

8-2020

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Recommended Citation

Schmauch, Christoph (2020) "On Both Sides of the Wall," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 6 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss6/10>

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ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL

Tempora Mutantur et Nos Mutamur in Illis

By Christoph Schmauch

Christoph Schmauch was born in 1935 in Breslau/Wroclaw and has lived in the United States and Canada since 1957. He has a Master of Sacred Theology from Union Seminary in New York, and an honorary doctor's degree from the Comenius Faculty of Charles University, Prague. In 1958 he was ordained in the United Lutheran Church in America, and is today an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and Executive Director Emeritus of the New Hampshire World Fellowship Center. He lives today with his wife, Kit, in Columbus, Ohio.

As I have come to understand it—after 85 years of life experience—there are two major categories through which we perceive reality: first, our own experience and second, our reflections on those experiences. By the first, one has to be very careful not to fall into what is known as “imaginary memory,” and by the second, to be careful not to let a particular ideology get the best of us—even though some of this is unavoidable.

Since the emphasis of this paper is to be on the Cold War and its aftermath, I will only mention that the first ten years of my life I lived in Silesia, Germany, on the outskirts of Breslau/Wroclaw during the Nazi period of World War II. I will begin with the end of WWII, 1945, my experience for two years in the mountains of Silesia under Polish administration, and from 1947 to 1950 in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany in Görlitz, and beginning in 1950 in Ost-Berlin, the capital of the German Democratic Republic.

When I left in 1953 I was recognized as a political refugee by the government of the Federal Republic of Germany in West Berlin, and then graduated from high school in 1955 in the state of Hesse in the Federal Republic, at a parochial school under the leadership of famous churchman, Martin Niemoeller, who at the time was the President of the *Landeskirche* (Territorial Church) of Hesse/Nassau. During the same year, 1955, I met my American wife, Kit, who was an exchange student from the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, as we both studied at the University of Göttingen. Since my fiancée had to return to the U.S. in the fall of 1956, I enrolled for one semester at the university in Bonn, while I was waiting for my

immigration visa. In January 1957, I emigrated to the United States, where we were married and have lived in North America for the last 63 years. Whether due to my mixed genes of German, Polish, and Ashkenazi Jewish, or by osmosis absorbing my father's political involvement during the Nazi period, there is no doubt that as long as I can remember I have been a "*homo politicus*"—in my case, of Christian background.¹

My first conscious "East-West" experience was the sight of a Soviet soldier riding on a bicycle by the senior home, where our family had found refuge during the last days of WWII, in my father's hometown, Bad Warmbrunn/Cieplice. Since we had no horses or wagon to go on the trek with the farmers of the village, when we were expelled by the German military from my father's parish on the outskirts of Breslau/Wroclaw, the capital of Silesia—when it was obvious on January 20, 1945, that the city would be under siege. Since it was to be defended "to the last drop of blood," it was natural for us to seek refuge at the home of my grandparents in the mountains of Silesia, 100 km to the south-west.

While the Red Army moved toward Berlin, Breslau/Wroclaw was indeed under siege, and was the last city in Germany to surrender on May 6, 1945, after having been totally destroyed. Since the Soviet Army was in a hurry to get to Berlin, they literally left the Sudety Mountains, where Bad Warmbrunn/Cieplice, and the home of my forebears for more than 200 years, was located, untouched, so that there was little or no fighting in the area to the end of war, in May 1945. Our immediate family was miraculously spared, except for my grandfather, my father's father, Richard Schmauch, who died in October 1945 of starvation, since my grandmother preferred to give the food available to us four children rather than to her husband.

Ignorant of secret agreements between the Soviet leadership and the Polish Communist Party, we were surprised by the almost immediate arrival of Polish people, who occupied the abandoned homes of people who had fled before the oncoming Soviet troops, or homes where the German occupants were expelled by force. For about six months there was a parallel

¹ "A homo politicus of Christian Background. Sketches of a 70-year political autobiography on two continents" in *Communio Viatorum*, a theological Journal, 2012, III. Protestants in the 20th Century between Faith, Dreams, and Power. On page 134 of the Journal, "Note of the editor: This paper is part of a longer autobiographical text, in which the author (born in 1935) describes his youth in Silesia, where his father (Werner Schmauch) was pastor of the Lutheran Church and a member of the Confessing Church. After the war he moved to Germany, where they lived mainly in the former German Democratic Republic. In 1953 he decided to leave the GDR and found temporary shelter in Hessen in West Germany. This theological journal is published by the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague. This issue is a result of a research project, "Josef Lukl Hromadka (1889-1969) and Czech Protestantism 1945-1989."

administration with a Soviet *Kommandantura* and a Polish-appointed *Bürgermeister*, who tried to organize the life of the people, trying to prevent total chaos and lawlessness as a result of the collapse of the Fascist/Nazi regime. As an example, in our case the local minister had already fled in January with his family to the West, when there was no sign of the Soviets yet, but since he had been a member of the Nazi party, and was known to wear the brown SA uniform under his clerical robe when he stepped into the pulpit, he had good reason to be afraid of the political turn of events. For the next two years we survived in part from the sale of the belongings of the former minister, which had been left in the parsonage.

