and western subsidiaries are getting started, hopes that international corporations would eagerly buy the old plants and renovate the economy to world standards are stymied by complicated questions about property rights. With the Nazi confiscation of property from Jews and other "undesirables" and the Communist confiscation of property from Nazis and another set of "undesirables," and, even more, the absolute transformation of laws of property that are now reverting to earlier standards, it is not clear who holds title to what.

As difficult for many is the fact that the life course they planned, the skills they had and the qualifications they tried to obtain are simply obsolete. Some twenty percent of the population, the more highly trained part, has gone West. This is the second loss of some 1/5 of the skilled population in eastern Germany--the previous one being the reason for the Wall in the first place. Doctors, who themselves are in the process of upgrading their training, techniques and familiarity with "new" medicines, report that depression, alcoholism, violence in the family and suicide rates are up among those who remain. As center-city populations in the USA have learned, it is difficult to keep life going when the leadership leaves.

Similarly devastating is the increasing bad news about the ecological situation. East Germany does not match the horrors of Romania or Bulgaria or even the USSR; but reports from all over eastern Europe are now bringing the situation to light. The price in human suffering and slow death may well match the AIDS crisis elsewhere. A recent World Health Organization report was quoted in the German papers as saying: "Nowhere in the history of humanity has the air, the water, the land and the people been so systematically poisoned." Cancer rates, frequencies of heart-lung diseases and numbers of birth defects are certain to climb.

At the Martin Gropius House near the remains of the Wall, I had a chance to see the remarkable exhibition, "Patterns of Jewish Life." Not only was this survey of Jewish history and experience from around the world fascinating in itself, but it is having a particular impact on people from the former GDR who have been told for almost half a century that they were at the vanguard of the heroic, progressive, democratic and socialist movements that defeated fascism, capitalism, militarism, and racism. Among other things, this account of the World War II period meant that the East Germans did not think through their relation to the Hitler period the way West Germans have, in some measure, been forced to do. Thus, attending this becomes a double exhibit--what is shown and how former East Germans react to what they see. When we came to the part of the exhibit that portrayed the treatment of Jews between 1935 and 1945, one of the placards on the wall explained the complementary but distinct meanings of the words "holocaust" with its implications of violent destruction, and "shoah," with its sense of deep tragedy. It was not a holocaust that the GDR brought, but it was surely a shoah.

However, the significance of these events is not yet clear. What fell with the Wall? That Stalinism fell is certain! That Leninism fell is clear to most. But did Marxism fall or only distorted forms of socialism, as many still believe? Could it even be the fall of the Hegelian ways of thinking about history that Marx adopted, as Fukayama has claimed, or is it the fall of the humanist presuppositions of the Enlightenment behind all of the above, as the Russian dissident author Yerofeyev has written. Perhaps it is the end of the modern era, as Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia holds, following Heidegger and a whole raft of post-modernists. Or do we have to think in other terms? Is it simply authoritarianism as a political system that fell to democracy? Is it centralized planning as an economic system that fell to capitalism? Or is there some other cause? At stake in these questions is this issue: how do civilizations work? That, after all, is the issue on which Marxism and most of the social theories that were developed in the last two centuries were designed to explain. It turns out that none of the prevailing views have yet explained why socialism rose or why it fell.

What the world has experienced is the sort of thing that changes history books. We have seen a transformation of the magnitude of the fall of Rome, the end of Feudalism, the

demise of the Divine Right of Kings, or the French Revolution. But what have we learned from this? What makes civilizations endure and grow, and what makes them decay and collapse? Political science, jurisprudence, economics, military intelligence, and philosophies of history, all were surprised by this change. Why?

The transformations of all of Eastern Europe are, of course, pertinent to these issues; but the case of East Germany is especially interesting to Americans, since it, like America, was founded on Protestant presuppositions in alliance with humanist ideals from the Enlightenment. Germany is the land of Protestantism's birth; this is where the Reformation, especially in its Evangelical forms, was founded and grew. Before the "German Christian" movement, which tried to co-opt Christianity into the Nazi movement, and before the Communists repudiated religion and made life difficult for practicing believers, more than eighty-five percent of the population was Protestant, as compared to about eleven percent Catholic. Less than ten percent of the population are religiously active. Reports indicate that today even fewer come to church--although the numbers of requests for baptism, confirmation and church weddings are up.

