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The Religious Situation in Germany - Past and Present

1. Introduction

A preliminary remark must be made concerning the German term "*evangelisch*". It is derived from the noun "*Evangelium*" which, of course, comes directly from the Greek word "*euangelion*", meaning the good news [the English translation gospel = "good spell" is linguistically quite different from the "good news"]. "*Evangelisch*", therefore, means that which has to do with the good news: a person, a church, a region may be referred to as "*evangelisch*". The English term "evangelical" was used and continues to be used to translate the German word "*evangelisch*". Thus, the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (London 1974, p. 486) renders "*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*" as "Evangelical Church in Germany". Other examples could be cited. However, since the mid-1960's a new word was introduced into the German language, that is "*evangelikal*". It was done so to denote a certain party within Protestantism in the sense of the American "National Association of Evangelicals". The English word evangelical can, therefore, be translated as "*evangelisch*" (broad) or "*evangelikal*" (narrow). To confuse matters further, it must be added that all German "evangelicals" (*Evangelikale*) consider themselves to be "*evangelisch*" as that word very often has the connotation "not Roman Catholic".

2. History

Until 1871 or 1919 Germany never was a unified country with a central administration. Even though the Napoleonic wars early in the 19th century (1805-1815) had ignited a wave of German nationalism, the reactionary forces of the ruling nobility retained the upper hand and crushed all efforts of national unity. They followed the familiar pattern which had existed since the Middle Ages: the ruling princes and prince-bishops had always given priority to protecting their own autonomous territories at the expense of a centralized authority.

To be sure, there was an emperor who ruled over the "Holy Roman Empire of German Nation" until it officially came to an end in 1806, partly to prevent Napoleon from taking the title, but the emperor's authority was limited. He had to rely on the favor or disfavor of princes and prince-bishops whose number in the Middle Ages was between 60 and 80. The number indicates how small some of the territories were. As time went on, territories consolidated into greater units, but the autonomy of these areas remained until after the first World War.

2.1 Some Causes of the Reformation

This broad outline may also help to understand the situation in the 16th century, the time of the Reformation. The demand for a thorough reform (a "reformation of head and members") had been raised repeatedly in the 15th century, but the Roman Catholic Church at that time could not carry out major reforms. Instead, the situation deteriorated continuously as some examples may illustrate:

- (1) Early in the century the Council of Constance convened (1414-1418) which removed three opposing popes and elected a new one. The fact that there had been two or three

popes simultaneously was an indication of the pitiable condition of the church. Reformers had, therefore, identified the pope with Antichrist, a description which Luther later used.

- (2) The same council burned two theologians who had advocated a thorough reform, Jan Huss and Jerome of Prague in 1415. Luther would later confirm that all of Huss' propositions were Christian, and in condemning him, the pope had condemned the gospel.
- (3) The life style of monks and nuns left much to be desired, and because of the wealth of the monasteries, the poverty of peasants increased. Luther would later abandon monastic life which he had earnestly tried to fulfill.
- (4) In 1074 the celibacy of priests became part of canon law, but many priests and monks lived with women. Luther would later enter holy matrimony with a former nun.
- (5) Bishops most often were not qualified theologians, but behaved as or actually were secular rulers in their dioceses. Some were called prince-bishops to indicate their spiritual and secular functions. None of the bishops would later convert to Luther's reform program.
- (6) With the rise of a monetary system which replaced an exchange of goods, the indulgences could be purchased not only for oneself, but also for the already deceased. This mixup of money and religion caused Luther to enter into a controversy.

2.2 Luther

In the language of the church and the scholarly world, Latin, Luther wrote his now famous 95 theses which, on October 31st, 1517, were nailed to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg in order to evoke a scholarly discussion with his colleagues at the recently-founded University. Unintentionally, the theses spread like wildfire, especially after they had been translated into German. The "new faith" began to take shape as Luther was pressed into making more and more public statements as, for example, at the disputation with Johann Eck in 1519 when Eck forced him to confess that he was, indeed, a follower of Huss and therefore a heretic.