For us children the situation was very exciting. Since there was no school, we could concentrate on the events of the day. For two days, for instance, I stood on the side of the main highway, which led across the mountains to Czechoslovakia, watching countless German military flee in whatever conveyance was available, before the Soviet troops, which were moving rapidly on German soil toward Berlin. When a vehicle gave out, it was unceremoniously pushed off the highway, while the white flags of surrender were already visible from the upper levels of the buildings. The German people knew that the end was near and the threat of being hanged from the lampposts, with a sign around their neck saying “traitor” did not prevent them from displaying this symbol of surrender.

Since my father was a leading member of the Confessing Church and we children were rather young—I was 10 at the end of the war and therefore spared having to join the Hitler Youth—we had not been indoctrinated in the Nazi ideology of all Slavic people being “*Untermenschen*.” To the contrary, my father had conducted a special Christmas service in 1944 for 100 Ukrainian young women, who were in a local labor camp, and were able to sing their Orthodox Christmas hymns in our church. This was a very moving event—for many Silesians the last Christmas in their homeland.

Trying to remember my attitude toward Russians and Poles, my mother had told us about Russian prisoners of war during WWI, when her family lived in the Prussian province of Posen/Poznan until 1919, when according to the Versailles Treaty this territory became again a part of a reconstituted Poland, and Germans had the choice to become Polish citizens or leave. As I found out from some relatives late in life, it was anathema for my grandfather to become a Polish citizen—a reflection of the hostility and contempt, especially of ethnic Germans, who were practically the colonial overlords in the territories taken from Poland in the three partitions in the

18th century, when Prussia annexed the western part, Russia the eastern part, and Austria-Hungary the southern part of Poland.

I never heard my parents use derogatory terms about Slavic people. However, in the interest of full disclosure, I must have absorbed some of the general attitude, because I remember distinctly when, in the fall of 1946, we were harvesting potatoes on a farm now in Polish hands. In a conversation with some other German, I used the term “Polack,” which at the time was considered derogatory. It was overheard by the Polish overseer, who beat me so badly that my face was terribly swollen, and my eyes were almost shut. That was an unforgettable lesson. Since I had to stay in bed for a few days to recover, my pain was made bearable by seeing my girlfriend through the window. She was 10 and I was 11—and we are still in touch today!

This general contemptuous attitude of Germans toward Polish people was in many cases richly reciprocated under the post-war circumstances. But for myself this might have been the beginning of my over-riding interest in reconciliation between Germany and its Eastern neighbors. In this respect, as in many others, my father, Werner Schmauch, was a role-model for me. (Prof. Souček of the Protestant Comenius Faculty of Charles University in Prague, said in his memorial lecture, one year after my father’s death, in March 1965, that Werner Schmauch, together with Hans Joachim Iwand, were German theologians who made it possible for him and his colleagues to relate again to the German churches and the German people after all the terrible things that had been done by Germans in the occupied territories during WWII).²

As I am trying to analyze my attitude toward the Eastern neighbors, I must mention that except for the Stalinist atmosphere in the Soviet zone of occupation, my school experience from 1947 to 1950 in Görlitz was very pleasant. The city is divided by the so-called Oder/Neisse Line, which became the border between Germany and Poland. My father was a member of the church administration of the rest territory of the Silesian Church (Upper Lusatia) with the church offices across the street from our apartment house. We took it in our stride that beginning in grade 5 everybody had to learn Russian, even though the psychological resistance must have been so strong that the textbook for grade 6 was still used in grade 8. At the final oral exam in Russian at the end of June 1950 I was asked to identify the letters “СССР.” I responded without hesitation, “*Soyuz Sovetskich Sozialistischeskich Respublik.*” This was all I had to do to get a

² Greifswalder Universitaetsreden, Neue Folge – Nr. 22. In Memoriam Prof. D. Werner Schmauch, *Gedenkrede, gehalten an der Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universitaet Greifswald*, 1965. J.B. Souček: (1902-1972), Professor of New Testament on the Comenius Faculty, Prague.

“B” in Russian. (Today I wish this grade were a true reflection of my knowledge of the Russian language)!

Unfortunately, my good grades had nothing to do with the admission to high school. After the Federal Republic of Germany had been established in the three western zones of occupation in the spring of 1949, the German Democratic Republic was founded in October of the same year on the territory of the Soviet zone of occupation, and decided to turn tradition on its head and admit only children of “workers and peasants” to higher education, while for hundreds of years an elite system, beginning with Latin schools in the Middle Ages had prevailed. That meant perpetuating the privileges of a small percentage of the population, in which children of academics advanced to higher education as a matter of course, resulting in a small percentage, ca. 5% of the elite educated, while most workers and peasants would never even consider the possibility of going to school beyond age 14, or grade 8! In hindsight I would have to give the GDR an “A” for effort, trying to right a glaring injustice, realizing of course that new injustice was created, which the principal, who handed me the one sentence letter directed to my father, that his son had not been admitted to high school, accompanied this announcement with a facial expression that said, “I’m sorry.” He also happened to be the organist of one of the Roman Catholic churches in the city of Görlitz! As I expected in this and other such situations, my father had to go into action, writing a letter to the responsible authorities, recounting his anti-fascist history,³ which resulted six weeks later in a letter of acceptance into the school.

It was also during that time in Berlin when my father spent much time sorting and organizing the papers of his respected and beloved teacher, Ernst Lohmeyer,⁴ my godfather, which eventually resulted in the *Commentary to the Gospel of Matthew* by Lohmeyer/Schmauch, published in Göttingen by Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht in 1956. Lohmeyer had been appointed

³ My translation of the German original, which has been published in Ernst Moritz Arndt, “Universität Greifswald, Greifswald Universitätsreden,” *Neue Folge*, No. 114, Greifswald 2005: Festakt Prof. Werner Schmauch, “Zum 100. Geburtstag”. Rev. Christoph Schmauch, North Conway, USA; Werner Schmauch pp.45-46.