We know that the deep residues of a religious tradition shape civilizations whether people are fully conscious of the influence or not. Perhaps Protestantism failed. Perhaps it could not and did not give to one of the most advanced civilizations of modern history the moral rudder to guide the common life through the terrors of this century. Or is it so that religion is what was ignored or rejected by modern philosophy, economics, political science, and jurisprudence and that is why these disciplines failed to understand key dynamics in the fabric of social history?

East Germany was also the land of Marx. An anti-religious socialist tradition had been present in Germany from the middle of the previous century, and it had roots in peasant movements with a much deeper history. It was from this tradition that some of the most vigorous opposition to what we now call "modern, Western forms of life" derived--although it must also be said that the distinction between proletarian socialism in the tradition of Communist theory and national socialism in the tradition of Fascism was not altogether clear to many, and sliding from one to the other was frequent. These were but the two most militant forms of a basic conviction that the perils of modernity rested in the triple evils of bourgeois democracy, corporate capitalism, and philosophical speculation. Human rights and international law, modern art and idealistic philosophy, ecumenical theology and universalistic ethics were also manifestations of these evils, for they were not rooted in blood and soil and the concrete practices of the people. They were, to use a key word of condemnation 'abstract.'

In the Museum of Modern Art, near the Dom, was the exhibit of "Degenerate Art." This exhibit was actually first shown in California and Chicago before it came to Berlin. It

consisted of some six hundred (of the several thousand) paintings, sculptures and compositions that had been condemned by Hitler and Gbels in the 1930s. Why some of them were condemned was obvious--they were by or about Jews, or they portrayed German people as miserable, poor weak or unhappy. But the only quality that one could discern that made the others so objectionable was precisely that they were cosmopolitan and 'abstract.' The debates about these matters had not end with the Nazis, and prohibitions about similar matters applied to artists and authors in the GDR until the very last days of the Wall. How ironic that 'naturalistic,' materialistic, power-oriented movements should find aesthetic and ethical abstractions so threatening.

In any case, when the Soviets brought Marxism back to Germany after World War II, it was with a sense of home-coming. Here was the non-Protestant side of German culture--the concrete, collectivist, materialist, and mass-political side in contrast to the abstract, individualist, idealist and bourgeois-cosmopolitan side that had dominated much of the German intellectual, and spiritual tradition. In East Germany 'really existing socialism,' met 'really existing Protestantism' more directly than anywhere else in the world. What happened: the triumph of one, or a new synthesis, or the defeat of both? Much of what happened, of course, has parallels with other countries. But this particular encounter was different, say, from that of Poland, where Marxism-Leninism was face to face with Roman Catholicism. The Germans did not form Solidarity. In fact they were rather contemptuous of it. Nor did they wait for a revolution from above, as happened with Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the USSR, where the Eastern Orthodox version of Christianity was woven into much of the history. Still other paths were taken in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia where the religious and ethnic mix was more pronounced and in several of the Baltic nations where religion had been more completely suppressed. And of course, wider examples could also be studied: Islam in Afghanistan, Buddhism in Tibet and Burma, Confucianism in China, all confronted versions of Communism in distinctive ways.

The full implications of how the various societies with their distinctive religious orientations interacted with Marxism and Leninism is yet to be written. But in the West, the case study of the GDR may well reveal something not only about our past but about our future. What role, if any, did religion play in the mix of political, economic, military, philosophical, and jurisprudential factors? No one would think today of offering an interpretation of the transformations taking place in South Africa, Central America, or the Mid-East without reference to religion. But is it also true in the "secular" West? Here, at least, is a fresh cadaver. What is the cause of death?

Surely it was economic collapse. That fact, however, does not tell us why economies fail. Perhaps it failed because supply could not be delivered or because demand was not present. But we know that demand was present, and thus supply was evidently the problem. Why

could goods and services not be supplied? Perhaps political leadership failed to meet the economic crises. But that is part of the question: are economies essentially dependent on governmental policy? If so, the real problems are political in nature, and responses to economic crises ought to be political. It becomes awkward to hold this view as one does the analysis of Germany, however, for these presumptions are just what Marxism-Leninism taught, and that is what did not work.

Perhaps, it is not politics in general that failed but the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism that distorted the perception of the real economic situation and produced the incapacity to respond politically. And that is surely the case. All the evidence as it is now coming out suggests that the economy failed in part because under that system; no one could know what actually was going on. For example, no one could tell the real price of things, and thus no one could figure out what was cost-efficient and what was not. And no one could tell what people really wanted, for market choices were allowed only very narrow play. Thus, no one was particularly accountable for figuring out the relationship between costs and benefits-- a convenient incapacity if one has in mind passing out benefits (or taking a few for oneself) without counting the costs. But to say that Marxism-Leninism does not work does not tell us what glasses we ought to put on to see what is going on and how to allocate the balances between costs and benefits.

