

12-1993

The Churches in the GDR between Accommodation and Resistance

Johannes Althausen
Paulinum School, Berlin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Althausen, Johannes (1993) "The Churches in the GDR between Accommodation and Resistance," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 6 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol13/iss6/2>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

THE CHURCHES IN THE GDR BETWEEN ACCOMODATION AND RESISTANCE

By Johannes Althausen

Dr. Johannes Althausen (Lutheran) is the Director of the Paulinum School for Pastor in Berlin. He lived in the former G.D.R. where he became known for his theological leadership. This article was translated from German by John P. Burgess.

If you had asked the people of Israel seventeen months after crossing the Jordan what the last forty years of wandering in the desert had been like, some would have spoken of hunger and deprivation, others of the miracles that had always brought them through, others of conflicts and disputes, and still others of love and joy. They would have ended up in each other's hair if they had tried to agree on one coherent description. And it is possible that the young people would have just shrugged their shoulders and turned to the new tasks. We find ourselves in a similar situation after forty years of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), not because it was a time of wandering in the desert -- one can quarrel about this kind of metaphor -- but because the events are still much too close to permit anything more than a subjective account of one's own experiences. Please do not expect anything more than such an account from me, a story that is both one-sided and assailable.

Nonetheless, I do not wish only to tell a story but also to make a contribution to processing the past, despite all the agitation and disagreement about these matters.

First, I will briefly describe my own position.

Second, I will draw on biographical notes to describe the history and context out of which I approach these matters, for I belong to that generation that began to think and act at the time of the founding of the GDR.

Third, I will give an historical overview of the theme "church and state in the GDR."

Fourth, I will address the theme *Stasi* (the state security forces), which deserves attention because of the present controversy.

1. General Comments

To begin, I find the key words "accommodation" and "resistance" peculiar. Both words have initially a negative ring to them. My own way of approaching history since 1945 -- and

I consciously choose this date, not 1949 -- is somewhat different. To me, it would be more important to ask what has given meaning to our loving and suffering, our fighting and failing, and our speaking and acting during the long time that many now wish could "unhappen," a meaning that we Christians can defend in the presence both of others and of God. But I will not go into these matters and will speak instead about the broader social, historical context.

The key words "accommodation" and "resistance" are more objective than the words "compromise" and "opposition," which play such a key role today because they more clearly express the dynamics between church and state. But even more important is the fact that they have something to do with the special nature of our church life. I have borrowed them from the lectures that the former bishop of our Berlin-Brandenburg Church, Albrecht Schoenherr, gave towards the end of his time as Chairman of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR and just before he went into retirement in 1980. They suggest the nature of his own engagement for the future of the church. The church has a distinctive identity ("community of the faithful," says Ebeling) as well as a social dimension (the kingdom of God). It is independent of the surrounding world. At the same time, the church lives as a community of men and women and lives for men and women in their relations with each other. Church history in all times and places is therefore a history of both accommodation and resistance.

The theological presuppositions that guided church leaders in relation to the GDR state are characterized by two well-known concepts: the Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms, on the one hand, and of the lordly rule of Jesus Christ, on the other. It is not my task here to summarize all of the theological discussion that these concepts stimulated in our churches in the last forty years. Rather, I wish to offer just enough detail to be helpful historically and to allow for an accurate judgment of the church's actions.

The two kingdoms teaching includes the notion of two different areas of competence, that of the church for spiritual things and that of the rulers for worldly things. For Christians, however, there is only one king over both, and the separation cannot be too strict. There has been much debate among us over this matter. Sometimes it seemed as if the one position (two kingdoms) stood for resistance, the other (lordly rule of Christ) for accommodation. But in practice this way of conceiving things usually did not work. In the 80s, for example, emancipatory groups appeared in the church, out of which later came the people's movement. We had to recognize that their goals were not strictly religious, and there were some among us who appealed to the two kingdoms teaching to argue that the church should put greater distance between itself and the groups. Others put more emphasis on the task of proclaiming the rule of Christ in all areas of life and were therefore ready to fight with and for the groups. In relation to the state, however, persons from both positions

intervened equally on behalf of the groups. Nearness to or distance from the state cannot be explained solely on theological grounds.