⁴ James R. Edwards, *Between the Swastika & the Sickle: the life and disappearance and execution of Ernst Lohmeyer*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019). Much has been written about the tragic fate of Ernst Lohmeyer since his execution in 1946, but no biography had been written in German about this prominent German theologian of the 20th century, more than 70 years after his execution. It is an irony of history that this first biography about Ernst Lohmeyer was written in English, due to a number of fortunate coincidences. John P. Burgess is quoted on the back cover: “This beautifully written book is more than a biography, It is, above all, an exercise in remembering and honoring the Christian struggle to live with truth and integrity under conditions of political repression. Edwards not only recovers Ernst Lohmeyer’s story but also draws us compellingly into his own life journey as a Christian scholar and pastor. Skillfully weaving together archival research, interviews, and personal experiences on ‘the other side,’ Edwards offers us a theological thriller that will interest scholars and, indeed, all who wish to learn from the Christian legacy of twentieth-century Germany.”

president of the University of Greifswald by the new authorities right after the war. The night before the opening of the University, February 15, 1946, he was arrested by the NKVD. For years nothing was known about Lohmeyer's fate until many years later it became certain that he had been executed by the Soviet military, already on September 19, 1946 in Greifswald. Since he was stationed as commanding officer of military occupation on Soviet soil, he was denounced and convicted in the general chaos of the time. Someone had to be punished for German atrocities committed during the war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union he was rehabilitated by the Russian Federation, to the great relief of his daughter (the wife had died in the 1970s). This story is an example of many, in which the confrontation between Fascism and Stalinism was close to home. Gratefully, it did not make me anti-Soviet and anti-communist, which happened to so many with similar personal experiences.

During the same time in Berlin my father, Werner Schmauch, accomplished what the Nazis prevented him from doing, namely to fulfill the German academic requirements to become a university professor at the Humboldt University in East Berlin. A second major research project had to be presented and defended successfully (Habilitation). A Ph.D. (in this case a lic. theol.) 1931 in Breslau was not enough to teach at a German university. Because of German tradition theological faculties are part of the otherwise secular state universities and the professors of theology are treated equally like all others. Generally speaking, a privileged class and certainly part of the "intelligentsia," that was considered the most important segment of society in any European country. (Therefore, the Nazis came with lists of professors to be eliminated as they occupied Eastern Europe; for instance, murdering professors in Lemberg/Lvov/Lviv in Ukraine). In 1954 my father was appointed to the chair of New Testament Theology at the University of Greifswald, where Ernst Lohmeyer had been a predecessor, and he held this position until his death in 1964. That this position of privilege was also true in his case, was forcefully brought home to us, when in summer 1961 he and my mother were permitted to visit us in Western Canada, where their first grandson had been born a year earlier. Of course, the invitation from the Western Canada Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America was helpful, as were the good offices of the Lutheran World Federation, facilitating a rather complicated process for two GDR citizens visiting Canada via Amsterdam, where their GDR passports were not recognized. That they could stay with us for a number of months and not only experience their first grandchild (he is now 60, living in Tashkent, Uzbekistan!), but

also participate in the life of a bi-lingual German/English congregation was indeed a great privilege. During that period my father was also able to preach in six different congregations, at a sensitive time for the ethnic German Lutherans in Western Canada, whose attitude was once described as “Lutheran to death, and German into the grave.” It was a time of transition from German to English in the worship services—for the older generation, a traumatic experience. That at the same time the Wall was built in Berlin is another coincidence—with major consequences. One can imagine that the East German border guards were very surprised when my parents crossed the border in the direction of the GDR, September 1961!

While we lived in Prenzlauer Berg, East Berlin, I had to take the tram daily to Alexander Platz, where the Gymnasium zum Grauen Kloster was located in a temporary facility, since the medieval monastery church and school buildings had been bombed by Anglo-American air-raids shortly before the end of the war. The GDR was in its early stages of development in the beginning of the 1950s, trying to implement a socialist system in accordance with the Soviet model, but with open borders to West Berlin, which gave ca. three million GDR citizens the opportunity to escape, and so destabilize the GDR. This became the main reason for building the Wall in August 1961. But in the meantime, Stalinism had reached a fever pitch in the Soviet Union, and the paranoia and resulting pressure was felt in the GDR. Stalin died March 5, 1953, and his death was properly mourned in our school, with a huge portrait of Stalin in the entrance hall, where members of the FDJ (the communist youth organization, Free German Youth), stood honor guard three days and three nights. As a member of the Christian Youth organization of the local congregation, and in a leadership position, I was considered part of the reactionary forces. In spite of my lack of support for a Stalinist system, I could not help but be shocked and somewhat disoriented by the death of Stalin, since I could not imagine a world without him, having known nothing but. It might have been due to the law of inertia that only during the following month, April 1953, the GDR unleashed a campaign against the “*Junge Gemeinde*” the Young Christians, who refused to let the Free German Youth have a monopoly of the activities for young people. In a kangaroo court like show trial, a student just before graduation, who happened to be the son of the Berlin Superintendent, later Bishop of Greifswald and Pomerania, was to be expelled for “anti-socialist behavior.” At that meeting in April, which was attended by members of the SED [Socialist Unity Party] (leading party in the GDR after the merger of the Social Democratic and Communist parties) and representatives of the school bureaucracy, I was

first in opposing the proceedings and 50 some students joined me. Now I had become the spokesperson for the opposition, and—according to some sources—I was to be expelled, and the Stasi was already interested in my case.