This much is clear: every serious alternative to Marxism-Leninism involves recognizing that there are multiple factors in a social system, including a substantive difference between economic and political systems. Economics cannot produce political law and order with justice, and politics cannot produce goods and services with efficiency. While no economic system can endure without a viable order maintained by government, and while a degree of political intervention in economic affairs are necessary to constrain exploitation and insure fairness, economic crises are not dependent on political conditions alone and political issues are not solved by economic measures. Both those who argue that we must get government off the backs of business and those who argue that we must get the politics out of the control of business are partly correct.

The issues are deeper, however, for both politics and economics are inevitably shaped by factors that are not economic or political. That is the greatest insight of socialism: it had a social theory of politics and a social theory of economics rather than merely a political or economic theory of society. The problem is, the socialists misunderstood the nature of human social relations. They thought that they are essentially interest driven. And they are, in some measure, correct, but behind every viable economic and political system is also a moral and spiritual fabric of meaning on which the legitimacy of the whole society depends and on which the viability of specific political and economic arrangements rest.

It is surely the case that basic laws of economic and political life that can, at no time and in no place, be utterly ignored or violated, but the constancy and universality of these laws has not produced a great world uniformity. What people want out of life and what people are willing to give to it is not exactly the same in Belize, Beijing, Berlin, or Boston; thus, people apply the laws of economics and politics differently. People all over the world will make great sacrifices if they believe that the meanings they serve are true and just, beneficent and trustworthy in the long run, even if they know that they are faulty in certain respects and in need of improvement. And this points to a deeper level of the situation in the former GDR than is often mentioned. People basically lost confidence in the value system on which their economics and politics rested. They would no longer pay the cost, believe in its beneficence or sacrifice for it. They did not think it was trustworthy. They came to believe that it was false and unjust more than it was true and just.

One could see the gradual erosion of social confidence. When I was in East Germany in the 1970s, one could sense the confidence and the trust. People pointed out things with pride. East Germany had not only been badly destroyed by World War II; the Soviets levied reparations against them and stripped the region of its remaining industrial capacity, metal resources and, for that matter, a good bit of the intellectual-technological leadership. But the people of the German Democratic Republic rebuilt it and became the most successful socialist economy in the history of the world. They were allowed to travel in sister countries of the Warsaw Pact, and it was clear that none of the other socialist lands had come so far or had such promise.

Further, they could get West German television and what they saw from the West, magnified by their own press, was race conflict, drugs, pornography, personal violence, NATO forces pointing nuclear weapons toward them, and former Nazi sympathizers in positions of prominence. If they felt a certain economic pride when they looked East, they felt a certain moral pride when they looked West.

When I taught in East Germany in 1983 as a visiting professor, stresses in this confidence were beginning to show. Hoarding was quietly taking place and the 'swapping' of goods and privileges was replacing the official economy. More importantly, my students were openly contemptuous of all the stuff they had to learn about Marxism-Leninism in school, even though they used Marxist-Leninist categories to analyze every situation we discussed outside their own country--Nicaragua, South Africa, the Mid-East, for examples. These were the only tools of social analysis most of them had, and disdain for capitalism, militarism and liberalism, which seemed to them to be pretty much the same thing, was pervasive--especially during the Reagan years.

Still, they were curious about the relationship of religious liberty to democracy and human rights. It was, after all, the Helsinki Accords, especially the agreements on human

rights that made it possible for them to exercise a greater degree of religious freedom than had been previously the case (and indeed allowed me to be there to teach; see my Creeds, Society and Human Rights, 1985). It further fascinated them that the GDR had signed the accords embracing human rights as a concept, outraging a number of orthodox Marxists, for human rights in the sense of civil and political liberties were viewed as a bourgeois mask to hide anti-socialist interests and obscure social and economic rights, which they said only Marxism could bring.