2. Attempt at Characterizing My Own History and Context

When my political consciousness first awoke, I was a student. My first critical struggle with the social and political conditions of the GDR took place as I assumed leadership in the student Christian fellowship movement. I was twenty-four years old. In early 1953, I was detained for five months in a *Stasi* prison. In 1952--that is to say, three years after the founding of the GDR -- Walter Ulbricht called for the construction of socialism in the GDR, so as to fight all ideological enemies more vigorously. There had been a general development towards a divided Europe, and the European Community was in the process of emerging, after Stalin's offer for German reunification in early 1952 was turned down. There was no mistaking that Ulbricht's action would affect the church. Already in the fall of 1952, the first reprisals began. In early 1953, there was a wave of arrests, affecting about forty ministers.

I very clearly experienced my arrest as an injustice, as the kind of injustice nonetheless that Christians and church leaders experience often. At the same time, I was guided by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thoughts. His letters from prison had just appeared and would have been a little guidebook for many of us even without the reality of arrest. Soon it was clear what was going on. The *Stasi* intended with the help of witnesses turned state's evidence to elicit statements that would justify restricting the church's possibilities. One could see through their method, and their arguments were threadbare. If one could keep one's nerves, one could survive the matter without damage and without accommodation. Historical circumstances began to change too. The larger political realities necessitated a settlement between state and church. The reason for my arrest passed, and I and many others were set free.

In prison, I had successfully resisted. At the same time, I had learned that for Christ's sake I could not despise others. The one who had suffered on the cross had prayed for his enemies. Above all, the experience had freed me from the pressure to resist, a pressure that I had found among Christians and among all of us in general, for we had all been influenced by a Nazi upbringing. Now I was required to make my own judgments about how the church should live in this society. Why should I not also find opportunities for conversation with Marxists?

My way led me first to the inner church opposition to the course of Bishop Otto Dibelius, which in our opinion the GDR government was not ready to accept, then to the brotherly circles in which we discussed questions of disarmament (above all, the tragedy of the arms

race and of nuclear armament), and finally to the Christian Peace Conference (CPC), whose General Assembly in Prague in 1961 was also the occasion for my joining.

Here I not only learned that Christians must gather together internationally to work against war and armament for the sake of peace, but I also developed a concern for the countries of the third world. At the beginning of the 60s, these countries had just come into the consciousness of Europeans, because they had just achieved their political independence. But what kind of justice would they now find in the community of nations? Would not a threat to peace be above all a threat to them? The World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983--in response to initiatives of the GDR churches--for the first time clearly related peace and justice. We had already discussed this relationship twenty-five years earlier in the Christian Peace Conference. We had also taken seriously Marxist options and the political positions of the socialist camp. It cannot be denied that the CPC in the long run lost some of its independence. In 1961, however, there was still a genuine dialogue. Moreover, other political positions have not yet proven that the nations and peoples of the third world can get both justice and development and progress along a non-socialist path. While these other political positions have won the race for power that broke out after the Second World War, the question of peace is still open.

I had both good and bad experiences into the 80s with the approach that I took. To the bad ones belonged above all my increasing discomfort with the growing indoctrination of people in the GDR since about the middle of the 70s. This indoctrination increasingly served to preserve the state's power and did not allow the underlying political problems to come to open debate. Everywhere in my world there were friends with whom we could discuss these developments--whether the *Stasi* were present or not was really secondary. But we did not find a way to demonstrate opposition publicly. What our experiences had taught us brought us above all to the idea of wanting to make socialism better. In that respect, we were not the only ones. The leaders of the so-called opposition, even as late as September 1989, continued to speak in terms of improving the GDR, not however of eliminating it. So then, with the decline of socialism in Europe, I could only conclude that it had been more ready to disappear from the scene than we had imagined. But the political questions that gave rise to socialism are still with us.

3. Stages in the Relationship Between Church and State in the GDR

In the relationship of the Evangelical churches in the GDR to the state (without attending more specifically to the differences among state, party, and the state security forces), there were historical factors that conditioned the tension between accommodation and resistance.

These factors always remained the object of discussion within the church, as well as within the state:

1. German relations with other peoples after fascism and/or the question of German guilt and the question of the division of Germany.
2. The opposition of East and West and the accompanying questions of peace and justice.
3. The relationship of Christianity in Germany to the workers' movement ever since it emerged in the last century.
4. The progressive secularization of society since the middle of our century and the paradigm shift that has accompanied it in the intellectual history of our time, especially during the 60s.