At that point I left for West Berlin, which was only a short train ride away—leaving my family at age 18. Since I was of age and would be treated as an adult was an additional reason for leaving. Like all East German refugees, I had to go to 15 different interrogation stations. In order to be recognized as a political refugee, with the privileges which that entailed, one had to prove that one was under greater pressure from the regime than the average GDR citizen. With the help of the written testimonial of my homeroom teacher, who had fled a few days before me, I did this successfully. After receiving refugee status, I was flown to Frankfurt, where my father had made arrangements with his good friend, Martin Niemoeller, for my admission to a parochial school of the territorial church of Hesse-Nassau. I spent two wonderful years there, graduating in March of 1955, with Latin and Greek required for the study of theology, and with Hebrew added after the first semester of studies at the University of Göttingen.

True to my inclinations (*homo politicus*), soon after I arrived in West Germany I was appalled by the effort of the Western powers, especially of the United States, to re-militarize West Germany, eight years after the end of World War II. Obviously, the international political situation had changed and the Cold War had begun already at the end of the Forties. As I learned later, the confrontation of Josef Hromádka, dean of the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague, who had been in exile in Princeton, NJ during WWII, and John Foster Dulles, at the World Council of Churches meeting in 1948 in Amsterdam, was a prelude of what was to come in the ecumenical movement in the context of the East-West confrontation.

For me as a high school student, it meant my political views prompted my involvement in the anti-rearmament movement and support for Gustav Heinemann and his own party, the GVP (*Gesamtdeutsche Volkspartei*), which at the time did not win the 5% in the election—a requirement to enter the parliament. Because of the reduced political pressure in the GDR ordered by the Soviets I was able to visit my parents in Greifswald, Pomerania for Christmas 1954, where my parents had moved in the meantime. I consider this one of the lucky coincidences in my life, or even a miraculous turn of events, for which I have nothing but gratitude. Having lived in both Germanys, I have learned that there is no black and white, but

only many shades of gray, which to discern is a complicated process that does not lend itself to simplistic answers.

I was grateful when I received my immigration visa and was flown to the U.S., at the end of January 1957, not knowing much English, but determined to get married to this American woman—overcoming my prejudice against everything American. Since the dean of the theological seminary of Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, had promised me a full scholarship and was of the opinion that married students are better students, we did not have to wait long to get married, now 63 years ago!

My insights into the dangers of the international situation helped me after my move to North America in 1957 to view the East-West confrontation as a gap to be bridged. As minister of Lutheran congregations in Western Canada, and then of the United Church of Canada in Ontario, I got involved at long distance in my father's passion for The Christian Peace Conference, which was founded in 1958 by Eastern European church leaders and by participants from the West. My father was a founder and later a vice president of the movement, developing a close friendship with the President Josef L. Hromádka. After I had attended my first meeting of the CPC in Prague in 1963 I was elected over time to various levels of this growing ecumenical movement, until in 1985 I was elected as one of the deputy secretary generals—the first from the West in that position since the beginning of this ecumenical peace movement in 1958!

Right from the beginning I tried to keep Western friends who were interested in Eastern Europe informed of developments in CPC. For instance, in a report which I wrote after a CPC meeting in Budapest in 1965 I stated, among other things: “Just a word about the report of the working group, Peace Service of the Young Generation, for which I am partly responsible and which has been strongly criticized, especially by Dutch participants, (Herformd Nederland, Nov. 27, 1965). It has been suggested that in our statement on Revolution, that we ‘baptized’ Trotzky.” But those who read the report closely will realize that something very different is meant here. It is the realization of the revolutionary period in which we live and the concern for the Christian involvement in it and our relationship to all its aspects. The following quotation from the Youth Report speaks for itself: “In trying to define this peculiar role and responsibility of Christians we would like to emphasize that we always live in the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet.’ Therefore we have to live in constant awareness of the eschatological perspective when involved in the intimate moment of history. This perspective does not remove

us from revolution but enables us to play a more creative role in revolutionary situations. In this sense to be involved in continuous revolution is a basic part of the understanding of the Christian life. In the same way we are enabled not only to react to crisis situations but to anticipate necessary changes within the movement of history. Therefore, a major Christian contribution to peacemaking should be involvement and action for peace and justice prior to crisis.” This statement of the working group, Peace Service of the Young Generation, was a precursor of the discussion of the same group at a meeting in Prague during the “Prague Spring,” in which Rudi Dutschke, the revolutionary student leader, participated in the discussions and was a major attraction at the meeting.

I like to think that my efforts to walk the fine line between my theological convictions and the limitations of the Soviet-dominated peace movement in Eastern Europe led much later to the unanimous vote in 1990 to make me chairman of the Review Commission, after the changes in Eastern Europe under the leadership of Gorbachev, which resulted in the dissolution of the huge organization that had developed over the years. A number of the members of church hierarchies did not agree, including Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev, who felt that he could not resign, since only his church—the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate—could recall him from a position they had appointed him to. (That he appointed himself Patriarch of Ukraine and was ex-communicated by Moscow, and recently—at age 88—has been replaced by a young man with the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul, is another long story of Orthodox Church politics).

