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NOTES FROM EAST BERLIN: A COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

By John P. Burgess

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It has been nearly three years since that fateful Thursday evening in East Berlin. At a press conference, Guenter Schabowski, one of the communist leaders in the new generation that came to power after Erich Honecker's removal, unexpectedly announced his government's intention to allow East Germans unrestricted travel to the West. His intention was never entirely clear. Some East Germans, however, took him at his word. Throughout the night, they gathered at the Wall. Their numbers steadily increased until harried, and uncertain border guards began to let them across. The Wall had fallen. In the next weeks and months, events would continue to outrun themselves. The nation's first free elections sealed its fate; unification would quickly follow. The forty year-old German Democratic Republic had come to an end.

Last year, I travelled to East Berlin and East Germany, the culmination of a series of trips reaching over more than a decade. In 1979, I was a tourist paying my first visit. In 1984-1985, I returned to live in East Berlin and study at a seminary of the Evangelical Church, the country's major religious body. In 1987 and 1989, I spent several weeks visiting friends, many of whom, in the meantime, had become pastors and members of the church-related "alternative groups" that helped build the opposition movement. I had last visited the country the very week the Wall fell. Now, I had a grant to spend two months researching the contributions of the East German church to democratization. I would again be living at the seminary, many of whose instructors and graduates continue to play leading roles in shaping the future of East Germany.

During my visit, I would learn of the difficult challenges and adjustments that unification has brought. But I would be even more struck by the difficult legacy of the past. The 1989 revolution (what East Germans call *die Wende*, i.e., the turning point) has begun to bring into the open what many would rather bury: complicity in the communist past, connections with the state security forces, and failures of intellectual integrity and moral courage. The church, which played

a significant role in supporting and steering the revolution, finds itself caught in a classic theological dilemma. Coming to terms with the past seems to require both forgiveness and accountability, both forgetting and remembering. In practice, they easily become contradictions that defy resolution, both personally and socially.

The Sprachenkonvikt

The history of the seminary reflects the events of post-war Europe. Before the war, students at Berlin's Kirchliche Hochschule (Church Seminary), a child of the German Confessing Church, used to live and take their first two years of classes--Hebrew, Greek, and Latin--at the Sprachenkonvikt ("language house"). With the division of the city, the Sprachenkonvikt found itself in the eastern sector; after the construction of the Wall, students could no longer go back and forth between it and the Kirchliche Hochschule. The Sprachenkonvikt soon became a full-fledged, five-year seminary, one of only three in all of East Germany. Under church control, it built a sharp contrast to the theological departments at the state universities; it was an island of intellectual freedom, maintaining a strong commitment to humanistic as well as theological education. Though the state refused to recognize it as an institution of higher learning (it had to keep its anachronistic name), it thrived, attracting not only future ministers, but others seeking an alternative to the ideological rigidity of the state universities.

With the fall of the Wall, the status of the Sprachenkonvikt has changed yet again. Berlin suddenly had too many schools of theology: two in the West -- the Kirchliche Hochschule and the Department of Religion at the Free University; three in East Berlin: the Sprachenkonvikt, the theological department at the state-run Humboldt University, and the Paulinum, which trains men and women coming to church work from other careers. Financial constraints have forced the Sprachenkonvikt to merge with the Humboldt University; within a few years, the Kirchliche Hochschule will join them. Nonetheless, the Konvikt, as it is now known, continues to exist as a "theology house" with dormitory and study rooms.

East Berlin and East Germany Today

I would find some East Germans describing the new economic realities as "nineteenth century industrialism." They are surely mistaken. Unification has resulted in mass displacement of workers, but East Germans now share in all the benefits of the West German welfare state. While East Germany has been slow in attracting Western investment, the standard of living, always the highest in the East Bloc, has already benefitted noticeably from unification.

But "nineteenth century industrialism" does reflect some people's sense that East Germany is wide-open for economic speculation and exploitation. The advent of capitalism has included all the "trash and sleaze" against which the Communists, in their yearly celebrations of the Wall, once warned. Forty years of public prudery have apparently created a tremendous market for

pornography. Sex shops have quickly established themselves, as have the street walkers who, as before the war, work Oranienburger Strasse, a street in the old Jewish quarter, near the seminary.