Meanwhile a Spaniard with no knowledge of German had been elected to be Emperor, Charles V. His election clearly indicates how little interest the Electors had in establishing a powerful central government. When Charles called the Diet of Worms to deal, among other things, with the rise of Lutheranism, Luther's sovereign, the Elector Frederick the Wise, insisted that Luther should appear before "Emperor and Reich". Thus an event took place which had been unheard of so far in history: an excommunicated monk stood in front of the Emperor and declined to do that which was expected of him, namely to recant. Instead, Luther on April 18th, 1521 appealed to his conscience which was captive only to the word of God and left Worms. On the way home Frederick had him captured in order to protect him from any imperial harassment and had him taken to Wartburg Castle where he translated the New Testament into German in the incredibly short time of only two months.

The Emperor, despite repeated attempts, could not stop the spread of Lutheranism as many princes as well as cities were friendly to the new cause. As no bishop took sides with Luther, he appealed "To the Christian Nobility of German Nation" to reform the church. This, in fact, did happen as many princes took charge of the church in their territories. Luther insisted that they be "emergency bishops" in this emergency situation. He thought that the princes' role as bishops would be only during a period of transition until the reform of the church had progressed so that the church would be in a position to govern itself. However, Luther proved wrong at this point. The princes, once they had been entrusted with episcopal oversight and

governing power in "their" territorial churches, would not voluntarily relinquish this new dimension of power.

2.3 Subsequent Developments

The ups and downs of the Reformation and the counter-Reformation need not be outlined in detail. Two events are important in the subsequent developments:

1. In 1555 the Emperor had to concede, in the Peace of Augsburg, that Lutheranism was a legal religion besides the Roman Catholic Church. The right to reform rested with the princes: *cuius regio, eius religio* = whose the region, his the religion. The subjects were obliged to conform religiously to the rulers' opinion. The Roman Catholic counter-Reformation made inroads into many Protestant territories.
2. This was also true during the Thirty Years' War. The peace settlement of 1648 reaffirmed the religious right of the rulers, but guaranteed, to the people, a *ius emigrandi*, the right to leave a territory for a more friendly area. Not only were Catholics and Lutherans granted the right to leave, but the Reformed were added to the list; other "sects" were not to be tolerated.

It turned out that not all rulers insisted on imposing their religion upon the people. Thus, the Prussian ruling house of Hohenzollern converted to the Reformed tradition, but the population remained Lutheran. When Prussia obtained new territories (Silesia as a result of the Seven Years' War or the provinces of the Rhineland and Westphalia at the Vienna Congress to end the Napoleonic wars with a majority of Roman Catholics), people were not forced to convert or leave. The same can be demonstrated here in Dresden. The king of Saxony, when offered the Polish crown, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1697, but the people remained Lutheran.

In Prussia the close link between church and state was referred to as the "marriage of throne and altar". How much the church was manipulated by the state can be seen in 1817 when the Prussian king Frederick William III ordered the Reformed and Lutheran traditions to unite. This, he thought, was his unique contribution to the 300th anniversary of the Reformation so that the so-called Prussian Union came into existence by royal decree. The king also devised a new liturgy for the new church. As a result, however, some Lutherans resisted which the king would not tolerate. He at one point called out the army against this act of civil disobedience. Some of these Lutherans emigrated to the United States and eventually formed the Missouri Synod, some left for Australia. The ones who remained in Germany organized a new church, the so-called "old Lutherans", today the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church.

3. The Consequences

From the foregoing several conclusions can be drawn which to this day characterize the religious situation in Germany:

1. The principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* prevented the establishment of a unified national church (as the "Church of England" or the "Church of Norway").
2. The power structure gave rise to three legally recognized religious traditions: Catholic, Lutheran (since Augsburg 1555) and Reformed (since 1648); others were considered illegal sects, sometimes tolerated, sometimes fiercely persecuted, depending upon the inclination of the rulers.
3. The refusal to support the religion of a territory was not only considered a religious heresy, but treason as well.