Given my own history and context, I would find it exciting and important to investigate these historical factors individually. I cannot do so now. Rather, I will attempt to identify and examine the different stages that these factors helped frame, in order to demonstrate the complexity and nuances of the history of church-state relations.

I would like to distinguish four stages:

- a. 1949-1958, seeking the terms of relationship
- b. 1958-1969, living without dialogue
- c. 1969-1978, beginning a dialogue
- d. 1978-1989, disruption and testing

a. When the GDR was founded in 1949, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) appointed an official representative to the government. In doing so, however, the church did not intend to acknowledge the legitimacy of the government. The government could not accept this situation. After 1952, as it became ever clearer that the division of Germany was inevitable, the government was naturally concerned to have the church as a partner that would acknowledge it and not regard it as merely provisional. To be sure, the government could not anticipate receiving such recognition so long as it acted against the church with emphatic gestures of force, as in 1953.

At the same time, the church did not come to the partnership without a history of its own. A hundred years earlier, Johann Wichern, founder of the Evangelical Church's Inner Mission, had seen in communism nothing more than a social evil. With the repression of the Russian Orthodox Church, anti-Bolshevism revived, only to be strengthened by the Nazi propaganda. A communist-led society was unacceptable to the German population. The courageous *Darmstaedter Wort* (Darmstadt Declaration) of 1947, which the leadership of the Confessing Church issued, died away almost unheard: "We were in error when we failed to see that the economic materialism of Marxist teaching warns the church of its duty and opportunity to provide for the life of men and women and for their life in common on

earth." To be honest, we have to conclude that it was not only the Germans' desire for unification or their desire to hold on to the unity of the EKD that made them oppose the GDR. There was more resistance than acceptance, a resistance that as we know led to repeated conflict in the 50s.

Tensions reached a peak when the EKD concluded an agreement with the West German government to provide pastoral care in the West German military and to grant chaplains the status of civil servants. For the most part, members of the synods in the GDR withheld their approval. Nonetheless, the law was fully valid without their votes and prompted the government of the GDR to break off its relations with the EKD. A state secretary for church questions, installed by the state, now took the place of the church's representative. The state's position was clear. The state secretary for church questions would act according to the needs of the state. The state would deal with the church as the state deemed appropriate. The state would act according to the political exigencies. Not until the revision of the constitution of the GDR and the founding of a Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR in 1969, could there be any movement in church-state relations.

That the two sides managed to relate to each other at all under these unclear legal circumstances is to be thanked both to a series of external circumstances (e.g., developments in the post-Stalinist era in the Soviet Union and shifting domestic priorities in the GDR) and to the fact that on July 21, 1958, a delegation led by Minister-President Otto Grotewohl could agree with five GDR church leaders on a communique that demonstrated a measure of mutual respect. We were quite attentive to it because for the first time it expressed the church's readiness to respect the socialist path. Already at that time there were strident critics among us who like many today characterized this step as an impermissible concession and/or as the first in a series of concessions. One should guard against a one-sided interpretation, however. In the same communique, the state promises to respect Christians' observation of their civic duties "according to their faith, and within the parameters of the law." In this document, the state backed away from the Marxist denial of the continuing existence of Christians. The communique therefore demonstrated mutuality. It became the foundation for many additional agreements over the years and gave both sides experience with each other.

b. I experienced the time between 1958 and 1969 almost as a time of "war in the trenches" between church and state. The so-called "Conference of the Eastern Churches" spoke for the churches in the GDR. As a body of the EKD, it could not be recognized by the state. When high government officials wanted to talk to Christian representatives, they did not turn to the official ones (Prof. Fuchs in 1961, Goetting in 1964, and as the first halfway official representative, Bishop Mitzenheim in 1967). Apparently, it was possible for church and state

to get along, for many practical things could be negotiated and even resolved at a more local level. Nonetheless, I regard these years in the 60s as very important. They helped us to recognize that the church's existence was challenged not only by a Marxist government but also by the continuing secularization of society. We had to acknowledge and dedicate ourselves to addressing new challenges to the church's social and public significance.