East Berlin, like West Berlin, is still quite safe in comparison to most American cities. But there is a burgeoning business in security locks and systems. Women who once thought nothing of walking home alone at night have in the meantime become cautious and angry. In some cases, the police themselves have become insecure, afraid to assert themselves, in case the public once again perceive them as "authoritarian" and "insensitive."

In the wake of a rash of robberies, many East German churches are no longer open to the public. Even cemeteries have not been spared. Near the Konvikt lies the Invalidenfriedhof, a famous, old military cemetery. The Wall once ran right through it, making it largely inaccessible to the public. It has suffered not only from forty years of communist neglect, but also from a recent wave of "capitalist" souvenir hunters intent on grabbing whatever they can while they can.

Over the past three years, East Germans have experienced incredible change. Once insular and provincial, resentful but secure behind the Iron Curtain, they find themselves facing enormous tasks of economic, political, and social renewal. Many are exhausted. They have ridden an emotional roller coaster of hope and depression.

Unification has brought stability but also left many East Germans unsure of how well they will survive in the free market. It is not so much a question of material but emotional and psychological well-being, of self-confidence and self-identity. East Germans have always compared themselves to West Germans. With unification, they still feel like poorer cousins, unsure if they have any positive, significant contribution to make to a new Germany.

Coming to Terms with the Past

Under these circumstances, people also have a hard time thinking about that social-political reality that they have just recently left behind, yet that ordered their lives for so many years. The demands of the present overshadow the concerns of the past. Yet, if studying history makes any sense, East Germans will eventually want to learn from their own. While unification has brought more than enough challenges and adjustments to occupy them for the time being, difficult questions about the past will continue to haunt the East German psyche, just as the Nazi past continues to haunt the German psyche. Indeed, coming to terms with the Communist past may be the most critical challenge before all the fledgling democracies in Eastern Europe. Social and political renewal seems to depend on open, honest confession of the crimes and mistakes of the past. Yet, this very effort threatens to pit individuals and groups against one another in settling old scores.

Some of the questions are already clear. How was Communism possible? How did it once establish itself as a seemingly unalterable fact, only to crumble so quickly in the end? How could people have lived in fear of it so long? How could they have failed to resist it sooner?

The attempt to find answers has, as one might expect, a one-word German equivalent: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, literally, "mastery of the past." This word, more than any other, is presently unleashing vigorous public discussion in East Germany. The debate is perhaps fiercest in the Evangelical Church. Church leaders have been at the forefront of the nation's conscience, calling people to examine their own complicity in the Communist past. But the church is also deeply divided over the best way to come to terms with its own past.

Some East Bloc intellectuals would argue that everyone shares complicity in the Communist past. In *The Power of the Powerless*, Vaclav Havel, while still a dissident in the country that he later came to head, suggested that the seductions of a modern, consumerist society made Communism possible. When people have no sense of responsibility to a larger, transcendent reality, when they live only for themselves and their material well-being, they lead "demoralized" lives. They are prey to dictatorships that promise to fulfill their needs through rational, scientific-technological organization.

The theme of an underlying spiritual, intellectual, moral malaise has also characterized the social-political analyses of those East German theologians most committed to democratization. A book receiving considerable attention during my stay was Hans-Joachim Maaz' *Der Gefühlsstau* (roughly translated, *Jammed-Up Feelings*). Maaz, an East German psychotherapist who has worked in a church-run psychiatric center and treated pastors, argues that the entire nation has internalized repressive, authoritarian social structures. Even after the fall of the Wall, only an "inner democratization" and "psychic revolution" can fully free people.

Richard Schroeder, the Konvikt's professor of philosophy, told me that the present situation is not unlike that at the end of World War II. Fascism and Communism were clearly different phenomena. Hitler had enthusiastic support; the East German Communist party lacked any charisma. Yet, in both cases, a kind of mass amnesia fell over the land. After the war, one could find no Nazis. Today, few admit to having believed even a small part of the Communist dream; even fewer can speak self-critically about the past. The problem is that no state survives without a broad, public consensus. Yet, most East Germans do not want to talk about the ways in which they implicitly or explicitly supported the Communist state.