They were equally fascinated by my participation in the Religious Caucus of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, which met regularly in the Boston area. They did not know that such things would be allowed to exist in a capitalist world (the idea that government should protect the right of all sorts of groups to exist outside of government control on the basis of a bill of rights protecting religion, speech, press, and assembly, was an idea beyond their comprehension). I told them, however, that I was having second thoughts about my participation in this particular group, for shortly before I went to teach there I had been involved in a debate in the group that was changing my mind. What if democracy and socialism should be proven to be incompatible? Which should we choose? Whenever two principles govern our thought, I argued, it is likely that one will sooner or later come into conflict with the other. One always has to have a priority. Should, then, we speak of ourselves as social democrats or as democratic socialists if we are first of all guided by our religious convictions? It makes a difference what the noun was and what modifies it.

This debate so intrigued some of my students that they invited me to attend some of the underground groups that were meeting. I pledged to be very careful about whom I told and what I wrote about these meetings, for if anything was published it could be difficult for them. I went to several, most in church basements or fellowship halls. What I heard there, behind the rather confused and rambling bull sessions, was a fundamental disbelief in socialism as officially presented, as well as a great vagueness as to what the alternative might be. I saw there also a demoralized population among young people who had been born, raised, educated and fed by the system but were living now in a spiritual and intellectual vacuum.

Many groups were rather boring. They had no focus, no little existential importance for me. Like a happily married man in a singles' bar, I had only an observers interest in all this posturing and chatter. But there was an exception. One group was very exciting. I was taken one evening to visit a Pastor Rainer Eppelmann, who had some following among the best of my students, but who was never mentioned by any of my colleagues on the faculty or at church headquarters. He understood, the students said. When I got there, I was asked to present my views on the debates in the Organizing Committee. After patiently hearing

me out for a while, Eppelmann got some of the students to drag a couple of cases of beer out of a storage closet, saying that this might prove to be an interesting evening. Then we went at it, discussing the relationship of theology, social theory, political philosophy, and economic analysis. Several hours later, Eppelmann slammed a book he was quoting on the table. "You are right," he proclaimed, "we have to have a primary principle. I do not know whether it should be true socialism or true democracy, but it has to be true theology first of all. Tonight, in fact, I think it has to be first a democratic theology and only secondarily a socialist theology, but theology is the noun in any case. Nothing else has the substance to hold society together." That Eppelmann later adapted the candle-light vigils into political protests and later became the defense minister in the transitional government who asked the Russian troops to leave.

In the spring of this year, in Munich, the first of two international conferences was held on just these matters. The second one will be held in Boston in the fall and will explore the ways in which religious thought may influence aspects of the emerging global economy of the future. The focus of the Munich conference was whether collapse of the Wall was brought about in any sense by religious influences and whether it was, in any way, a distinctively Protestant revolution. A half-dozen books and several dozen major articles have appeared in German claiming that it was, and many of the leading authors were there; although, as things go in academic life, other scholars attribute the transformation to entirely different causes.

The conference was sponsored by the Theology Department of the University of Munich and The Institute for the Study of Economic Culture of Boston University, and it was funded in part by the Lilly Endowment. Professor Trotz Rendtorff of Munich opened the discussion with an overview of the issues as they are being debated. He was quite clear that it was not a theological revolution--nothing quite like Luther's Reformation took place here at the theological level. Nor was it a church revolution, if one means by that the official church leadership acting in concert with political forces to undercut the regime--as, for example, the pope did in regard to Poland both by his support of Solidarity and his cooperation with President Reagan to put pressure on the Polish government. In fact, most church leaders simply ducked their heads and did nothing very useful one way or another, and a few supported the regime.

Nevertheless, the fact that the church had a degree of independence from state control proved to be of great importance. And, more profoundly, religious assumptions continued to operate in East German culture in spite of the decline of church life and religious participation during the Communist years. They gave life a distinctively religious stamp, even in secular garb. After all, all churches that believe in the baptism of infants believe

that religion can have an effect whether or not people are fully conscious of its influence. The historic faith could not be uprooted; the red flags could not extinguish the white candles.

Certainly the place of the church in East German life was unique. When the GDR was formed, the central legal act was the incorporation of the whole. The entire society became a single corporation, with all the people declared as equal stakeholders and with the Party as the board of directors of the whole, and seizing control of the state apparatus to see that everything worked for the good of the whole. That is why housing and education and politics and economics and the media and law and medicine and technology and the arts and the military were all guided by the same set of hands.