My positions in the CPC provided me with wonderful opportunities to get to know the Eastern European churches: that I was able to preach in a Hungarian Reformed congregation and was greatly impressed by the singing of the national anthem at the end of the service, “God Bless the Hungarian People” (a Communist country); or in the Methodist church in Warsaw, which had a relatively small congregation, but a school with 5,000 students eager to learn English; or in the Baptist church in Moscow, where 2,000 worshippers listened to the message of Peace and Reconciliation. I was able to meet Pimen, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russians, a number of times, and had lunch with Patriarch Alexei in Leningrad, with whom I could speak German, since part of his family was from the Baltic region, and I knew the current Patriarch Kirill, as a young priest in the early years of CPC, and spoke with him at a large meeting in Görlitz, GDR, in 1988, when he was the leader of the Russian Orthodox delegation. I saw him again at the

Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Australia in 1991, where he still emphasized the importance of the CPC! However, when I congratulated him on the occasion of his installation and mentioned the good paper he had written, published in English, expressing his appreciation of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, the vice chairman of the department for external church relations, Moscow Patriarchate, responded on his behalf, not mentioning Gorbachev. I assume that in the meantime, because of his close relationship with Putin he cannot afford to be known to have had positive feelings toward Gorbachev, who might be the most hated person in Russia today, since many Russians hold him responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, one paragraph of the thank you letter refers to something which I would never have said: “I fully agree with you that today as never before it is necessary to assert in the world the standards and models of life based on the traditional Christian worldview. It is my conviction that Christians should exert every effort to defend these values in today’s society as it becomes ever more secular.” This lack of realism shows how the Russian Orthodox Church even today predates the Middle Ages, never had a Reformation or Enlightenment, feels the need to save Europe from the decadence of secularism, and insists on the superiority of traditional Christendom.

The Soviet military intervention after the “Prague Spring” in the summer of 1968 was a major shock and a wrenching experience for anyone involved in the East-West situation. The Christian Peace Conference, based in Prague, was greatly affected, since President Hromádka objected publicly to the Soviet intervention. He was too prominent a person to be ousted, but the victorious party leaders forced Jan Ondra, the General Secretary of CPC to resign, which Hromádka properly understood as directed against him, and he resigned his position as President of CPC and died of a broken heart one year later in December 1969. When one knows his biography this becomes understandable, having based his theology on believing fervently in an alternative to the capitalist system, which he had experienced during his years of exile in the United States. For him the obvious alternative was the Soviet Union. His disappointment over the Soviet move could not have been greater. (“If our enemies do something like this to us, we can understand it, but not our friends”!) A number of the western leadership and regional committees also resigned. Our regional committee in the United States no longer participated for a number of years. Under the leadership of Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Ladoga of the Russian Orthodox Church, who had supported the entrance of the Russian Orthodox Church into the World Council of Churches in 1961 in New Delhi, the CPC was “normalized” in the

following years with Károly Tóth, a bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church, as General Secretary. (That Nikodim died a few years later at an audience with the Pope, practically in his arms. is an irony of church history.)

Hromádka's close friendship with my father, who had died in 1964 in the GDR and did not have to experience this tragedy of the socialist movement, made these events very personal for me, since Hromádka had transferred his cordial relationship to me, the much younger member of CPC. I believed then and I believe now that the Prague Spring, initiated by the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, envisioning "Socialism with a human face," was the last chance for a socialism based on Marxist ideology to succeed. Milan Machovec, a Marxist philosopher, and many Christian friends in Prague were of the same opinion.⁵ Some friends who supported the Soviet intervention did not realize that this rather violent and unimaginative move only postponed the collapse of a system that had become rotten from within and could not compete with the Western powers in the arms race and the standard of living of the population. The events of 1968 were especially wrenching for me, since at the beginning of April a CPC Assembly was held in Prague and I experienced the hopeful atmosphere of a new beginning. But in addition, those days are especially memorable since on the last day of the conference, the news of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was received.

I was privileged to get an inside view of the internal discussion within the Marxist movement at the time, since I functioned as interpreter (from German to English) for one of the foremost Czech philosophers, Milan Machovec, when he was a guest lecturer in 1968-1969 in New York. As many of his countrymen, he paid dearly for his courageous thoughts of change and innovation in the Marxist movement by being demoted as a prominent professor at Charles University, in which hopeful tendencies of change in the Marxist movement were so brutally crushed. I learned from him that Marxism is not a static ideology, since Karl Marx applied his ideas to the reality of the 19th Century, and that this ideology, to be relevant, had to be adjusted to the realities of the 20th Century with all its new problems. He even said that what is so often quoted to be true for the Church, "*semper reformanda*," applies equally to Marxism and that the Dubček government understood this.⁶

⁵ Milan Machovec and Milan Opočensky in *Marxism and Spirituality, An International Anthology*, edited by Benjamin B. Page, (Westport, CT and London: Bergen & Garvey, 1993), pp. 173-185.

⁶ *Evangelische Zeitstimmen* #41: Theologie und Revolution: Milan Machovec, „Von Prag aus gesehen.“ Referat gehalten auf dem Beienroder Konvent am 9.10.1968. Herbert Reich – Evangelischer Verlag – Hamburg 1969.