I wish to characterize these developments through two discussions in particular: the secularization debate and the debate over the Ten Articles and the Seven Statements. The opposition that the church expected among Christians to the 1954 youth dedication ceremony -- a state-promoted social rite to replace church confirmation -- never materialized. Secularization had penetrated far deeper than the church leadership had suspected and necessitated the church's asking what was still possible. What was the way of the church to be? What would the congregations of the future be able to bear spiritually? How would the church have to understand church membership in the future? Which church was it anyway that would make its witness somewhere between accommodation and resistance? The secularization debate was to our joy and consternation not only ours. We found ourselves in an ecumenical discussion. Nonetheless, it had its own depth and explosive effect among us. The synods vigorously debated not only what to do about those who participated in the youth dedication ceremony instead of in confirmation, but whether the church could retain infant baptism as the norm. In addition General Superintendent Dr. Guenter Jacob's essay "The Church in 1985," was a great sensation. To be sure, his prognosis that the church in twenty years would have only ten percent of its membership left did not come true. Because of the church's public significance, the picture that finally emerged in the 80s was different. Nonetheless, one can say that this document remained meaningful to many individuals and relevant to many of the concrete decisions that the church in the GDR had to make.

In any case, given the response to the youth dedication ceremony, church leaders had to recognize that members of congregations bore the spiritual burden of resistance and that it did not always occur in the way in which church leaders -- or people today -- would imagine. When military instruction in the schools was introduced in the 70s and the churches protested, they had a similar experience.

The struggle to determine the role of the church in a secular society was reflected in the dispute over the so-called "Ten Articles" and the "Seven Sentences." In 1963, leading church bodies set forth a series of theses, the so-called "Ten Articles about the Freedom and Service of the Church in the GDR," and attempted to delineate the basis of responsible church action. Above all, the church wanted to distinguish itself from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and from other groups of Christians who were accommodating themselves to the state. Concerned that these groups were making the word of God "accompany and confirm earthly ends" or that they were "succumbing to the seductive

opinion that certain forms of society in themselves make possible the obedience of faith," the articles attempted to determine--in the areas of science and truth, law, peace, and work, as well as church and state--how the duty of proclamation demands an independent and in some cases critical witness.

Over against this document, the Weissensee Work Group, influenced by the tradition of the brotherhoods in the Confessing Church, and to whom people such as Albrecht Schoenherr belonged, opposed the "Seven Statements about the Freedom of the Church to Serve." The Weissensee Work Group saw in the Ten Articles formulations of delimitation that seemed to perpetuate the church politics of resistance to the social and political structure of the GDR, a position already widely represented and one to which Dibelius and others like him in Germany had been long dedicated. The Weissensee Work Group feared that a false understanding of the two kingdoms teaching was at work here. Jesus' missionary commission, as the Work Group says, "prohibits the church from seeing the world as the kingdom of the law under God's demands, and itself as the kingdom of grace under the promise of the Word of God, because God claims all people in the promise of his grace." For this reason, the question must also be posed in what sense resistance is justified. "In the obedience of faith, the church resists the selfish temptation to seek its own well-being apart from that of the godless world. It will find its own well-being only insofar as it seeks the well-being of the world" (Statement 1).

Both sets of theses appeal to the Barmen Declaration, which describes the state as a divine appointment. But they develop this idea in different ways. The eighth of the "Ten Articles" climaxes in the statement, "We act in disobedience when we do not answer for the truth, are silent about the abuse of power, and are not ready to obey God more than people." It would be entirely wrong, at least from my perspective, to say that we in the Weissensee Work Group ever fundamentally contradicted this statement. But given the uncompromising resistance of the 50s and the fact that the life of the church after the building of the Wall in the GDR suffered considerably because of the church's connection to the EKD, the Ten Articles reflected an unfounded fear.