4. That the ruling princes determined the religion of their territories created religiously homogeneous territories. Luther had maintained that a country with more than one religion was a "house divided" (Matth. 12:25) and could not be ruled.
5. The close link between church and state rendered the churches conservative. Church leaders as well as a local pastors supported the status quo and sided generally with the powers that be, the nobility.
6. Exactly 200 years ago, in 1799, it was Schleiermacher who gave an "Address on Religion to the Despisers of Religion". It seems that the church at that time had already lost at least some of the intellectual elite.
7. Further into the 19th century the church lost the middle-class because it condemned all efforts of democratic reforms as "dangerous and atheistic". The Roman Catholics did the same as Pope Pius IX (1846-1876) had in 1864 explicitly condemned liberty of conscience, tolerance, universal suffrage, public education, freedom of the press, freedom of worship, socialism as well as a liberalism (*syllabus errorum*).
8. The church appeared to be internally as well as externally immobile. Society was made up of three classes: nobility, bourgeoisie and peasants. When industrialization and urbanization began and a fourth class developed, the church was totally unprepared to address its problems. The working class found little acceptance or consolation in the churches. The parish system prevented new churches to be built in new quarters of the cities.
9. At the end of the first World War the emperor as well as all the princes resigned. The evangelical churches, therefore, were suddenly and unexpectedly without the authorities on which they had relied for 400 years. As the "atheistic" Social Democrats came to power in the "Weimar Republic", many pastors and priests looked at the democratic republic as a "state without God". The Weimar Republic was only halfheartedly supported by evangelical churches.
10. The evangelical churches as well as the Roman Catholic dioceses retained the historic boundaries, sometimes established through wars, sometimes through marriage among ruling houses, sometimes arbitrarily. The evangelical churches remained within the regional structures and are, therefore, called regional or territorial churches (*Landeskirchen*). In 1922 there were 28 such autonomous regional churches which founded a federation until the Nazi government dissolved it in 1933 in an effort to establish a *Reichskirche*, a national church.
11. Even linguistically the free churches were alienated or alienated themselves. They largely refrained from using the word "church" (*Kirche*), but spoke of *Gemeinde* (as the body of believers) and *Kapelle* (chapel, house of worship).

4. After World War II

The peace of the Allies made more people homeless than all the bombing raids on German cities combined. The USSR acquired sections of eastern Poland (now part of the Ukraine) and the northern part of East Prussia. Poland, in exchange received several German provinces, and the entire German population was expelled. More than 12 million refugees flooded into the vastly damaged rest of Germany. The refugees were of different religious background. As a result of the relocation of the refugees, most of the hitherto religiously homogeneous areas were now being mixed. In many instances evangelicals for the first time ever encountered Roman Catholics and vice versa. The refugee problem had also great effects on Baptists as they had a stronghold in East Prussia so much so that they had created a Baptist "milieu" which German writers like Günther Grass, Siegfried Lenz and Johannes Bobrowski who were born and spent their early childhood in that area captured in some of their novels after the

war. Many thousands of Baptist refugees came to other parts of Germany and founded new congregations. These congregations were often referred to as "refugee congregations".

A related problem, but of less magnitude, happened as a result of the migration of so-called "ethnic Germans" from the countries of the former USSR to Germany. Since the 1970's a steady flow of more than half a million people came to Germany, and many of them are of Baptist, Mennonite or Pentecostal background. Most of the Baptists refused to be integrated into existing German congregations. Only a small percentage joined the Union. Instead they created their own Unions or Federations. Of the estimated 90.000 Baptists from the former Soviet Union about 15.000 are in German congregations or are part of the Union; the others are divided into six different Unions of various sizes. For the first time since its beginnings in the 1830's the Baptist movement in Germany is divided into several organizations even though hard efforts had been made to avoid discord. Cultural as well as theological factors contributed to this division. People from the former USSR were not used to "liberal" Western life styles or to express themselves freely in public, women are not supposed to wear jeans or use lipstick, elders are elected for life and have powerful positions within "their" congregations. These and many other factors are involved, and even though Baptists call into question that they rely on tradition, the opposite can be demonstrated when trans-cultural migrating Baptist people are investigated.

The territorial churches remained basically unchanged after the war. In 1948 they formed an umbrella organization called *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (=EKD = Evangelical Church in Germany) with its headquarters in Hannover. In 1969 the territorial churches in East Germany officially ended their membership in the EKD and organized their own federation. After unification all the regional churches again are part of the EKD. The EKD is not a church in terms of law, theology or confession. That rests solely with the individual autonomous *Landeskirche*. Not until 1974, with the ratification of the so-called Leuenberg Concord, was there "pulpit and table fellowship" among the Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches both in Germany and throughout Europe. The Scandinavian Lutherans, however, do not participate in the Leuenberg Concord. The Concord is an agreement between the churches to recognize each other on the basis of a common understanding of the gospel and the sacraments as well as a mutual recognition of the ordained ministry. The condemnations of the past are no valid. The United Methodist Church joined the Concord a few years ago, the European Baptist Federation in 1999 entered the first two rounds of negotiations to see whether full membership or some kind of association can be worked out.