There was one exception: the church. It was expected to fade away over time, especially if its economic base was removed. But as a concession to the residues of pre-scientific superstition among the people and its grip over the imagination of the peasantry, it was allowed to hold meetings, own some property, teach, preach, publish, collect money, train its own leadership, etc., in a way that no other sector of society could. Also important is the fact that early in the short history of the GDR, the churches themselves came to a fateful decision. They would be the 'Church in Socialism.' The phrase became the title of the leading journal and has a nice ambiguity about it. It is not the church for socialism, nor is it the church against socialism; yet it implies that the church can live, some believed must live, in socialism, either because the church itself has impulses that press in a socialist direction, or because that is where God put the church in this time and place to carry out its ministries. Among the public implications of this decision was the recognition that the Party and the state did not feel that it had to shut the churches down if they agreed to live in and not oppose socialism. The churches could maintain their relatively free 'social space,' for it was viewed as ultimately harmless. It is from these social spaces that the anti-state movement grew.

But some scholars were not having the view that religion was much of a cause at all, even in this modest sense. Sociologist Detlef Pollack of Leipzig, for example, argued vigorously that the real revolution was caused by the lure of the West and by the opening from Gorbachev. If people did not want the goodies, or if they thought that Russian tanks might roll, they would not have taken the risks. Besides, both the workers and the intelligentsia could look around them and see the bigger, deeper holes in their economic capacity and the increased frequency of lies and duplicity in their politics. Thus, they could not see the prospects of a good future there. It is as simple as that. Religion did not cause the revolution; ordinary interests, common sense, and no small amount of opportunism did.

The highly respected author Reinhard Henkys of Berlin, however, disagreed. We have to look deeper, he argues. Of course people worry about how life is going to turn out for them, and no one wants to spend his life digging a deeper grave. But we know that groups

of many kinds formed in the churches---poetry reading, ecology, peace advocacy, and all sorts of things. To be sure, we know that these groups contained maladjusted people and informers and troublemakers. But, for the most part, they were people who could not see basic value in what was told to the public by the Party or by the education systems. And we know that these are the groups from which the opposition movements grew among those who did not leave but stayed to try to set things right--whether we are speaking of the candle-light vigils, the illegal political parties, the human rights groups, or the art and poetry groups that circulated non-approved literature and woodcuts. That is not simply material interest and common sense or opportunism.

His position was parallel to one held by Heino Falcke of Erfurt, one of the most articulate theological minds of the German Democratic Republic. He was not present, but his views were referred to several times, and I had a chance to visit him in his home the next week. He has argued that these groups were fateful for what happened. The church became the mother of many children, not all of whom recognized her. Of course, some came under the roof of the church simply to find shelter, and of course, some pastors tolerated their presence less out of conviction that they were religious than out of a desire to protest the regime without becoming personally involved or even to keep an eye on them. Nevertheless, in the groups formed under the wings of the churches, people found a new confidence and a capacity to develop and express their deepest convictions--no small accomplishment in an environment where the party wanted your heart, mind, and will as well as your body. Even more important, they developed new competencies that have not been a part of German culture since the Nazis came to power. They learned how to build peaceful, self-disciplined, proto-democratic organizations from the ground up, without a central authority to enforce a consensus, since all formal patterns of authority outside the church were controlled by the party through the state. These transformations of psyche and habit, although not traditional religious conversions, were key sources of courage and innovation when the opportunity for change came.

Of course, Falcke admits, for he shares the view, most of these groups simply wanted to improve socialist society, not overthrow it. They wanted the church to be reformed as a model of genuinely democratized and socialized community, and saw it as the moral resource to humanize the inner structure of Communist society. Indeed this is what led the church leadership of East Germany, supported by many in the West, to become central figures in ecumenical bodies that sought new forms of socialism. The East German church became, as Peter Berger, the leading American sociologist at the conference, said, the icon of the liberation movements around the world. Here was an articulate, western Protestant leadership, obviously skilled in the accoutrements of theological scholarship, yet clearly aligned with the socialist agenda of the 'Third World.'