We believed ourselves commanded to formulate things differently: "In the obedience of faith, we will neither love nor fear the state, the political order of our society, but rather will participate in the fulfillment of its divinely-appointed task" (Statement 7.1). Today one must understand the word "participation" to refer only to individual Christians. The Weissensee Work Group, in my opinion, had not intended to argue that the church should participate in state activities. But the repeated hope for an "improved socialism" (Falcke at the Federation Synod, 1972) that also served as the basis for specific church actions had its foundation in such theological impulses. I regard it as unjustified to see an accommodationist ideology in the sentence just quoted from the "Seven Statements," for it is expressly stated that we will

"neither fear nor love" the political order. But with thirty years distance, I am prepared to reflect on whether it was right to formulate the matter in that particular way. At the time, it was surely helpful to me. I was able here to express theologically what had become clear to me: if persons in our situation are not just going to flee like Jonah, they must establish a relationship with the partner to whom they owe the gospel. Their word must seem trustworthy to him, if he is to accept it. I never understood this stance to be an inappropriate kind of accommodation.

To translate it into ecumenical language, I would describe this position as a commitment to a missionary dialogue. It is right to question just how far it could serve to guide the church's action. But, as is well-known, it corresponded to the key notion of a "communion of witness and service" that originated in the ecumenical movement of the 60s and that the church used to clarify its intentions in founding the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR in 1969. In its service of witness, the church intercedes for and with people for the sake of their well-being, for the sake of human rights, and for the sake of God's justice. In doing so, the church acts independently and is challenged to exercise resistance. In its service, the church takes every partner seriously. What the church does through witness and service should not direct it away from the world but rather should be effective in the world. In this way, a dialogue with the world results.

In encounters with the West German churches of the EKD, one often hears reference today to the difference that existed between the relative nearness of the Western churches to the state and the distance of the former GDR-churches from the state. The new orientation of the 60s, in which the friends of ecumenicity were also very active, made us aware that we had to be church in a different way. As a result of living in a secular society and in an ideologically-led state, we had to learn to live with ever fewer privileges, in contrast to the situation of the West German church, which as a partner of the state enjoyed many privileges in a pluralistic society. The history of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR is, in my opinion, only to be understood when one judges it in terms of its attempt to adopt this new orientation.

c. The history of the churches in the GDR reached a clear watershed in 1969. The founding of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR put the relationship of church and state on a new footing. The new constitution of 1969 was a decisive point of departure legally. If the church had not been willing to respect this new situation, it would have had to go into a kind of quasi-illegality. No one was interested in that path, for it would have surely deprived the church of the possibility of interceding for the people. Instead, the church decided for the people.

In order to describe the relationship of the churches in the Federation to the state, one is careful today, whether with friend or foe, to come back to the formula of "the church in socialism." Here I neither can nor wish to go into the whole discussion. It was already very vehement during GDR times, especially from about 1985 on. But I think that I should say what I understood the formula to mean in its time and what significance it could have today. I saw in this formula a renewed effort to guard against a basic rejection of the legitimate existence of the GDR. For after twenty years, the voices of those who fundamentally rejected the GDR had not grown silent, especially in the churches. Today, I am still of the opinion that an "inner emigration" out of society contradicts the church's commission to serve the people with whom it lives. Such an attitude cannot contribute to the church's credibility.

But there was yet another aspect to the formula. It stated the church's place, a place that had a specific context in the history of the twentieth century. In a conversation with State Secretary Gysi, I once detected how much for the Marxists the controversial formula of the "church in socialism" represented for the Marxists the end of a decades-long confrontation between themselves and Christians, in which the question of power always took precedence over the question of justice. The formula represents, so one must conclude, no alliance and also no false accommodation. But it did represent the beginnings of a dialogue that was in the interest of the people of our century.

Among other things, a sentence of a letter of the GDR bishops to Ulbricht (February 15, 1968), anticipating the founding of the Federation, underlines this particular significance of the formula. Building on a statement of the Darmstadt Declaration of 1947, the bishops said: "We see ourselves set before the task of realizing socialism as a more just form of life together, precisely because we have failed to make the cause of the poor and the cause of those deprived of their rights the cause of Christianity" (Quoted by Manfred Stolpe, "Ten Years of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR," *Zeichen der Zeit* (1979): 415) The letter then described additional tasks, among which the most pressing belonged to intervening for human rights and human worth.

This letter cannot be misunderstood as an accommodation to the politics of the GDR. In speaking of the German question, it finally says: "We operate from the assumption that after the war for which Germany was guilty two German states now stand on the ground of the German nation. We strive for orderly cooperation and rapprochement between the two German states, so that we Germans can promote peace and so that human relationships, especially between family members, can achieve their full legitimacy."