"Speechlessness" and Scapegoating

During my stay, I found that this unwillingness, perhaps even inability, to discuss and analyze the past took two forms. The first was what several East German friends called *Sprachlosigkeit*, literally, "speechlessness." Many people simply did not question their past involvements in state-sponsored organizations and activities. They did not ask themselves if they had done the right thing by participating, for example, in the Jugendweihe (the communist youth dedication ceremony that had effectively replaced confirmation as a rite of passage). They did not examine the ways in which they had once lived in fear of the state and practiced forms of self-

ensorship that restricted them perhaps more than the state itself. They did not speak of the meaningless elections in which they had contributed to 99.99% majorities or of the May Day gatherings in which they unenthusiastically but faithfully repeated the slogans of worker solidarity and international Communism.

This *Sprachlosigkeit* even extended to their former fears of, and encounters with, the state security forces (the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, the so-called "Stasi"). Nearly every East German had once experienced the Stasi as a force of mythic proportions, capable of knowing and controlling everyone and everything. For many years, it had successfully permeated people's spirits to the point of paralyzing their desire for change. Not surprisingly, the self-organized, mass demonstrations that helped people overcome this paralysis finally led them to the Stasi buildings themselves--at first, just to march by them quietly and cautiously, later to enter and occupy them. Yet, few people today are able to analyze the ways in which the Stasi actually worked or to make sense of their own irrational fears of it. Even the novelists and poets, once the ones who dared to say a little more than the state normally allowed, have grown quiet, seemingly disillusioned and disoriented, and few of those people who actually suffered Stasi harassment and imprisonment have come forward to demand rehabilitation and restitution.

One result of this *Sprachlosigkeit* has been that West Germans, who never had any experience of the Stasi, have assumed the rather arrogant and ludicrous posture of trying to tell East Germans what to think about it. Because so few other East Germans are addressing the issue, Schroeder has found himself writing and speaking about his own encounters with the Stasi, and has called on the West German media, instead of spreading myths and inaccuracies, to consider what East Germans could teach them.

The second way in which I found East Germans repressing the past was by scapegoating others. A whole people had been duped. Now, it vented its ire against the Politburo, or the party, or the Stasi. Perhaps, the most pathetic expression of this attitude were the persistent calls to arrest and try Erich Honecker, the old, dying East German leader whose picture once graced every government building and post office. (He is now being tried.) The media in both Germanies make headlines out of exposing the crimes of the once privileged and powerful; more than one politician has lost his career. Unfortunately, they offer little insight into the larger problem: the "demoralization" that infected an entire people. True, the revolution gave people a voice. They took to the streets. They demanded that the state treat them as responsible, mature citizens. Yet, their self-righteous anger was a convenient diversion from their own complicity in the communist past.

The Church's Response

The church too has sought to counter this *Sprachlosigkeit* and scapegoating. Ehrhart Neubert, an East Berlin pastor and sociologist of religion, has written extensively on the religious character of the alternative groups that began to appear in the church in the early 1980s. While these

groups did not practice a traditional religious piety, the church offered them a space in which they could meet freely and speak openly. Though sometimes experiencing state surveillance and harassment, they managed to develop a critical potential that helped spark the revolution. Neubert believes that the church can now offer a similar "free space" for groups seeking reconciliation between the victimizers and victims of the past. Neubert has himself helped form such a group in East Berlin's Bartholomaeus Church, located in an area of high-rise apartment blocks not far from Alexanderplatz, the center of East Berlin. The congregation quietly posted signs and issued invitations. People who in forty years had never set foot in a church building suddenly appeared. Meeting monthly, the group resembles an AA-style support group. Participants keep a degree of confidentiality; they never identify themselves by name. Yet, they have discovered a level of trust that enables them to speak quite openly about their individual pasts. Former agents of the Stasi sit next to former members of alternative groups. The agents hear the pain of those whom they once harassed. The alternative group members come to know the agents as real flesh-and-blood people, not simply as a dark, evil force.

Such meetings have been repeated throughout East Germany, though on an extremely small scale. One pastor who has been active in promoting local school reform recently helped organize a meeting between the town's high school teachers and some of their former students. It was an opportunity for the young people to express their anger at the rigid, ideological indoctrination that characterized so much of the East German educational system. Several teachers were visibly shaken; others offered apologies.

Many pastors throughout the country have also had the experience of people seeking to make confession to them and receive forgiveness. One pastor told me of a former party official who had come to him in tears. The anxieties, lies, and pressures that had ruled his life under the Communist regime had nearly destroyed him. With unification, he too wanted to make a new beginning.