Not everyone held such views with the integrity of Falcke. Church historian Gerhard Besier of Berlin, in fact, has published a thick volume of documentation, with a second one on the way, about cooperation between Christian and Communist leaders from the available files of the East German secret police. He gave a paper treating the difficulty, yet the necessity, of finding out what has happened and by making the best documentation public. His book has been under sharp criticism in German church circles, for no one knows whether what is in the secret police files is accurate or rumor or slander. Further, everyone recognizes that certain official contacts had to be made, and key figures such as Manfred Stolpe and Christa Gregel were designated contact persons. But the documents also strongly suggest that some contacts were voluntary, unauthorized, unduly enthusiastic, and manipulative of church policy in the GDR and in the wider church. Further, current evidence points to the direct involvement of West German church leaders with the secret police and of East Germans, nearly always supported by church funds from the West German churches, in pro-socialist struggles from Zimbabwe and Mozambique to Cuba and Nicaragua--but they are not alone in that. General Superintendent Günther Krusche was formerly a colleague of mine when I taught in the GDR and gave a paper at the conference on the ecumenical role of the GDR churches. He drew on key phrases from the famous theologian who had resisted Hitler, and become a martyr for it, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that the church had to be a 'church for others' in a 'world come of age.' Part of what we need to do is recognize the validity of "religionless Christianity," that form of secular commitment that seeks *shalom*--as we can see in the recent ecumenical statements on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation." This language is common in ecumenical circles, but questions from Professor Eberhard Jüngel of Tübingen on theological grounds and F. W. Graf of Augsburg on ethical grounds pressed issues not yet clear to many ecumenical Christians, namely that these terms have come to be used in some contexts that make Christ, faith, and the church entirely dispensable except as they serve socialist aims.

Rather naively, at dinner after that paper, I asked Krusche whether he had had any personal contact with the secret police. He paused, drew a deep breath, and began to tell about the several people with whom he had been in rather close contact. The table fell hushed, and no one chewed a bite as he recounted his involvements with 'his man.' We did not know until the next day, when he distributed previously-prepared photocopies of a carefully worded statement to his colleagues, that he had only recently revealed these relationships with the secret police to the leadership of the Berlin-Brandenburg church.

I could not believe it. "How could you do that?" I asked. I was shocked, and my mind was racing. Someone had told me not to trust him, but I have tried to follow the GDR situation since I first published on it in 1968, and I did not quite trust the person who warned me against him. Other people whom I did trust had high regard for him. I had tried to learn

whom to trust and whom not to trust. I do not believe that churches should only live under the steeple and not be involved in their society; I do not believe that Christ is only against culture, politics, and social change, and I do believe that there are moments, as Saint Paul wrote, that we must "sin bravely that grace may abound." But I simply could not comprehend how a pastor could engage in such action unilaterally, without checking with colleagues, superiors, and spiritual confidants at least. Protestants believe in the reality of sin, and that means that we have to make ourselves vulnerable to the judgments of the community of faith in difficult moral questions, as well as seek God's grace.

At breakfast the next morning, I was still incredulous. I expressed my puzzlement to Professor Bernd Hildebrandt of Greifswald, a gentle, sensitive man who shared many of my, and Krusche's, ecumenical views, and who had anguished with and about those who had gone too far. "You must remember," he said,

We believed that socialism was the way to the future and that God put us here to be an inner witness to it, to keep the soul warm in this inexorable machine. We could soften it, make it truly human, because we know the secret of humanity in Christ. Our burdens and sufferings, although they were several, were shared with others in a great, mutually supporting fellowship. And the mission was great. We were doing for Protestantism what Thomas did for Catholicism. We were creating a new synthesis, not of Aristotle and Augustine but of Luther and Marx. We were cutting the path to the 'third way' for modernity. Besides, the Stasi was not the Gestapo. They did not beat people on the street or snatch you away in the night. They called at convenient times; they asked questions in a friendly voice; they fomented the idea that we could cooperate. They were interested in the relationship of Communism and Christianity because they said that Christianity was basically a people's movement among the proletariat who wanted to make things better, even if many of the Christians later developed false fixations on all sorts of myths. Besides, they could offer help. They could fix things. If the roof were leaking in the church and it was near impossible to get copper for flashing or a roofer to come, they could get it done. And beyond all that there is the fact that the older Communists the older members of the Confessing Church remember each other from Nazi jails. We remembered the same enemies.

The rest of the breakfast was in virtual silence.

Public discussion, however, soon began again at the conference. One question is less whether it was a Protestant revolution than what constitutes a revolution in the first place. This is an especially acute question because, for nearly two centuries, our image of revolution is built on the model of the French and Russian Revolutions. Put up the barricades! Storm the Bastille! Mobilize the exploited many against the elite few! Is that what happened?