Membership in the church is, of course, closely associated with the rite of baptism. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical territorial churches administer baptism to infants indiscriminately. It is a rite which to this day is well received by the general population except in the East. Almost all infants are baptized and are subsequently instructed by the churches in confirmation classes. Membership is thus passively assigned rather than actively acquired.

Christianity, then, becomes the official religion of land, and it is not surprising that it is mentioned in the federal constitution, the Basic Law.

Article 4 says: "(1) Freedom of faith, of conscience, and freedom of creed, religious or *weltanschaulich*, shall be inviolable. (2) The undisturbed practice of religion is guaranteed."

Article 7 states: "(1) The entire education system shall be under the supervision of the state. (2) The parents or legal guardians of a child shall have the right to decide whether he or she shall receive religious instruction. (3) Religious instruction shall form part of the curriculum in state schools [...] Without interfering with the state's right of supervision, religious instruction shall be given in accordance with the tenets of the religious communities. No

teacher may be forced against his or her will to give religious instruction. (4) The right to establish private schools is guaranteed.”

A number of articles from the “Weimar Constitution” were incorporated into the Basic Law such as Article 137: “There shall be no state church. Freedom of association to form a religious body is guaranteed [...] Every religious body shall regulate and administer its affairs independently within the limits of the law valid for all. It shall confer its offices without the participation of the state or the civil community”; Article 138: “State contributions to religious bodies, based on law or contract or special legal title, shall be redeemed by means of legislation in the land. The principles for such redemption shall be established by the national government. The property and other rights of religious bodies or associations in respect of their institutions, foundations and other assets designed for purposes of worship, education, or charity are guaranteed”; Article 139: “Sundays and public holidays recognized by the state shall remain under legal protection as days of rest from work and of spiritual edification.”

It is especially Article 138 that forms the basis for a unique system of financing the churches. The churches, or any religious organization recognized by the state in legal terms, are entitled to collect a church tax from its members. The evangelical territorial churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community and several other small religious bodies participate in this system of financing their activities. The free churches, although legally entitled to the same privilege, do not because they rely on a voluntary contributions.

The church tax is withheld from the payroll and automatically forwarded to the Internal Revenue Service which in turn passes it on to the churches or religious bodies. The church tax is a surcharge of about 9% of a person's income tax. This means in practice that if income taxes go up, so does the church tax, if income taxes go down, the church tax will follow suit. During the years of economic boom the income of the churches through the tax system increased tremendously. But recently, especially after unification (1989/90), Germany experienced a double-digit rate of unemployment with the effect that the income through church tax remained steady or decreased slightly. As the territorial churches in the East do not have a sufficiently high enough membership rate, they cannot raise the adequate amount of money through the tax system to upkeep their activities. Consequently, the West German churches shifted some of their resources toward the East which means that they do not have as much as they were used to in previous years. In addition the government is presently trying to lower the overall tax system so that the churches or religious bodies which depend upon the church tax will be negatively effected. Another area of concern is the plan to shift the entire system from direct taxing more toward indirect taxing through VAT. The amount that churches receive through the tax system is staggering: The Church of the Rhineland, one of the largest and most prosperous, had a net income last year of DM 1.1 billion (1.100.000.000). Many international Christian organizations like the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and others depend heavily on German tax money, some as much as 40%.

5. The Free Churches

It is against this background that the rise and development of free churches must be seen. “Free” in the German context means that these churches require a decision on part of people to acquire membership. Even in churches with infant baptism, such as in the Methodist church, a special service is held in which the baptized individuals confess their faith and ask to be received into the church. “Free” also means that the free churches do not rely on funding through the IRS or any subsidies by the state (except for the maintenance of hospitals, kinder-

garten, senior citizen homes, nursing homes which are kept for the general public), but on voluntary gifts. Voluntary membership and independence are essential marks of the free churches.

