

Evangelical Churches in East Germany a Decade after the Fall of the Wall*

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It is remarkable and delightful that you start this celebration which is dedicated to the anniversary of a member of your faculty with a speech which addresses the condition of a church in a foreign land. Twelve years ago such a beginning would have been very plausible. All eyes were on Berlin, because the fall of the wall symbolized the end of the cold war in Europe.

But today? The things you hear from a reunified Germany and especially from the previous regions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the so-called «Neue Bundesländer», do not sound very encouraging:

- a region, where the unemployment rate is twice as high as it is in the western parts of Germany, and also from where a million inhabitants migrated to the richer West since 1989;
- a region, where on the 21st of October, 2001 in former East Berlin more than 48 percent of the population voted for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which is the successor of the old state party, the SED;

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The unabridged German version together with footnotes of the quotations and with wide bibliographical references can be found in the internet under: www.bb-evangelisch.de unter «Archive und Bibliotheken».

- a region, to say the worst, in which a foreigner faces the risk of being a victim of xenophobic attack, which is many times higher than it is, for example, in the cosmopolitan city of Hamburg, including its harbor district with the streets of St. Pauli;
- a region, of which a prominent observer of the political scene, Günter Gaus, the former permanent representative of West Germany in East Germany, has been quoted: «Out of scattered illusions in the East and a disturbed narcissism in the West comes an estrangement which stands among the Germans, which evolves not from separation, but rather from the encounter.»

And in this region we find the protestant churches, whose membership totals have declined heavily after 1989 rather than increased, and which prepare themselves for another round of cutbacks once Germany slips into recession.

Being invited to talk about the church in this region seems to be an expression of intellectual solidarity, for which I am grateful. I come from the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg. Our church is the one where reunification happened in two respects. On the one hand, political reunification occurred between the two parts of one federal state, the former West and East Berlin. On the other hand, reunification also happened between the two parts of the regional church, the former Western region (West Berlin) and Eastern region (East Berlin and Brandenburg). This regional church at the same time

includes the metropolis of Berlin and the two least populated areas of Germany, Prignitz and Uckermark, which are north of Berlin. Whether we like it or not, we are a unique church where East and West conjoin, and we experience all of its ups and downs. Before I speak of the church, I will outline the general situation in the former regions of Eastern Germany in a way that will help to understand the situation of the churches.

I. The General Situation in East Germany

1. Legacies of the Necessity in the Reunification Process 1989/90

If you think about the situation in East Germany, you will inevitably face the confusing mesh of political goals, economic conditions, and international constellations, which in their interactions shaped German reunification. First of all, there existed extremely diverging forces: the political intentions of the various groups, the options provided by victors of World War II, and lastly the economic differences between East and West. Nobody had anticipated these changes, nor intentionally analyzed them. Rather the pressure of time and the permanent risk of failure were the dominant pattern of this time. It is one of the lucky incidences that reunification and a consolidated democracy stood at the end of this process, without any bloodshed. No one from my generation had dared to hope for this.

However, this result had its price. Decisions needed to be quickly made because no one was sure how the situation would develop in the Soviet Union. Some essential decisions were sped up while others were postponed. The latter decisions were mortgages that had to be accepted as part of the reunification process. For example, the homeowner who, if necessary, takes a mortgage on his property in order to finish the construction of his house, but he will only be able to sleep well after the mortgage has been paid off. I want to use this comparison to make clear the current state of German unification, its success and its crisis:

Due to the external circumstances between November 1989 and September 1990, it was

plausible to organize those aspects of reunification that concerned international and public law as quickly as possible. At the same time three topics were postponed which under different circumstances would have belonged to the prerequisites of German reunification:

- the discussions of a possible reform of German Basic Law, administration, the educational system, and similar institutions,
- the planning of an enduring, feasible reconstruction of the economy of the former GDR,
- a European security model.

These are the three «mortgages» that were taken out during German reunification, however this means that these postponed topics had to be later put on the political agenda.

The current crisis of the reunification process is caused by the fact that the first two of these «mortgages» have not been paid off as yet.