Yet, the church itself suffers from *Sprachlosigkeit* and the temptation to scapegoat those of its leaders who had worked with the Communist authorities. Despite its significant role in the revolution, broad segments of the church had once helped support the Communist order. They too were part of that public consensus of which Schroeder speaks. Schroeder has argued that the slogan "church in socialism," which the church adopted to express its commitment to ministry in East Germany, too easily became its way of accepting the Communist state as an established fact. The church largely bracketed the question of the state's legitimacy. It rejected the atheistic element of its ideology but mostly failed to question whether the state had properly interpreted Marx and Lenin or whether Marx and Lenin themselves had a true understanding of the human condition.

Those Christians once most sympathetic to the East German version of the Communist dream (such as some members of the Christian Peace Conference) also seem to suffer the most from *Sprachlosigkeit* today, as if incapable of critical self-examination. They express no regrets for their

former lack of critical perspective, for having focused only on the possibilities, not the problems, of cooperating with the state. They feel no qualms about the privileges that they enjoyed, such as permission to travel to the West. To them, Communism represented a necessary social-political alternative to the West.

Given the charged public atmosphere of scapegoating, however, it is not surprising that people are reluctant to talk about their past. Some church leaders have argued that their first task is to create an atmosphere in which people will feel freer to examine themselves. They would ask those calling for "mastery of the past" to begin with themselves and to have patience with others, rather than making them lose face. I spoke with some pastors, however, who believe that people will only examine themselves if someone else first exposes and confronts them. Bringing the truth into light may actually free them to come to terms with a past they would rather repress.

The Stasi Files

This dilemma raises profound questions. Can people be forced to admit to their complicity in the past? If confession occurs under compulsion, can it be genuine? Will people freely own their past if left to themselves? When does confession belong in the public realm, when does it best remain private?

Nowhere do these questions assume more intensity and difficulty than in regard to the files left by the Stasi. In the months after the fall of the Wall, members of the opposition movement slowly became aware that the Stasi had begun to destroy documents. In Leipzig, Dresden, Rostock, and finally East Berlin itself, "citizen committees" decided to occupy and secure Stasi buildings. They believed that the Stasi past had to be preserved, analyzed, and understood.

Over the next weeks, the government, at that time composed of both communist and opposition forces, debated what to do. Because the political situation appeared increasingly volatile, opposition leaders agreed to help destroy computer tapes that had complete directories and listings of information in the files. They sensed the power in their hands, and they feared it. They wanted to resist the temptation to delve into information that sometimes contained individuals' darkest secrets. They wanted to hinder the Stasi from manipulating individuals on whom it had collected information. They wanted to protect the public sphere from poisonous accusations, denunciations, mistrust, and intimidation. Moreover, they feared that the West German secret police might attempt to steal information to blackmail individuals for its own purposes.

But the files themselves stretch more than 180 kilometers long. Some church leaders, such as East Berlin's Bishop Gottfried Forck, who had taken courageous stands against the Communist state, suggested that they be sealed in concrete or destroyed. Others, such as members of *Demokratie Jetzt* (Democracy Now), another of the first opposition groups to go public, insisted that individuals had a right to examine their files.

Eventually, the new East German parliament, elected in March 1990, decided to establish a government agency to organize, archive, and research the files. With unification, this agency (named after its director, Joachim Gauck, an East German pastor) became accountable to the German Bundestag.

David Gill, a former Konvikt student, now head of the East Berlin offices of the Gauck-authorities, believes that the Stasi had infiltrated the citizen committees and attempted to steer them. Despite reports that crowds had stormed the Stasi headquarters, agents had actually opened the doors and invited people inside. The Stasi had undoubtedly influenced the decision to destroy the tapes. But Gill argues that the country stood on the brink of civil war; its future was completely unclear.

Unification, however, has brought a political stability that puts the files in a different light. Now, argues Gill, it is possible, indeed essential, to use them to help the nation come to terms with its past. Several hundred thousand East Germans (no one knows the exact number) worked officially or unofficially for the Stasi. They spied and reported on millions of their fellow citizens. They violated the basic trust upon which a free and just society depends. Few broke the law--even fewer will ever come to trial--but their abuse of the public trust constitutes grounds for denying them positions of leadership in a new democracy.

The law provides for public institutions to request information from the files. As part of the process of rebuilding themselves and regaining the public trust, city councils, local legislatures, public universities, and government agencies can request information from the files. The essential criterion is whether or not one worked for the Stasi. All public officials must declare any Stasi connections. If they deny having them and the Gauck-authorities find evidence to the contrary, they can lose their position.