5.1 History

When the free churches began in the 1830's, they were heavily criticized by the territorial churches and by the Roman Catholic Church as being "intruders" into territories to which they had no right. The free churches were always pejoratively referred to as "sects" or cults. They disturbed the religious peace of the land by missionizing Christian people. Baptists were special targets of polemical literature as they "re-baptized" people. To theology professors, ministers and church leaders they looked like Luther's enemies, and they would reiterate Luther's contention that as the "Anabaptists" of his days were "*Schwärmer*", so were the new groups. The term *Schwärmer* is used in connection with honeybees who emigrate from a beehive and are thereby worthless to a farmer. The *Schwärmer* separate themselves from society and become worthless for the public good which is why the Reformers asked state authorities to administer the death penalty. In the 19th century, of course, it was no longer possible to apply capital punishment to supposedly religious fanatics, but the very fact that Methodists, Baptists and later Pentecostals, Adventists and others were nicknamed "sectarians" and "swarmers" was reason enough for the free churches to feel alienated from society.

Other points of tensions re-enforced this impression:

- Before civil marriage was made compulsory by Bismarck in 1874/1875, all marriages were performed by the parish priest (RC) or minister (ev.). Free church members had to appear in a church to which they vehemently objected in order to be legally married. It is reported that in some instances Baptist couples walked out of the church after they had been pronounced husband and wife and before the minister began with his sermon.
- Babies were supposed to be baptized in the church shortly after birth. When Methodists began to baptize in their own congregations and when Baptists did not baptize babies at all, it caused consternation in the communities and often ended in open persecution of the parents. In Marburg, for example, when the first couple of the Baptist Church had a baby and the parents refused her to be baptized, the consistory of the evangelical church obtained a court injunction which relinquished the father of his legal guardianship. Instead, an uncle of the baby became the legal guardian who asked the church to baptize the child. A midwife and a policeman were sent to the home; they took the baby against the will of its parents, carried her to the church where she was baptized and then taken back to the family. Afterwards the uncle was relieved of his temporary duty as legal guardian and the father reinstated: The law had been enforced. This family by the name of Grimmel would later emigrate to the United States, and one of their sons translated "Blessed be the ties that bind" into German.
- Cemeteries were exclusively operated by the churches. When a member of a free church died, free church ministers were not allowed to enter the cemetery. People tried to obtain graves next to the fence so that the minister could preach from outside the cemetery and still be heard. In other instances free church members were buried in the section reserved for people who had committed suicide. There were a few towns or villages where free churches were able to operate their own cemeteries. I know of at least two cases where this was jointly done by Methodists and Baptists.
- Some cities had zoning laws which would not permit free churches to buy land and build a "chapel" on the street where it could be easily seen. The free churches could only build in back alleys or acquire "back houses".

These and other instances did not create a climate of mutual trust between the churches. Under the prevailing conditions no ecumenical relations could begin. In fact, many free church people, possibly the best or at least the most mobile, emigrated to other countries, notably to the United States. Free churches suffered from a brain drain which cannot be accurately measured, but which must have been of considerable magnitude. Free church people, therefore, welcomed any development that would help to improve their situation. The organizing of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 in London was such a stepping stone. All three leading German Baptists, Oncken, Lehmann and Koebner, took part in this important ecumenical event. When the second International Conference of the Alliance was held in Berlin in 1857, many evangelical pastors left town in order to avoid "fraternization" with Methodist and Baptist sectarians. Those ministers from the territorial churches who did participate in the meetings came from "pietist" or "awakening" background. They were spiritually very close to the free churches, but, as one Methodist minister reported to the U.S., they were politically "reactionaries". The Baptist minister Koebner, only a few months after the Communist Manifesto had appeared in 1848, published his own "Manifesto of Free Primitive Christianity" in which he defended the political revolution which had finally triumphed over a system of "churchianity" and established religious liberty for all people of the fatherland. Needless to say that this manifesto was taken off the market after the reactionary forces had again gained the upper hand in 1849.

It is not surprising that the free churches remained small in number. Only slowly did they attain legal recognition. For the Baptists this recognition came in 1930, for the Methodist it came during the Nazi reign. Generally speaking the free churches supported the Nazis (1) because they considered themselves not political, but strictly religious, (2) because they followed the Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms and interpreted Romans 13 to mean strict obedience toward any authority and (3) because they were thankful for not having been forced into one national church. The German ambassador in Washington had warned the government in Berlin only a few months after the Nazis had come to power (what they called *Machtergreifung*) in 1933 not to call Methodist and Baptist independence into question. As both religious traditions were highly influential in Washington, he cabled to Berlin, the reputation of the new administration would suffer greatly should attempts not be stopped to integrate these free church traditions into a unified Church (*Reichskirche*). One scholar who covered the story of the Baptists during the period from 1933 to 1945, Andrea Struebind, correctly called her book "The 'unfree' Free Church".