The political legacy

It was a radically democratic protest movement benefiting from Gorbachov's reformist thoughts, that increasingly used the public as a forum to express their ideas. The possibility of internal reforms of the GDR was assumed. Even the Alexanderplatz demonstration in Berlin on November 4, 1989, which was the biggest manifestation of this peaceful revolution, pursued this idea. Five days later the wall was open. What everyone knows now is that this was caused more by a chain of accidents and misunderstandings than by well-considered planning. However, once the wall was open everything changed. Now that reunification seemed to be a feasible option, fewer and fewer people wanted to be part of a depriving Socialist experiment or a «third way» solution between East and West. «We are the people» became «We are ONE people». In order to stop the mass exodus to the West, politicians first considered the possibilities of a confederation, and later of a reunification. After the monetary union in July 1, 1990 it was clear that reunification had to follow suit.

But under which conditions should this political merger take place? Since 1949, the Federal Republic of West Germany had had a Basic Law that included the option for reunification. Its last

article states: «This Basic Law becomes invalid on the day that the new constitution becomes effective, which has been agreed upon by the German people in a democratic decision» (Article 146). Should not this day be prepared by a joint East and West German discussion, just like the East German reformist groups who had prepared a draft for a new constitution? Of course, this would have taken a lot of time. So the other proposition was favored, which said to organize reunification according to article 23 of the Basic Law. This article refers to those federal states («Bundesländer») where Basic Law had been enacted since 1949, but also says, «in other parts of Germany it (the Basic Law) has to be enacted after the joining of the Federal Republic.» This clause was explicitly in reference to the region of the Saarland, which did not belong to the Federal Republic in 1949. It was understandable as to why this clause should be used in order to organize the reunification as a joining of the five East German federal states. However it was not understandable that the discussion about the constitution or a possible referendum about the Basic Law was not continued. So the impression is given: there are not two partners that joined and together formed something new, but rather one piece is taken up by the whole. The Basic Law is only one example, but we should also mention other social institutions that were simply adopted, like the educational system, the health system, the administration, and others. All these institutions had proven to be effective, however they needed reform and they did not suit the different conditions in the East. But they were taken over and were pushed through. It is not surprising if some people spoke about a «tutelage». This is the political legacy of the reunification.

The economic legacy

Instead of a longterm policy that seeks to transform the planned economy of the East and integrates it into the market economy of the West, a policy of generous subsidies was implemented. The results are both impressive (1,3 billion Marks have been transferred from the West to the East) and problematic. In the first year after the political changes, the GDP in the East declined by a third, industrial employment was re-

duced by 43 percent. Until 1996 it seemed as if the East would catch up with the economic development of the West, but since 1997 the GDP has been growing faster in the Western than in the Eastern part of Germany. I already mentioned the unemployment rate which is twice as high as in the West, despite a high job migration from East to West: Officially, 17 % of the population in the East are unemployed, unofficial figures that compute the percentage of the unemployed people among the actual workforce even speak of 30 %. On the other hand we see immense investments into the infrastructure (transportation, communication, urban renovation) and benefits for East German pensioners and workers that raised their salaries to an amount of 80 % of the Western salaries although their productivity remained at 65 % compared to the West. That is why most people in the East agree that they are better off now, but they are not satisfied with that, because they know that they heavily depend on the West. They feel or they know that they are not needed for Germany's development. They consume more than they produce. They regard the subsidies that they live on as a compensation for «incidentally having been in the wrong part of Germany» when the allies divided the country after World War II. However, these subsidies are also regarded as mere alms, reluctantly provided by the West. Catching up with the West turned out to be wishful thinking. Hence, more and more young people from the East try to find a job in the West, and the East stagnates. After outlining the political and economic development it seems understandable to speak of a «nachholende Revolution», a revolution in order to catch up with the West politically, and a «nachholende Modernisierung», a modernization in order to catch up economically and socially with the West. That is a lot, if you consider the political and economic conditions in the East. However, it is not much, if you consider the rather critical views of the protesting avant-garde — esp. in the churches — of western society. Wolfgang Thierse, president of the Bundestag and at the same time the highest ranking politician from the East repeatedly pointed to the negative developments of the last years and said «The paradigm of the *nachholende Modernisierung*, organized as an

adjustment of the East to Western standards, has its limits, even with generous support. Too much creativity and self-esteem, the resources of social change, get lost.» Thierse favors a new approach towards this modernization, one, that is similar to the task of EU enlargement. East Germany could become a prosperous European region connecting the former West with the Central and East European regions, if research and development capacities as well as IT and biotech industries can be successfully implemented there. This actually leads to the third major aspect of German reunification.