Professor Kurt Novak of Leipzig, who has written extensively on the GDR change, enlivened the proceedings in the discussion of his paper when he was pressed to reveal his basic convictions. He believes that the French Revolutionary model is not how this revolution actually worked, and that this model has come to dominate German (and other) philosophy and social theory because there is a political deficit in Protestant thought. In fact,

behind that stands a profound ecclesiological deficit. We do not have a basic theory of how it is that God wants us to live together, except in interpersonal terms. Hence, matters of social order simply get turned over to political power. While it was true that groups could form under the protection of the church, there is no deep theological, philosophical or political theory that could guide the reconstruction of the church, the society, or modern civilization. Thus, the door is left open for the successive seizing of power and sudden lurchings of policy that have no deep intellectual or spiritual guidance system. This revolution happened because the society was morally, spiritually, and intellectually bankrupt--a vacuum. And thus far there is no profound vision to fill the vacuum.

Three interviews in Berlin suggested, in differing terms, that efforts are being made to overcome this vacuity. The theological faculty at Humbolt University is, under the new leadership of Professor Wolf Krotke, being substantively rebuilt. Most other departments that are pertinent to the reconstruction of the intellectual foundations of the common life--philosophy, jurisprudence, political science, economics, intellectual history, etc.--are not so far along, and are still dominated by discredited modes of Marxist thinking. Several of the leading theologians whose studies overlap with these areas are in initial stages of conversations about the reformation of intellectual life that will bring a new level of integrity to both scholarship and public discourse.

At a small seminary in Berlin for those who come to study for the ministry as a second vocation, I had a chance to meet with a group of younger faculty, gathered together for my benefit by the President of that institution, Johannes Althausen who had himself spent time in a Stasi prison and yet remained in the GDR to minister to those called to ministry. They are deeply concerned with the reconstruction of the integrity of the church and of personal piety. When I inquired about the greatest problem that they see, the reply was quick: integrity. The pietistic roots of this institution showed in the vocabulary: personal experience is decisive for all truth. Above all else, integrity in personal biography is a manifestation of faith, and this has to be developed in the quality of community in the congregation. Where this accent was preserved, the most vibrant lay groups remained active in the churches over the past forty years, and from this root many of the proto-democratic groups that proceeded the fall of the Wall grew.

Yet it may be that the best intellectual work on this issue is not being done in the academy. One of the most brilliant young thinkers of eastern Germany, Erhard Neubert, now working in the nearest thing I could find to an independent think tank, believes that the best path to understanding the present situation and its background lies in a recovery and recasting of the work of Max Weber, the comparative and historical sociologist who wrote in the first quarter of this century and still viewed by many and the most important post-Marxist theorist of how history works--an Einstein of the social sciences. Weber included

in his work certain insights from Marx (and, for that matter, from Nietzsche), but never allowed them to dominate his thought. In fact, much of what he wrote can be understood as a refutation of the notion that their ideas of power are what determine the course of human affairs. Weber's famous little book, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, is a glimpse into his vast research which, among other things, shows that religion is a decisive force in modernity--including that form of 'secular' life that seems most materialistic and pragmatic and the most removed from overt ethical or spiritual concerns. Weber was not a believer himself, but he became convinced that such areas of life are not so devoid of value as they often pretend to be, and they cannot be understood deeply without reference to their religious roots. Weber is very clear that it is not always religion as it is intended by the theologians and preachers that has these effects, but it is religion as interpreted and applied to practical life by laity who have to weave its principles into the web of economic, political, sexual, legal reality over time that make a difference. That is how it cuts channels of thought, frames habits of daily life, and shapes institutions that form societies in ways that subsequent generations may not recognize, any longer, as religious. Yet, such patterns of life do not undergo deep and enduring change unless there is religious change.

Erhard Neubert thinks that this is what happened in East Germany. The deep Protestant forms of Christianity finally were not overcome, repressed, or undercut by the humanism, historicism, or naturalism of Marxism-Leninism. Working away in the souls of the people was a profound sense of 'calling,'--the notion that God calls each individual to various walks of life and gives people the talents to carry through on these. If people cannot do that, if the society locks out the sense of calling or blocks the sense that their best work is to be done for the Glory of God and the service of the neighbor, people will begin to think that they are violating what they are supposed to be doing with their lives. They will resist the society in covert if not overt ways and seek other ways to work out their deepest sense of the meaning of their work. That touches a deeper sense of the meaning of work than Marxist theories of the worker could touch.