The "church in socialism" was always an independent church. For the sake of its commission to serve the people, it had to walk a narrow line between accommodation and resistance. In the current debate, one may ask if it was right for the church to express its place in society with the slogan "church in socialism." But I think one would be ill-advised

to overlook the way in which it signalled the church's readiness to overcome a false anti-socialism that had rooted itself among Christians for more than a hundred years. In any case, I am often unable to shake the impression that some want to refer to the formula of the "church in socialism" simply to accuse the church in the former GDR of accommodation and to justify their own socially and historically grounded refusal to repent.

d. To be sure, we never got beyond the beginnings of a dialogue. For before a compelling case for the importance of dialogue could grow among Christians and before the church could really go a new way, events occurred that brought fundamentally different kinds of challenges. The difficult testing of church-state relations ever since the end of the 70s has to be seen against the background of larger developments in Europe. The emancipatory movements that became active first in the liberation of third world nations in the 60s and then at the end of the decade in the northern hemisphere (in Central Europe above all in the student revolts) were not without significance in the GDR, as became apparent in the middle of the 70s, when people could appeal to the Helsinki-Declaration to demand human rights in the GDR, even though the state only reacted negatively.

I observed at that time that our children in the school began to discuss things more openly and that Christians, say in the case of being denied higher education, had more possibilities to sue for their rights. It can also be demonstrated that the GDR government in the interest of gaining greater recognition from the West was ready to allow more openness in the economic sector. In addition, such concessions as greater freedom to travel or for the church to build in new, satellite cities and to deepen its ecumenical contacts could be wrested from the state. At several decisive points, however, the state was all the more rigid, especially--as in the 50s--in the areas of political opinion and of the building of democratic structures in any area of society. The introduction of military education in the schools, the expatriation and regulation of non-conformist writers and poets, and the hostile attitude towards the peace, justice, and environmental protection groups, which after Helsinki were being organized with ever greater frequency, were all in the same vein.

The church was not prepared for this situation. But from the beginning, it also found itself in an ambivalent position in respect to these new challenges. In many areas, the church was granted the greater freedom that it had long demanded, for example, in regard to pressing construction needs or to its international commitments. Into the 80s, it experienced increasing "relief." Similarly, one should not underestimate what it meant to church scholars and theologians when there was genuinely open academic dialogue with Marxist historians in preparation for the Luther Year in 1983, something that had been unthinkable since the founding of the GDR.

The high point of this era was the conversation between Erich Honecker and the officials of the Federation in 1978. At the same time, the efforts to win freedom for a Christian witness to peace ("swords to plowshares") and to make an independent witness in questions of justice in the third world or in regard to non-violence at home (see, for example, the issue of military instruction in schools) occasioned vehement disagreement between church and state, and the church was always the loser.

But the situation was also made ambivalent by the emancipatory groups' seeking shelter under the church's roof. The churches were aware that emancipation and the freedom of the gospel related to one another. But the church found that many of the group members, most of whom were young people, were prepared to live in the church, but not with the church. This situation resulted in tensions, though often they could also be resolved locally. The problems with state authorities or the security forces occurred above all where the congregations by themselves could not regulate things (for example, where the municipality was involved) or where the *Stasi* provoked a confrontation with the church.

Out of my few personal experiences in the church offices in the 70s, I can say that the church struggled to know how to order its relationship with the emancipatory groups. But it also seems to me that the groups were just as unsuccessful in making their concerns clear and in winning over church leaders as their advocates. It was not until 1989 in the context of the Conciliar Process for Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of the Creation that both sides could finally be brought together and find an increasingly common language. Until then, the relationship of the church to the groups for peace, justice, and the protection of the creation was tense. The church stood, in the words of Werner Krusche, for the minimalization of conflict, while the groups sought to maximize it. By the time that Rolf Henrich, a dissident Marxist lawyer, wrote his book on the "guardian state" in 1989 and accused the church of being too chummy with the state, using almost the same arguments as representatives of the independent political movement today, the ecumenical assembly in Dresden, the high point of the Conciliar Process in the GDR, had already taken place. It seems to me today that this assembly created the conditions for the church leadership to be able to support a comprehensive resistance of Christians to the falsification of the election returns in 1989, and finally to allow in summer and fall of 1989 the church to be a gathering place -- and in its intercessory prayer also a space for free expression--in which the groups, so often unloved, could make their critical contribution to the Wende (the "turning" point, i.e., the downfall of the communist government).