The European and international security legacy

If Germany's neighbors, the closer as well the more remote ones, had not been sure that a reunited Germany would remain a strong ally in an ever closer Europe, reunification would have never occurred. Many feared a new German nationalism. We know now, that these fears fortunately were unfounded. However, German reunification somehow presented a decisive step towards European integration. You certainly remember Gorbachov's speech about the «European House». In my opinion, this «mortgage» or legacy is already paid off. Reunited Germany turned out to be an active member of the EU and an explicit proponent of EU enlargement. Nevertheless, the question whether it was helpful to make NATO the only true guarantor of European security instead of having the CSCE/OSCE playing a more important role, remains open. But it is a question not only concerning Germany.

2. Observations about East German Mentality

Please do not expect too much. It would be extremely difficult to outline a detailed picture of East German mentality. However, there are certain peculiarities, which are especially obvious to foreigners when they compare East Germany to, for example, Poland or the Czech Republic. We can agree on the fact that the amount of scepticism, disappointment, and dissatisfaction is disproportionally high in East Germany. How can we explain this phenom-

enon? I already mentioned some of the reasons, but I can provide more facts.

East Germans did not only face high pressures to adjust to the new economic, legal, and administrative system, but also politicians that generated unrealistic expectations. Deceptions and delusions closely interacted. During the 1990 election campaign, politicians did not have the courage to give a realistic estimate of the financial and social costs of reunification. Additionally, there is a difference in comparing the progress made in East Germany to the situation until 1989, as Poles and Czechs proudly did in their respective countries, and to compare it to West Germany, which had forty years to achieve these standards.

In this new situation special attention was given to the youth. On the one hand, you see younger people taking this *new world* of the reunified Germany as a matter of course. On the other hand, it is young people who turn their alienation, their insecurity into aggressive xenophobia and right wing extremism. There have been many studies to explain these behaviors. However, no simple causal connection can be found. A memorandum, issued by the church, combines the following reasons:

- Some people explain these phenomena as lasting effects of the repressive political system.
- Others assume that the demise of socialist ideology caused an «ideological vacuum», which was easily filled by the simple dichotomies of right wing teachings.
- Others believe that the brutal scheme of «winner and loser», «power and weakness» is an essential part of western civilization. It has much stronger effects in the East where casino capitalism and high youth unemployment rates have not yet been limited by a society that had to learn to cope with these phenomena.

Thus, East German alienation is comparable to the situation of someone who emigrates into a foreign country. However, it is actually even more complicated, since not only present and future have become uncertain, but also one's own past. Most of the files from the former

Ministry of State Security still exist. They uncover a closely knit web of surveillance and secret actions. They also show how many people voluntarily participated in this system. How should people react if colleagues, friends, or neighbors suddenly turned out to be culprits? Which professional career was caused by qualification and which by political obedience? As the East Germans were not sufficiently represented by the media, which were dominated by West German journalists, it was difficult to completely realize and understand the complexity of life in the East German reality that was called a «dictatorship of the proletarians».

Günter Gaus had called the GDR «a society of niches», where people escaped from the political and social repression into private life. West Germans, of course, observe a different mentality in the East. They explain this fact by the long period of non-democratic rule starting in 1933 and enduring until 1989. East Germans, on the other hand, regard Germans from Munich or Düsseldorf as people being typical of Manchester capitalism. Plenty of jokes have been told about these prejudices. However, it is an asymmetric relation. Often, East Germans consider themselves as «second class citizens» or «poor relatives».