Thus far, however, the process has been slow and inefficient. The Gauck-authorities have been severely understaffed. Until recently, they had only several hundred employees to try to handle tens of thousands of requests. The delay in examining people's files has sometimes been a year or more; the time lag has encouraged people not to reveal their Stasi connections. Many wait, hoping to slip through the cracks. Moreover, not all public institutions have chosen to examine their officials.

The Church and the Stasi Files

The church too has the right to have the Gauck-authorities examine the files of its pastors and leaders. Whether or not to do so has generated passionate debate. Some church leaders have argued that Christians must begin from trust, not suspicion. A general examination could only undermine the church's life and witness.

I asked a member of a synodical commission charged with developing a position on the Stasi issue how it was possible that some of those who during the revolution had called for "living in truth" (to borrow Havel's phrase) now did not want to deal with the truth about the past. She told me that

the commission had struggled to find a solution. Especially important had been conversations with former Stasi officials. Many of them had high, admirable ideals. They had sought to do their job with integrity. They had seen themselves contributing to the good of society. With the rise of Gorbachev, they themselves had hoped for changes in East Germany. They had been the first to know that the old system was no longer working, and they had tried, to no avail, to encourage state leaders to institute change. This process of "demythologizing" the Stasi also extended to the question of so-called *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (unofficial colleagues), i.e., informants. Through her work, the commission member had become aware of the psychological pressures that had been brought to bear on them. There were stories of the Stasi recruiting orphans and social misfits, offering them the acceptance, approval, and love they had never known elsewhere. For others, work with the Stasi represented a necessary concession. Perhaps a person had committed a political offense many years earlier. The Stasi agreed not to destroy his career if he would become an informant.

In any case, it appeared that many, if not all, the members of the Stasi, official and unofficial, were themselves "victims." Since they no longer posed a threat to society, the church could now celebrate the new beginning that the revolution represented and reach out with love and compassion to those who had gotten entangled in the Stasi web. The church's task was to find ways to show concern and offer care. Confronting people with their past would only put them in a defensive position, not free them to come to terms with it. Instead, the synod had offered to work in confidentially with any pastors who came forward of themselves.

Commission members were also concerned that the Stasi files were misleading. Agents and informants had sometimes been rewarded simply for producing information; its accuracy was not always established. Moreover, in the weeks between the fall of the Wall and the occupation of the Stasi buildings, the Stasi had time to destroy and falsify documents.

Schroeder too helped make me aware of the complexity of the problem. Some church leaders had been regularly questioned by the Stasi; they might appear in the files, but that did not make them informants. Others had tried to make good use of their contacts with the Stasi, seeking to protect individuals against whom the Stasi had suspicions or to make the Stasi aware of public discontent with state policies.

Others, however, have found arguments against using the files unpersuasive. Some synods have voted to have their pastors examined. The rationale is that the church cannot rest on its laurels. It can keep the public trust that it won in the revolution only if it shows itself as ready as other public institutions to examine its complicity in the communist past. Of all public figures, pastors in particular must be accountable to a higher standard. Waiting for informants to come forward of their own accord is like asking alcoholics to admit they have a problem; very few will ever do so, unless exposed and confronted.

Some pastors told me that church leaders had their own reasons for not wanting files examined; they did not want people to know just how much the Stasi had successfully infiltrated every layer of the church bureaucracy, especially in East Berlin. These church leaders also feared that a population tempted to scapegoat might not appreciate the complexity of the Stasi issue.¹

Yet, responsible use of the Stasi files may be an essential component of corporate and personal renewal. Several pastors who had been active in the opposition movement told me that asking people to confront their past could be an act of love. Justice and love need not contradict each other. The victimizer's act of remorse can meet the victim's act of forgiveness. Confrontation does not--in fact must not--exclude compassion.

Justice or Love

But neither remorse nor forgiveness, I discovered, is certain. I learned of a theologian with apparent Stasi contacts. His friends were devastated. In telling me about the situation, they spoke with sadness and pain. They felt confident that he had used his Stasi contacts for the good of others. In so many cases, they claimed, the Gauck-authorities had provided ambiguous information. Their friend could go to court to appeal their judgment and probably win. All I could do was ask myself: what is required here, love or justice, coming to terms with the past or making a new beginning?