Today the total membership of congregations affiliated with the Union amounts to about 85.000 people. A recent survey revealed that of all the free churches the Adventists and the Baptists are the most evenly distributed bodies in the country. The other free churches have certain regional strongholds and are not represented in other parts. Baptists can be found in every region.

5.2 The ecumenical activities of the Baptists

The inter-church or ecumenical activities of the Baptists can be seen on a number of levels:

1. The Union itself grew out of inter-church conversations. In the 1930's, under the prevailing pressure from the Nazis, the free churches developed plans to integrate into one body. Some of the leaders were of the opinion that a unified organization would strengthen their witness in society and that they would be a "third column" besides the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical church. These plans did not materialize, but there were certain repercussions. When the smaller religious bodies were highly

scrutinized by the government, the group known as the "Plymouth Brethren" was outlawed. They had on theological grounds objected to any kind of organization and did not even have membership lists. The government was therefore highly disturbed because it could not control this "sect". An attorney within the group convinced most of the congregations that they should organize themselves. They did so and called themselves "Federation of Free-Church Christians". This group and the Union of Baptists merged during the war. Both gave up their name and called the new organization the "Union of Evangelical Free-Church Congregations" (*Bund Evangelisch-freikirchlicher Gemeinden*). A large number of the Plymouth Brethren congregations left the union as soon as the war was over so that the percentage of Plymouth Brethren within the Union amounts to about 12 %. Another splinter group, the Elim churches, a small Pentecostal body, had been accepted into the Baptist Union in 1937. They were mostly in the eastern part of Germany, and after unification they left the Union and joined the Pentecostal Church.

2. A federation of two Methodist traditions, the Baptists and the Union of Free Evangelical Congregations began its work in 1926. It is called "*Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen*" (VEF = Union of Evangelical Free Churches) and was originally established to give weight to common concerns vis-a-vis the territorial churches and the state. In recent years more and more free churches joined that organization so that today the major traditions are represented: Association of Mennonite Congregations, Union of Free Evangelical Congregations, United Methodist Church, Salvation Army, Church of the Nazarene, two Pentecostal bodies, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Baptists and the Moravians. The VEF is probably not as effective as the long list of its members may suggest. This is probably due to the fact that churches with quite different church order or church polity (episcopal or local autonomy) and with different objectives try to work together. The VEF not only has different commissions for different areas of concern, but is now officially engaged with the EKD in a dialog on "church and culture" in order to find new ways of cooperation for the 21st century. Very recently a Baptist minister was appointed on a part-time basis to represent the VEF at the federal government's new seat in Berlin.
3. As mentioned before German Baptists had supported the Evangelical Alliance ever since its inception. The support continues to this day. Baptist congregations actively participate in events which the Evangelical Alliance sponsors, such as the week of prayer during the first week in January, evangelistic campaigns and other functions. Strictly speaking, however, the Evangelical Alliance is not an inter-church organization as it knows only membership on a personal basis, not membership of individual churches.
4. When in the 1960's the charismatic movement began to emerge, some Baptist pastors and congregations were immediately drawn into these activities. A charismatic conference center was staffed by two Baptist ministers in addition to Catholic and Lutheran staff members. As the charismatic movement is an inter-church affair, a number of conversations and other activities resulted with Baptist participation. There is a nationwide umbrella organization of charismatic churches and organizations, and Baptists are actively involved.
5. The Baptist Union in 1948 was a founding member of the ecumenical organization called "*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland*" (ACK= Joint Working Group of Christian Churches). In the same year when the World Council of Churches was created, the Protestant churches in Germany formed the ACK. The free churches actually wanted to establish a council of churches, but the EKD churches objected because, at that

time, they did not have "pulpit and table fellowship" amongst themselves. This was a disappointment for the free churches, but the creation of the ACK must be considered a bold step forward when one looks at the polemical past. The churches committed themselves to working together rather than against each other. Although not undisputed, Baptists have always participated in the program of the ACK. When the Roman Catholic Church left its self-imposed ecumenical fortress mentality as a result of the Second Vatican Council, it, as well as Eastern Orthodox churches, applied for membership in the ACK so that since 1974 these two important traditions are also part of the ACK. After unification a few more churches such as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church joined. It is also noteworthy that the same organization existed in former East Germany, and many Baptists and other free church people who were actively involved report that there had been a very warm relationship during the Communist era which cooled off after unification.