I wonder why the public debate hardly considers the situation of the two German states after the end of World War II and the political circumstances of that time. Rather, an at least subliminal moralizing, that is not justified, dominates the discussion.

3. Religion and Church in Public Life in East Germany

Let us now get closer to our original topic and start looking at the situation of religion and church first from the outside. How do they present themselves in public?

Some simple statistics might help: In 1950, 96 % of the population of West Germany and 93 % of the population of East Germany belonged to one of the two major churches. In 1994 these membership figures were reduced to 80 percent in the West, but to 28 percent in the East (about 25 percent Evangelical and 4 percent Roman Catholic). The dramatic increase in

people who resigned their membership after 1989 has a particular reason. In the GDR, many people, although formally still members, simply did not participate in church life. They did not officially leave the church. However, when after the fall of the wall, the mandatory collection of a church tax was reintroduced for all those who were still registered as parishioners, most of them hastily renounced church membership. Others stayed in or even reentered the church.

The heavily reduced membership figures for East Germany give rise to two questions:

- Did people leave the church against their will because of political repression, and are they now willing to return?
- Is the public disappearance of religion, esp. regarding the traditional manifestations, maybe explainable by an increased popularity of small religious sects and various spiritual practices, as Thomas Luckmann argues?

It was naïve to believe that the phenomenon of full churches during the autumn 1989 would be an enduring one. We saw and we knew that the alienation from (not hostility toward) the churches had become natural for most people. Atheism had become a normal element of biographical continuity, because often two or already three generation of a family did not have any religious tradition. Although East Germany's mass atheism was politically induced, the collapse of the GDR was not perceived as a failure of atheism. In the contrary, atheism was and is a leftover, that is still cultivated in family and school life.

What about the second question? Are East Germans more open to dubious religious sects and esoteric cults, which indeed entered the scene soon after the fall of the wall? Clearly, this is not the case. Due to their socialization East Germans were renitent enough to resist these temptations. Sociologists actually described East Germans as having an affinity towards normality, average, balance, and order, typical traits of a petit bourgeoisie. Exotic religions do not fit into that world.

At the moment, people leaving the churches is not our primary problem. It can be seen that we

might expect a consolidation at around twenty percent evangelical Christians. But the predominance of elderly people among our members is a problem. The young generation is clearly outnumbered by the older one.

II. The Position of Evangelical Churches in East Germany

1. *Setting the courses in the beginning.*

The return of the East German churches which were joined together to the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR since 1969 into the community of the Evangelical Churches in Germany (EKD) occurred just as fast as political reunification. There were calls for a slower unification in order to protect the experiences and the knowledge gathered in the East and to use them for the future. Others regarded the separation more like a historical accident, which had to be corrected as soon as possible.

The legal relations between the churches in East Germany and the EKD had never been completely clarified. In 1990, they were interpreted as a suspended membership of the eight eastern churches in the EKD. After a simple membership declaration the status was normalized. On June 28th, 1991 the reunified EKD-synod from East and West assembled for the first time. Now an answer needed to be found for the following question: Should and would the churches in the East adopt the legal structures that regulated church-state relations from West Germany?

Three areas were especially important:

- The collection of church taxes by the federal authorities of the state together with all other taxes;
- Pastoral care for the members of the armed forces, as it was regulated by the so-called Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service treaty between the EKD and the West German government;
- Religion as a normal part of the core curriculum of all public schools, that means it has to be offered but participation is optional.

Heated debates were fought about these topics, in the synods, in local gathering, and even on the streets. These discussions were used to practice an existence under new circumstances, but also to express a new independence and the will for self-responsibility.

I will briefly outline the first two points in order to have more time to discuss the third point, because I assume that the focus of your interest lies exactly here.