Other real life examples confronted me with similar questions and tensions. I knew a pastor who had spent several years in psychotherapy. During the chaotic days of December 1989, he had gotten hold of a copy of his Stasi files. To his horror, he discovered that his therapist had regularly delivered information to the Stasi, which hoped to have him committed to a psychiatric hospital. He confronted the woman, but she completely denied her involvement. His files also revealed that a fellow pastor had also been an informant. Now, he pondered whether or not to confront him; would confrontation only result again in denial, making both justice and love irrelevant?

In other cases, the past seemed to take care of itself. One of my friends had never talked much of his personal past. I only knew from others that he had been imprisoned in the late 1950s. As a university student, he had composed a poem mocking Walter Ulbricht and other East German Communists of that era. The bell rang, and he went off to his next class, inadvertently dropping the notebook with the poem. Another student found it, turned it over to the authorities, and he was arrested.

¹ Since my trip, the Gauck-authorities have asserted that Heinrich Fink, a theologian and former chancellor of the Humboldt University, and Manfred Stolpe, a leading church jurist, currently minister-president of the federal state of Berlin-Brandenburg, worked for the Stasi. Both acknowledge having had conversations with the Stasi in order to protect individuals or advance church interests but deny the accusations. The Berlin education ministry has forced Fink to relinquish his position. Stolpe has resisted calls to resign, and a parliamentary commission is investigating the case. Both Fink and Stolpe argue that the Stasi classified them as informers without their knowledge, cooperation, or permission.

This time, however, my friend himself broached the subject with me. With the political changes, a number of people had encouraged him to apply for rehabilitation. He seemed to struggle to know what to do. He said that was all so long ago. He had come to terms with it. He had no need to have his justice. Opening the case would only open old wounds. Again, I was left only with questions and tensions: was I viewing liberation or repression, healing or hurting? could the past sometimes better be left alone, no longer a matter of either love or justice?

A fourth life story moved me most deeply of all. One afternoon, a pastor who had been active in the opposition movement told me of getting his files through a member of a citizens committee, prior to the government reestablishing control over the Stasi buildings. The files were extensive, documenting how the Stasi had bugged his home and prepared, but never executed, his arrest. What shook him most deeply was the discovery that his best friend had been an informant. He had known this man for ten years. He had originally met him under circumstances that had made him suspicious. Gradually, he had dismissed his fears. Not only had they come to speak openly about politics, but their families had vacationed together every summer; they had shared birthday celebrations; they had hoped and dreamed together about a new kind of society, more free and just.

The shock had gone deep into his bones. To this day, his wife could not forgive the man or his wife, who had been aware of his involvement; she could not even bring herself to talk to them. The pastor himself had spoken twice to the man, by telephone. The first time the man denied everything. The pastor persisted, insisting there be honesty and openness. The second time the man completely broke down, condemning himself and sounding suicidal. The pastor was so concerned that he found himself backing off, suggesting that the friendship was perhaps not all lost.

Through other mutual friends, the pastor has put more details together. Ten years ago, the man and his wife had attempted to adopt a baby. Everything was in order until the very day they were to receive the child. Suddenly, their request was denied, without explanation. For weeks, the man met with doctors and officials, trying to determine the problem. He got nowhere. Exasperated by his persistence, one doctor finally told him, "you've got to be stupid if you can't figure it out." Something clicked in the man's head. He went to the Stasi and offered to work for them if they would allow the adoption. They denied any involvement but agreed to check into the matter. They added that the decision whether or not to work for them was fully his. He signed a statement. A few days later, he and his wife had the child.

The German Bundestag has recently voted to allow every East German the right to examine his files, if they indeed exist. People will be able to learn who informed on them; personal information about third parties will be blacked out. The debate that has erupted in the church is finally a debate for an entire society. Some argue that opening the files will result in acts of hatred and vengeance. It will destroy friendships; it will undermine all efforts at a desperately needed social reconciliation. Others argue that the only way to healing is through an open, however painful,

coming to terms with the truth of the past. They add that to date there have been no acts of violence against known Stasi agents and informers; they do not anticipate any in the future.

As in all these questions, the church finds itself on both sides. It has no other choice. Without confession, there can be no forgiveness; it may be just as true, however, that without forgiveness there will never be confession.

As Richard von Weizsaecker, the West German president, once remarked, in reference to the Nazi past: there is no such thing as *Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung*; we never "master the past;" for the past, for good or bad, always remains with us.