During this time, the state conducted a relentless battle against every emancipatory movement and probably fell apart as a result. The fact that the church was not always one-minded in these matters but remained captured by this historically-rooted ambivalence, and the fact that the church succumbed to supposed pressures on it, is reason for confession of

guilt. But for this phase, I would also want to say that the church continued along the difficult path between accommodation and resistance.

4. Present Efforts in the Public Debate to Make Sense of the Relationship of the Church in the Former GDR to the State

Within the context of this lecture, there is not enough time for me to give a complete analysis of the issues indicated under this heading. The very nature of the topic presents additional problems. At this point, for example, all of our information is still incomplete. But perhaps as an insider I can make a few general comments to put things into perspective more objectively and to encourage conversation about these matters.

First of all, when one frames these matters in terms of the question of accommodation and resistance, much has to be understood with greater nuance than has occurred for the most part so far. Furthermore, to narrow the focus to the relationship of church and *Stasi* is absolutely impermissible both in regard to the historical developments and in view of the possible misjudgment of the circumstances under which this or that occurred. So, for example, it is correct in the public debate to see the dissident Robert Havemann as one who resisted, given his actions after the middle of the 70s. But in the 50s, as Prorektor of the Humboldt University in Berlin, he was above all guilty of the expulsion of Christians, an injustice for which as far as I know he never made amends, not even later during the time of his friendship with Christians. Nor did this injustice ever prompt him to engage in conversation with the victims. He himself was clearly a victim of the *Stasi*. But his history as a victimizer has also not reached the "statute of limitations."

Or, for another dimension of the problem, in one of the most dramatic situations that I can remember, the church had to save one of the so-called groups from the grip of the *Stasi*, even though in the church space that it was using, it had smeared a wall with swastikas and other grotesque symbols. The church had reason to abandon the group to the state authorities. But for the sake of human worth and for the sake of some of the concerns that the group represented, the church could not simply do so. The degree of accommodation and resistance became the question: how we help without betraying people and possibly at the

same time, how we betray people and in that way help. I do not know if an outsider can imagine such situations. But they always occur to me when I attempt to put myself into the shoes of the church leaders who today are accused of having gone too far in their contact with the *Stasi*. One must therefore examine each case very carefully and even then be cautious in one's judgments. What in each case did an unofficial collaborator actually do? What constituted "regular" conversations with the *Stasi*? When one says that he hoped through such contacts to help others, I am sympathetic, and I wish to believe him until there is proof of the opposite. Unfortunately, we are for the most part not at the place where one's guilt has to be proven before one is judged; rather, we are still at the point of jumping to conclusions and of forcing the accused to prove his innocence. That should not be the case, at least not among Christians.

With a second observation, I wish to direct our attention once again to contexts and conditions that in the present debate are all too easily forgotten. The East-West conflict of the post-war era created a mentality of fighting "the enemy." The conflict is now past, but this mentality has not yet been fully overcome. Occasionally, it seems that it continues to play its old role in people's assessment of the *Stasi*. The fact of a single encounter with the *Stasi* becomes sufficient to stain a person permanently. Deep mistrust spreads, undercurrents of which it has been the doubtful achievement of the recent book by Gerhard Besier to promote, as important as its documentation is (Pastors, Christians, and Catholics, 1991). It seems to me that to process our past in Europe we must examine this mentality of always needing to fight "the enemy." The question of anticommunism also needs to be a part of the discussion. Only those who are ready to engage in open-minded discussion and to adopt a new view of things can do justice to the attempts of the churches in the GDR to live in accordance with the Gospel and to be present to others in the context in which Christians found themselves. The questions that we have to solve today in common also have to be solved without the old enemies. Though Europe and the North have achieved a peace, it often appears to depend on a distorted enemy complex that they are unable to overcome.

**Fifty years after the terrible Nazi war, will things come to pass that did not happen then?
And does that threat pertain only to the former GDR?**

Christians and the churches know of the possibility of attaining a new beginning through penance and renewal. In light of the history of the German churches in this century, they especially should find themselves moved to contribute to a more liveable and peaceful world in the twenty-first century.