Collection of the church tax by state authorities

The institution of a church tax, its advantages and its problems, are well known in Sweden. The right to collect a church tax and thus to gain access to state tax lists, as well as the possibility to pay state authorities to administer all this, is an old German tradition. In the GDR this has been suspended in 1956 by the state. Since then, the churches had to organize this on their own. Members were able to determine by themselves the amount they were willing to give. Of course, this money was not sufficient to finance all the tasks the churches had to perform. West German churches provided the necessary monetary resources. This was highly problematic. If the state — that actually benefited from this via exchange rates — suddenly had stopped this transfer, many activities would have had to be reduced: costly Christian social services (especially for disabled persons), construction works for the large number of old church buildings, and also pastoral and missionary services. Hence, becoming financially independent remained wishful thinking and we thankfully (but also with some doubts) accepted the support from the West. Some pastors dreamed of American conditions, but only a few parishes were able to achieve this. After re-unification every synod had to decide between (re)introducing the old system or maintaining the one practiced in the GDR. However, everybody knew that the latter one was only possible due to generous support from the West, which could not be a long-term solution. You know the arguments for both sides. Collecting church taxes with the help of state authorities is more just and reduces the costs, it also helps to register everybody who belongs to a church. On the other hand, this pro-

cedure is quite anonymous and abstract and does not link the people with the reality and the tasks of the local congregation. The East German churches decided to return to the traditional way of the collection of church taxes, while at the same time they stressed the need to promote voluntary donations. They put much effort into explaining the need for this money, and why the West German system was adopted.

Pastoral care for the members of the armed forces

The discussion about the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service Treaty signed between the EKD and the West German government in 1957 focused on two questions:

- It was asked whether this treaty (which did not have any parallel in the East and which was heavily attacked by the East German government) integrated the pastors too much into military organizations and whether another way, which expressed the independence of the church, could be found.
- Especially during the time of the nuclear arms race, there was also the fundamental question whether Christians should get involved with the military at all. Can the church justify nuclear arms as a legitimate means of deterrence?

It is obvious that those who criticized nuclear deterrence were not enthusiastic about military chaplaincy. This opinion was prevalent in the GDR. After passionate debates, the churches in the East were successful in establishing an additional clause in the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service Treaty, that linked the adoption of the treaty to several conditions. The respective pastors from the East did not become state civil servants, but rather worked under a superior from the church. Furthermore, pastors could work as part-time military chaplains. These exceptions are valid until 2003; by then, a new regulation has to be found, which will no longer distinguish between East and West. The reactions to this temporary solution have been largely positive. However, soldiers and officers did not perceive any differences. Right now, the discussion has

started again. A compromise proposal recommends to leave the old treaty unchanged, but also to permit much that is already practiced in East Germany. Nevertheless, nobody knows what kind of opinions will be expressed in the synods. I think the compromise is a feasible option.

The introduction of denominational religious instruction in public schools

Let me first mention the constitutional guidelines. Article 7 of the Basic Law says:

- (1) The complete educational system has to be under the guidance of the state.
- (2) The parents or legal guardians have the right to decide about their child's participation in religion classes.
- (3) Religion is part of the normal school curriculum in all public schools, except for the non-denominational schools. Religious instruction is organized in accordance with the principles of the different denominations, but under state guidance. No teacher can be forced to teach religion. Art. 141 (the so-called «Bremer Klausel») also needs to be mentioned. «Article 7, point 3, first sentence will not be implemented in that country that had a different regulation on January 1st, 1949.»

Due to the special condition of our regional church the discussion after reunification was dominated by the following problems:

- (1) In the GDR religious instruction had been gradually removed from public schools. Both churches, the Evangelical as well as Roman Catholic, with an immense effort had established Christian teaching by church employees in their parishes. In the Evangelical Church, this was called «Christenlehre». Naturally, this form of teaching was much more effective in leading children into congregational life with all its worship services and celebrations, than religious instruction in public schools. These children groups were not large, but often more than half the chil-

dren had not been baptized and this was a first step to religious life for them.