The ACK was set up for mutual information, dialog, common concerns, public statements and intervention with the government. Topics of dialogs in the past were baptism, the Lord's supper, church and ministry, mission and evangelism, proselytism, life style, program to overcome violence and xenophobia. In 1992 it sponsored the "Year with the Bible"; this year the ACK appeals to Christians in the country "to invite your neighbor" as a way to overcome xenophobia. Each year the Prayer Week for Christian Unity is organized by the ACK. Also, the International Women's Day of Prayer uses some of the logistic resources of the ACK with active Baptist participation. In 1989 the churches joined in the conciliar process on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). This process turned out to be a major success in terms of bringing the churches closer together and making an impact in the public sphere.

A number of regional and urban ACK's exist. On the national level the member churches send their delegates to the "general assembly" which meets three times a year in various places. Its work is supported by a staff of four full-time consultants, one from the EKD, one Roman Catholic, one Orthodox and one from the free churches. The latter position rotates among Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites, Moravians etc. The headquarters, *Ökumenische Centrale*, is in Frankfurt. A quarterly, scholarly journal, *Ökumenische Rundschau*, is published by an ecumenical committee. Member churches are: EKD, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Greek-Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany, the United Methodist Church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Syrian-Orthodox Church, the Old Catholics, the Moravians, the Old Reformed, the Association of Mennonites Congregations, the Salvation Army, the Russian-Orthodox Church and the Baptists. Guest members are the Union of Free Evangelical Congregations, the SDA and a Pentecostal body.

From a free church point of view it must be clearly stated that the work of the ACK stands in the shadow of the bilateral relations that have in the meantime developed between the EKD and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference. It appears that the two "big" churches have much in common so that they would regulate certain items bilaterally rather than multilaterally, thereby bypassing the free churches and the ACK.

The ACK has a commission which may be defined as its "faith and order commission" (*Deutscher Ökumenischer Studienausschuss = DÖSTA*). The commission is made up of 25 members, most of whom teach in theological faculties or in free church seminaries. The Baptists are entitled to send two delegates. It is the task of the commission to review ecumenical events both here and abroad, to give guidance to the ACK or to produce

studies or study guides. In the last few years the commission has dealt with mission and evangelism, produced a major study on ecclesiology, published a study guide on the Nicean creed (NC) and is currently involved in studying John 17:21 and its ecumenical implications.

6. All of the German Protestant churches cooperate very closely in the area of *diakonia*. The Roman Catholic counterpart is called *Caritas*. What originally was the "inner mission" of the territorial churches has now developed into a large social program, and the free churches fully participate in these endeavors. It covers domestic work with refugees, asylum seekers, homeless people, prison work, hospital work, senior citizen homes, nursing homes, homes for the handicapped, counseling centers for pregnant women, marriage counseling etc. as well as programs for the developing countries such as "Bread for the World" or "Service Overseas". The agencies and organizations connected with the *Diakonisches Werk*, headquartered in Stuttgart, are the largest employer in the country. All the Baptist welfare agencies are connected with this organization, and the vice-president is currently a Baptist.
7. Another area of common concern of the Protestant churches is the youth work. All of the churches have their youth departments, but they cooperate very closely, develop programs and draft public statements.
8. The German Bible Society is another area of common interest and of involvement of free churches. The president of the society is currently the German Methodist bishop Dr. Walter Klaiber.
9. The Protestant churches have also combined forces in the area of publication of a religious news service as well as producing TV and radio programs for public stations.
10. There are two inter-church Mission agencies in which Baptists participate, one is more "evangelical" in orientation, one more "ecumenical".
11. Church music may be seen as another area of common concern among all Protestant churches. Two free churches, the Baptists and the Union of Free Evangelical Congregations jointly published a hymnal.
12. Internationally the Union is a member of our own tradition's international organizations, the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance. It is also a member of the Conference of European Churches which was created during the time of the "cold war" to keep the churches in Europe together despite ideological differences and the iron curtain. At present a Baptist, Dr. Keith Clements from the UK, is general secretary of that organization. One of his predecessors, the late Dr. Glen Garfield Williams, was also a Baptist from the UK.