Our American group, related to the CPC, decided to continue our relationship with the new name CAREE (Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe, An Ecumenical Association to Promote World Justice and Peace and Relations with the Christian Peace Conference) we also established a special relationship to the Europe Committee of the National Council of Churches. In the meantime the emphasis in CPC had changed from East-West, to North-South. More and more participants from the Third World had joined. The Cubans, because of their special relationship to the Soviet Union, were very active participants, and in 1979 they organized a theological conference at the seminary in Matanzas, to which the president of CAREE at the time, James Will, appointed Harvey Cox and myself as participants.⁷ I was grateful for the opportunity, which was not without danger, since I never became an American citizen, and was travelling on my German passport via Montreal to Havana.

My many travels in connection with CPC are too numerous to mention. After I was elected deputy Secretary General in 1985, my responsibilities grew and my travels were even more frequent. For instance, in 1989 and 1991 I went twice to Australia, representing CPC, first at the Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in Melbourne, and two years later at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra.

Because of my background I had a special relationship to the German Democratic Republic. There were, of course, family ties but there were also church ties with students of my father's, who are still living, and the fact that I was repeatedly able to visit many congregations at the invitation of the Regional Committee of the CPC in the GDR. My contacts were varied and many. I vividly remember one occasion when I spoke at the invitation of the Theological Faculty of the University of Greifswald in the Auditorium Maximum in April 1984, a student tried to provoke and embarrass me by asking, "Why did you leave the GDR?" I matter-of-factly responded by telling exactly how in 1953 there was a major confrontation between young people related to the Church and the FDJ, the communist youth organization. I also remember another time when I spoke to about 100 members of the Governing Board of the East German CDU (Christian Democratic Union). In this connection it is important to mention that the CPC Regional Committees of the GDR and the FRG alternately arranged speaking tours in a number of congregations. The GDR was the only Eastern European country related to CPC where the

⁷ Quoting from a letter to me, dated November 15, 1978, Will wrote: "I hope you will be able to represent us in Cuba along with Harvey from February 25 - March 3 of next year."

major churches were not officially members of CPC, but in analogy to Latin America had established a good number of Christian base congregations/communities, which involved the church membership on the local level rather than being represented only by the hierarchies so that the local church members either did not hear anything about this Christian peace movement or were hostile to it because they resented the cooperation of their church leadership with the socialist/communist governments. There is no question that all the Eastern European governments tried to influence if not control the churches and for that purpose each country had “a secretariat for church affairs.” There is documentation that representatives of these departments for church affairs of the bloc met at least once a year to coordinate their efforts and there is evidence that they tried to shut down CPC altogether because they were “too theological and not supportive enough of the Soviet foreign policy and peace initiatives” (such as the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan). These machinations behind the scenes were obviously not always known to the local church members and the congregations I visited tried in good faith to be faithful to the Gospel, believing that the peacemakers shall be blessed, which of course in the light of the constant possibility of a nuclear war was also enlightened self-interest.

The long-term secretary of the Regional Committee of the CPC in the GDR was Carl Ordnung, a Methodist lay-preacher, who through his wife had been converted from being an atheist in his youth and was a staff member of the East CDU under the leadership of Gerald Götting. He was indefatigable in his energy and arranged more visas for me and travels in the GDR than I can count. For instance, in 1986 he arranged a speaking tour for me from September 23 to October 14, visiting congregations in not less than 15 East German towns, with a detailed train schedule to reach all of them (Bärenstein, Lauthen, Berlin, Eisenhüttenstadt, Leipzig, Klein-Schwarzlosen, Erfurt, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Greifswald, Görlitz, Frankfurt/O, and Sühl).

In 1982 my wife and I accepted a similar invitation of the Regional Committee of the CPC in the FRG and we spent 3 weeks visiting with congregations and peace groups in 19 cities from Hamburg to Munich in as many days, reporting on the peace movement in the U.S., especially on the role of the churches. Since we were hosted mainly by congregations of Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches and stayed in homes of ministers and lay people, we were able to gain new insights into the life of the churches and the political situation in the FRG. Between 50 and 100 people attended the public meetings at each stop. People like Martin Niemoeller, Helmut Gollwitzer, and Dorothee Sölle were giving leadership at the time. We

learned that the efforts and successes of the U.S. peace movement were very poorly publicized. We felt then that because of its history and tradition the Christian Peace Conference based in Prague, a socialist country, could provide a bridge between the “old” and the “new” peace movements. There were indications that the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983 would adopt a statement similar to the one published by the Bund of Reformed Churches in the FRG, (“Peace and Disarmament as Status Confessionis”) supported among others by the member churches of the CPC. The church as global organization could be an instrument for peacemaking, since both Eastern and Western churches were involved. (One-third of the delegates to the WCC Assembly in Vancouver were flown there via Moscow, courtesy of a plane chartered by the Russian Orthodox Church.)

My interest in the German Democratic Republic was shared by a number of people in New York City, who had either fled from Germany during the Nazi period or who were academic specialists in German affairs, a few CPUSA members of German background, and some Methodist ministers at the Church Center for the UN. We were all interested in the GDR/East Germany, which was officially neglected by the Western democracies, including the U.S. Those interested had organized already in 1965 “The American Society for the Study of the GDR” and held regular meetings at the Church Center for the UN, with speakers from the GDR or American specialists on what was considered an Eastern European country, since it was located behind the Iron Curtain. The goal of the Society was a more realistic view of existing countries which for political reasons were not recognized but should be part of the global community. That meant membership in the UN and full diplomatic relations with the United States in the case of the GDR.