- (2) In former West-Berlin an exception rule was established in the immediate post-war time. The schools provide the locations and the state government pays ninety percent of the costs, but religious instruction is not part of the *core curriculum*, but rather takes place in the afternoon or sometimes in gaps between other classes. This means that pupils have the choice between attending the religion class, sleeping longer, or having some ice cream in a café. In the same way religion is taught now even in East Berlin.
- (3) While all other East German federal states (with the exception of Berlin) gradually introduced religious instruction in public schools in accordance with the rules of the Basic Law, Brandenburg — the other part of our regional church — refused to do so. Here, a strategy was pursued to replace the traditional form of religious instruction by something called *Lebensgestaltung, Ethik, Religion* (LER). This mandatory course should include instructions for life, approaches to ethics, and information about religion and different denominations. This concept relates to the ethics/philosophy courses that have been implemented in several federal states, especially where many students did not attend denominational religion classes, as an optional alternative to the traditional religion courses. Moreover, this concept was specifically created for a region like Brandenburg, where only about one fifth of all children come from a family that has a religious background. Another intention was not to divide children from one school grade into many groups, but to teach all of them together about different religions and hence foster tolerance.

Among those who contributed to the development of this new concept, were also several civil rights activists with a religious background. Initially, the intention was to include pastors and religion teachers employed by the church, in order to have someone who could authentically present Christian faith. When in Brandenburg this concept was scientifically tested in a sample of

twenty schools, the Evangelical Church participated in this experiment. However, the results were not satisfying at all. The presence of the teachers employed by the Church was limited to a few presentations. They did not know the group members and those did not know them. There was no equal participation, rather they had to play some kind of an exotic guest, a role they could and would not accept. The teachers employed by the state often showed even aggressive laical attitudes, because some of them had taught *Staatsbürgerkunde* (political education) before 1989 or they had been section leaders of the state youth organizations. This experiment proved that this concept of LER was not helpful to provide appropriate religious instruction. Meanwhile, however, Brandenburg introduced LER as part of the core curriculum. Traditional denominational religion courses can be offered in the afternoon similar to Berlin. They are financially supported by the state government (with 55 % of the cost).

- (4) Under these circumstances, the Evangelical Church proceeded to improve their own, traditional model of religious instruction. The main idea is a set of courses including religious, philosophical, ethical, and *Weltanschauung* instruction, comprised of offers by the churches, perhaps Islamic groups and an ethics/philosophy class. Each course has different contents, different syllabi, and students or their parents need to choose one of them. The different courses will cooperate, for example via joined meetings, joined projects like excursions, exhibitions, discussions, temporally limited joined extra classes etc. The basic idea behind this is that religion can only be taught from an internal perspective. Additionally, the state should not judge or evaluate religious confessions. Rather, the state has to be limited to the basics of social ethics, which are outlined in the constitution. I agree with E.-W. Böckenförde who said with great precision «In order to exist, the liberal, secularized state needs certain prerequisites, that it itself cannot guarantee». That is why the state finds its limits at these sources of life experiences.

(5) These are the main intentions of the two major churches in our region. In Berlin, public school laws would need to be changed, which seems impossible under the current government. At least, there is an attempt to replace the competition between religious instruction and ice cream by a competition between religious instruction and an ethics/philosophy class.

Some parents, the two major churches, and the conservative party group in the Bundestag (CDU/CSU) sued the government of Brandenburg at the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe in order to oblige Brandenburg to offer religious instruction like all other federal states. After the first hearing, the court is trying to find a compromise. This case is observed all over Germany, because the future of religious instruction in other federal states also depends upon the coming ruling of the court.

2. Crises and daily life

I already mentioned financial and membership problems which, after the sharp fall in 1997/98 that forced the East German churches to implement dramatic financial cut-backs, became a permanent factor of the strategic planning in all churches in East Germany. In our church, for example, the number of pastors declined from 1.478 in 1995 to 1.049 in 2001 and will have to go down to 700 or 800 in the future. Many pastors retired early, sometimes they have continued to do exactly the same work once they had become pensioners. Only a few pastors newly entered our church. Among those 20–25 who graduate from divinity school each year, only about one third could find a pastor position in a congregation. Meanwhile the number of high school graduates that enter divinity school is that small that a shortage of pastors is expected.