Further, Protestantism gives an impulse to secularize and rationalize life--not against God or religion; but because of them. Because God is sovereign over life, nothing else can be. Thus, Protestantism distrusts group-think, cant, ideology or authoritative teaching that does not give convincing reasons or evidence as to why it should be believed by faithful people. Blind faith is a betrayal, not a mark, of profound belief. That is why Protestants are so wordy, with all that preaching and teaching and Bible reading and discussion, etc. Still more, it forms its groups around common convictions and common purposes rather than on the basis of common interests or common origins. For Protestants, these only have validity when shaped and guided by clarified convictions and purposes. (The deep differences between Protestant and Catholic impulses in economic theory on such points have also recently been

artfully explored by Robert H. Nelson's remarkable Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

Finally, Neubert believes, with Weber, that there is a impulse in Protestantism toward capitalism--although not, of course, if one adopts the economic definition of capitalism as the license for greed, that has become widespread in academic and liberal church circles for the past two generations. Neubert means capitalism in the sense of the peaceful, disciplined, formation of multiple economic communities of cooperation to produce something of value in such a way that every participant in the process gains. This brings a new pluralism in society, an associational freedom that, in the East German case, showed up first in the formation of groups that spilled over into political movement first and now is spilling over into new economic activities (as well as to the formation of new prayer and Bible-study groups only marginally related to the traditional churches).

The key to the transformation of the recent past and to the prospects for the future is, in any case, religion, for it is the center of society and personality, and that is the core reality on which the wider and deeper forms of morality rest, and that is what finally defines the guiding features of both politics and economics that political science and economics have ignored. He thinks it is Protestantism's ethic that was the foundation of the revolution, although it is not at all clear that the Protestantism as it is institutionalized in either the former East or West Germany can carry the future. While its roots are deep, it is thin and inarticulate among the people. He thinks a deeper, more classical, recovery of biblical insights will be required if the promise of these events is to be sustained.

Neubert's thesis was confirmed, I think, one morning near the end of my trip to the reunited Germany. I woke up early one morning and looked around to find something to read, not wanting to disturb my hosts. I found a manual of the *Jugendweihe*, the 'communist confirmation class,' written for all students in the former GDR high schools. What intrigued me above all was the scheme of world history which lay behind the organization of the various chapters. It was (in brief) this:

1. Primitive humanity lived in harmony with each other and nature, but the natural state of affairs had been disrupted by the strong who made up myths which legitimated the domination of some by others. In some myths made up by workers such as the myth of Prometheus, however, we see the dream of humans to control their own destiny. Some ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, actually began to move toward an empirical science and a realistic humanism.

2. In the Mediterranean cities where the bourgeois began to oppress the workers, the people also tried to imagine a better world in religious terms. Some, such as Spartacus, also tried the path of violent revolution, but the scientific understanding of social reality was not yet developed. Later, strides toward a more adequate theory were taken, such as Utopia by

Thomas More (1516), and new movements were engendered, such as the Peasants Revolution, led by Thomas Münzer (1525).

3. The French Revolution began a new step toward modern revolutionary developments, and its aftermath was experienced by Germany in 1848, but these efforts were subverted again and again. Nevertheless, in the last few centuries, we can see the growth of three decisive developments:

A. The science of economics developed from Adam Smith through Ricardo to Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

B. The science of philosophy developed from the idealism of Kant through Hegel and Feuerbach to Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

C. The science of socialist and communist theory developed from St. Simon, through Fourier to Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

4. This revolutionary world view was made concrete in the twentieth century by a whole series of Russian and German heroes and leaders, particularly those who fought in the great struggle against Fascism, and those who struggle still against capitalism, liberal democracy, and militarism which are the sources of oppression in human affairs today.

5. This view is bringing a new understanding of truth to the whole world: "The criterion of truth is *praxis* . . . , the material activity of the people. Praxis has several forms--work, class struggle, social action, scientific experiment . . . Through the practical activity of millions of people the theory of Marx and Engels shall be verified and its value shall be confirmed in irrevocable reality." The hero for youth in this is Yuriy Gagarin who, like Prometheus, flew to the heavens and displayed the transcendence of humanity over merely earthly bondage. Join the heroic struggle for liberation!

Here obviously was a vision that has all the marks of a religion, but without God. Here are the red flags that were rejected, even if the young people of Germany today are not clear about the implications of the road they are choosing. And what was chosen, contrary to the expectations of many, was a more 'abstract' vision of history where spiritual ideals and hope remain sources of meaning. This implies some kind of eternal principles in alliance with the freedom to worship and love, to work and sing, to resist evil, and to form communities of open graciousness, as we are called to do by all that is holy.

In the struggle with red flags, these pale candles won.