In 1970 I was elected president of that Society and held that position until 1975. In that year a number of the members of the Society were not content to be an organization to “study the GDR” but most likely, through the encouragement of GDR authorities, wanted to be a mouthpiece and a propaganda organ for East Germany. Since in 1973/74 both Germanys had been accepted into the U.N. and diplomatic relationships had been established between the United States and the GDR, I felt that I did not need to spend my time and energy on internal quarrels, and resigned as President. Not wanting to give up all the good contacts we had made over the years, I established The New Hampshire Symposium on the GDR at the World

Fellowship Center in Conway, New Hampshire, where my wife and I had been directors since 1970.

The first New Hampshire Symposium was held in the summer of 1975, followed by 25 years of a one-week symposium each summer with participation from many countries, naturally East and West Germany and the U.S., but also from as far as Japan and Australia. In time it became so important that government officials from both Germanys and the U.S. State Department participated, and that organizations like the Goethe Institute supported the Symposium financially. The 15 volumes of “Studies in GDR Culture and Society,” edited by Prof. Margy Gerber, Bowling Green University, Ohio, published by University Press of America, are witness to this valuable contribution. That the Symposium outlasted the GDR by 10 years is a phenomenon mainly due to the complications of two parts of Germany coming together after more than 40 years of separate development. Even now 30 years later there is still evidence of the differences which were imposed on Germany by the victorious powers. Many individual fates are being recounted, including the terrible repression of citizens by the Stasi, which was seldom as humorous as Stefan Heym tells it in his autobiography: when he found the notes a Stasi member had lost in front of his house with detailed entries of when the lights were going on and off in each room, and he comments, “I knew that the situation in the GDR was not good, but I didn’t know that it was so bad.”⁸

It is my judgement that the investigations into the injustices committed by GDR agencies were more thorough than the process of de-Nazification after WWII, which was totally discontinued by the Allies because of the change in the political climate. As a result, this gave many former members of the Nazi party a chance to not only disavow their participation in the atrocities committed, but also to receive their life-long government pensions, and live happily ever after. I also learned that one has to differentiate between degrees of cooperation with the GDR government, since the motivations of individuals greatly differ and not all are to be condemned. The history of the left-wing party in today’s Germany is an interesting example of how attitudes have changed after 30 years, when it is no longer impossible for this successor party to the SED, the Communist Party in the GDR, to participate in local and provincial governments—even though not yet on the federal level.

⁸ Stefan Heym, *Nachruf*, (Bertelsmann: 1988).

In one case, to my personal knowledge, a Protestant minister was defrocked and all his clergy privileges were revoked because of his Stasi contacts. Since he had to make a living and he wanted to do something which a minister could do without the authority which ordination bestows, he decided to become a speaker at funerals, which in the more and more secularized Germany has become an accepted vocation. In the last 25 years he has spoken not only at 3,000 funerals, but has also published his autobiography, in which he takes full responsibility for his contacts, and also describes in detail the advantages which these contacts meant for the life of the congregation he had served in facilitating contacts with partner congregations and visits from the West, which would not have been possible without these contacts. He apologized individually to those who might have been hurt by his Stasi contacts for which he was forgiven by some, but not all. Again: not black and white, but many shades of gray!

When, for the first time in the history of CPC, the Presidential Board meeting was held in the U.S., in New Jersey in early November 1989, the local congressman could not understand that anyone could be critical of the CPC (where had he been during the last 30 years?!). But more importantly, two participants from the GDR came with us after the meeting to New Hampshire and witnessed the Fall of the Wall on television in our living room in North Conway. They were incredulous, as most of us were, since no one could have predicted the sudden turn of events. The details of this seismic shift in world politics are now fairly well known. I always felt that Mikhail Gorbachev was not given enough credit for the fact that this “velvet revolution” was nonviolent. I was able to confirm with a Lutheran pastor, who had been very active in the demonstrations opposing GDR government policies and who received a national award for his efforts together with Gorbachev, that Gorbachev, indeed, during his official visit to East Berlin on the occasion of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR in October, had told Erich Honecker that if there would be violent protests in the GDR, the 400,000 Soviet troops would stay in their barracks and not come to the rescue of the East German regime. I’m convinced that this was a major factor in the peaceful opening of the Wall on November 9, since the East German government was prepared to put down a possible insurrection with force of arms. A theologian in Leipzig, who was also active in the CPC, was one of the people, who convinced the authorities in East Berlin that there should be no violence. That he lost his position because of his Stasi contacts is one of the personal tragedies that occur in times of such confusion.

Even though it had been obvious to me during my last few visits to the Soviet Union in the 1980s that the system could not continue much longer with all its shortcomings, especially due to the discontent of the population and the cynicism and greed of the ruling class. Something had to change! The collapse of the Soviet Union is a prime example of unintended consequences, which Gorbachev could not foresee. That President Putin considers this to be “the greatest tragedy of the 20th Century” (never mind the Holocaust and 50 million dead in World War Two) says more about him than the historical facts. That as a former KGB agent, he regrets the demise of the Soviet Union as a super power is understandable.