Another news that excited the public just after the churches had played an important role in the political changes in 1989/90 is that the East German State Security Agency (*Staatsicherheit*) had tried to infiltrate systematically the churches. Of course, every case of a clandestine contact with the *Staatssicherheit* was one case too much. On the other hand, it is as-

tonishing how much effort the security agencies put against the church and the opposition movement without actually influencing any major decisions. However, it is more important for the churches to ask themselves whether they had expressed their opinions clearly without any opportunistic behavior. The final report of the EKD's history committee criticizes «the non-existence of critical statements by the churches regarding (il)legal aspects of expropriation, criminal justice, and elections. The consideration for the functioning of the government system resulted in the fact that critical views were expressed not in public but in private conversations.» I think this is true.

To illustrate daily life of a church that is just about to unify, I want to give an example from my own work. I am in charge of theological education. In 1991 we had to face a situation of having not only double, but even rather different structures. In Berlin, there were three theological faculties: the Church College in West Berlin (Kirchliche Hochschule), the theological Faculty of Humboldt University, and the Church College in East Berlin. There was no way to maintain all three of them. Hence, they were united under the guidance of Humboldt University. Similar situations occurred in all areas of church life and work. There is nothing to complain about these things. It is our daily life that we are gradually getting used to. However, again and again we are surprised that the wall has disappeared and the cold war is almost forgotten.

3. Towards a missionary church

Looking at East German theological literature from the 1990s, it is obvious that two issues dominated the discussion. On the one hand, there was a vast amount of publications dealing with the history of the GDR: file publications, biographies, discussion papers, interviews, committee papers etc. In the middle of the 1990s this first publication wave decreased and a different kind of papers became prevalent, short papers, often written by committees, discussed in the synod, and distributed to the congregations. These papers were positions papers, where the Church discussed its own position, its tasks in the immediate future and ways to solve these

tasks. Until now, these kind of papers still make for the majority of papers issued by the Church. Experience from the GDR time are not denied, but rather incorporated into problem solving strategies for the future. We had to adjust to the fact of being a small Church with modest means, without isolating ourselves into a pious ghetto. The experiences from the fall of the socialist regime helped the churches to realize that they were able to attract and help people by their natural potentials of freedom, tolerance, and non-violence, although not everybody decided to be baptized. The first years after the *Wende* were years of learning to cope with the *Rechtsstaat*, democratic institutions, a market economy, and an almost unlimited pluralism. Furthermore, the church had to face aspects of life that had been unknown in the GDR. Now, business executives, military functionaries, high-ranking lawyers and civil servants, reappeared in the congregations. They helped to sensitize against superficial identifications of Christianity and church.

To conclude, I want to summarize the discussion with some theses.

(1) Many Christians have an attitude similar to the one expressed by Lessing in his «Ringparable»: Religious beliefs are only traditions. Ethos is the one important thing. Contrary to this, Marxism in its intense denial of Christian truth claims, helped Christians not to forget that their faith is all about truth and the certainty of truth (*certitudo*). Hence, it is an essential task for the Christian community to enforce the conviction that individual experience is important for other people as well.

- (2) Maybe the terms «Evangelisation»/«Mission» are hollowed out, because they are often defined as indoctrination. Therefore, I recommend a more careful use of these words for some time. However, missionary tasks are an indispensable part of the church, if the church wants to avoid contradiction to its own roots. Therefore, in order to revive evangelization, enjoying and praising the deeds of God has to be renewed first.
- (3) The more the church lives out of the gospel, the more it can cope with its own limits. Everyone lives more of the gospel than for the gospel. That is why the distinction between a core congregation, periphery, and externals as well as the distinction between «*Volkskirche*» and «*Beteiligungskirche*» is only of marginal importance. It tells us how many people consciously or unconsciously live in the domain of the gospel. Therefore, this distinction encourages them to invite others to participate in the work of the congregation.
- (4) The Evangelical Church has a long tradition of being closely connected to the political realm, esp. to the state. Despite this, the Church has to learn to define itself as an institution within civil society and fulfill specific tasks together with other institutions and elements of the society, like education, art, culture, science, and economy. Thus, the Church as an institution furthers what is expected from each individual Christian: the enriching connection between the relation to God and the relation to the world, godliness and the art of living.