When Arthur Koestler learned of the Stalinist atrocities, while he was in the Spanish civil war, he wrote the book, *Darkness at Noon*, published in 1946 which made him known as anti-communist, even though he had been for seven years an enthusiastic member of the German Communist Party. The Marxist ideology, which promised a new world of socialism, was best described as a statement of faith in Maxim Gorky’s *The Mother*:

There will come a time, I know, when people will take delight in one another, when each will be a star to the other, and when each will listen to his fellow as to music. The free men will walk upon the earth, men great in their freedom. They will walk with open hearts, and the heart of each will be pure of envy and greed, and therefore all mankind will be without malice, and there will be nothing to divorce the heart from reason. Then life will be one great service to man! His figure will be raised to lofty heights—for to free men all heights are attainable. Then we shall live in truth and freedom and in beauty, and those will be accounted the best who will the more widely embrace the world with their hearts, and whose love of it will be the profoundest; those will be the best who will be the freest; for in them is the greatest beauty. Then will life be great, and the people will be great who live that life.⁹

This must be one of the most beautiful and best descriptions, in secular terms, of what the Biblical account describes as “the Kingdom of God.” The disappointment among early Christians, that this kingdom, or “the Parousia,” did not arrive as expected, was so great that many Jews, who had joined “the Jesus movement,” left and returned to their Jewish traditions. Over the last 2,000 years this concept of “the Kingdom of right relationships” was reinterpreted again and again. (“The Kingdom is within you,” or “...in your midst.”) The Enlightenment, or the process of secularization, made the statement by Maxim Gorky possible. To this day, neither

⁹ *Mother, The Great Revolutionary Novel*, by Maxim Gorky, with an Introduction by Howard Fast. (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press:1947, copyright renewed 1975), p. 149. (Curiously enough *Mother* was written in the United States. In the period of the 1905 revolution in Russia a warrant was issued for Gorky’s arrest. Escaping Russia, he travelled abroad to plead the cause of the revolutionists in all the countries of the world. He spent a considerable period in America and it was in a log cabin in the Adirondacks that much of the manuscript of *Mother* was written).

Christians nor Marxists have given up on this hope, and the dialogue of the 1960s, especially in Czechoslovakia, held the promise of a joint effort, not only in the longing for a “*bessere Welt*,” but also in the common work for peace and justice. That this hope was badly shattered during the last half century does not make the need to search and work for a sustainable, global community less urgent. (*Chaos or Community?* MLK Jr). The monumental volume, *North American Churches and the Cold War*, edited by Paul Mojzes, is a witness to this truism.¹⁰

That on both sides of the dialogue real people were involved, was forcefully brought home to us through various efforts of Christian-Marxist dialogue sponsored by the World Fellowship Center in Conway, N.H. In the spring of 1968, before we were appointed directors, such a dialogue took place at the Church Center of the United Nations, 777 UN Plaza, across from the UN, between Father Quentin Lauer, SJ a Roman Catholic priest and professor at Fordham University, and Herbert Aptheker, an eminent philosopher related to the Communist Party, USA.

My involvement and life-long preoccupation with the East-West conflict might explain why in 1988 I was asked to be a panelist together with Harvey Cox at a conference at Harvard University, entitled “Anti-Communism and the U.S.: History and Consequences.” The title of our panel was: “Godlessness: Religion and Anti-Communism.”¹¹

After my experiences during the Cold War between East and West I gratefully welcomed the development of the European Union as an instrument of peace for a continent that had experienced too many wars in recent history. I identify myself as a passionate “European.” That my DNA confirms my interest in everything German, Polish, and Jewish, is a special gift and treasure.

After our retirement in the year 2001, my wife and I spent considerable time in a small town in Poland. The area had been part of Prussia after the division of Poland in the 18th Century, but became part of a reconstituted Poland, according to the Versailles Treaty of 1919. The town, Krotoszyn, was just across the border, north of the province of Silesia, where I was born in the capital of Breslau/Wroclaw. A British historian, Norman Davies, had just published an extensive history of that beautiful city, simultaneously in English, Polish and German. The English and Polish title, *Microcosm*, was too uninteresting for the German translator and

¹⁰ (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

¹¹ My statement at that conference was published in full in *The CAREE Communicator*, Newsletter #30, Spring, 1989, pp. 7-9.

publisher, so the German title is *Breslau, die Blume Europas*, or “The Flower of Europe.” Teaching Polish high school students this history in English and in German was another wonderful inter-cultural experience.

When Ilya Ehrenburg, who early on was an opponent of Stalin but became one of his most effective propagandists, writing regularly for and being published in “Red Star,” the paper of the Red Army, was asked in old age, what was most important in his life’s story, he responded: “I survived!” In light of Stalin’s purges, 1938/39, this is certainly an achievement. However, we know today—as I have stated elsewhere—we will survive together in a global community or not at all.

Thirty years ago members of the Christian Peace Conference reflected in a self-critical way on the failures of their efforts. This coincided with the 500th Anniversary of the “discovery of America” and the European guilt in the unintended consequences. Today, 30 years later, on the 400th Anniversary of the first slaves from Africa having been brought to the New World, and the global soul searching triggered by the pandemic of the corona virus and the murder of George Floyd, the statement by the aforementioned Carl Ordnung is still relevant today:

But perhaps the main reason for the weakness of the peace movement lies in the fact that the lifestyle and standard of living of the majority of its members, including the Christians among them, links them far more closely to the rich of this world than to the poor. And it is precisely this way of life which was defended against the poor during the Gulf War. Our protests against this remained purely intellectual and our political opposition, no matter how courageous it may have been in individual cases, remained sporadic. How can a change of direction be expected from an entire continent, when not even those who have understood the necessity for it—in other words us!—are prepared to accept this change in their personal lives?¹²

¹² In *Occasional Papers*, published by the Christian Peace Conference, One World or None, Documentation from the extraordinary Assembly of the CPC membership held in Celakovice, Czechoslovakia, on October 17-22, 1991, Vol. II, p. 34.