6. Other Factors

After the second World War two important renewal movements began to function. Both are the fruits of the struggle between Nazi ideology and the Christian faith:

- (1) Evangelical and Roman Catholic academies. The first Evangelical Academy opened in September 1949 in Bad Boll, a Moravian spa near Stuttgart. Today every territorial

church and every Roman Catholic diocese has its academy. They are adult education centers where especially over weekends various topics are being presented and discussed. The original intention was to train the laity, to attract people from all walks of life and to voice Christian concerns and standards in planning for responsible action in society. Free church members attend some of the events, but as it is quite expensive to run such a center, none of the free churches founded an academy. Instead, there are a number of retreat centers which at one point or another serve the same purpose.

- (2) The *Kirchentag*. A leader of the confessing church, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, began to organize the *Kirchentag* in 1949. It is mass movement: people gather from Thursday to Sunday in a large city to discuss various issues from politics to environmental concerns to religious street preaching, Bible studies and worship services. The *Kirchentag* met every year for a decade and now alternates with the *Katholikentag*. In June 1999 the *Kirchentag* met in Stuttgart with 120,000 people permanently in attendance. People could choose from more than 2,000 events and go to a "market of possibilities", an exhibition where different activist groups or other organizations present themselves. The Baptist Union this year had a booth to present Baptist work. The pietists or evangelicals began with an alternative *Gemeindetag* a few years ago because they felt that the *Kirchentag* was too political and secular. They attract about 30,000 people, the vast majority of whom are from the territorial churches.

All of these activities seem to suggest that Christianity is a vital force in the country. However, statistics do not agree. On an average Sunday 4.9% of evangelicals and about 19% of Roman Catholics attend church services. Both the EKD and the Roman Catholic Church claim roughly 28 million as members. The free churches combined will have a Sunday attendance of about 300,000 people. In the eastern part of the country most people are not church members, not even nominally. In the city of Halle, once the center of Pietism with August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), as the leading spokesperson of that movement, church membership is down to 8%. Among the young people there seems to be little interest in organized religion in the West as well as in the East. One third of the total population has no religious affiliation.

Germany and the churches do not have a long record of inter-church dialogue. This is only a recent phenomenon. Consequently when new situations arise, there is a wide-spread uncertainty how to deal with them. Two recent developments may serve as examples:

- (1) The rise of New Religious Movements (NRM) since the 1960's caused churches to set up special task forces to combat the intruders. They were quickly labeled destructive cults and harassed by church and government officials. Parliament set up a special Enquete Commission to look into the "sects and so-called psycho-cults" which presented its findings in 1998 and suggested, among other things, that the word "sect" be dropped in official government documents. The federal government and state as well as local governments have not exercised self-restraint towards NRM's, but published booklets to warn the public on the basis that they were not loyal to the constitution. Some of the NRM's went to court to claim their right of freedom of religion.
- (2) Because of the booming economy and the shortage of labor, government and industry began to bring foreign "guest workers" into the country. The first came from Italy, then from Spain, Portugal, the former Yugoslavia and Greece. Finally Turks were also attracted. The assumption was that these people would work in Germany for a certain time and then go back home. Many southern Europeans, in fact, did that. The Turks,

however, stayed in the country, especially after laws had been changed so that they could bring their wives and children as well. Now there are about 2.9 million Turks and Kurds, most of whom are Moslems. Therefore, these people do not only come from a different culture, but also from a different religion. There are also many language problems so that it has been especially difficult for people from Turkey to feel at home or to be integrated. Over all the German population has not reacted favorably towards their presence even though most are hard-working and friendly people. Many Germans are afraid that the fundamentalists have too much influence in the Moslem community and that the civil war in Turkey may spill over into German cities. There were also quite a few political battles in urban centers where Moslems tried to build mosques or other houses of worship. In a number of cities right-wing parties increased their voter potential when a Moslem house of worship was supposed to be built in the neighborhood. Some pastors added oil to the fuel, some tried to mediate between the different religious communities. Free church people are generally not involved.

At present the discussion centers around the right of the Moslem community to have its own religious instruction classes in the schools. In a recent survey 67% of the population was for such a move, 29% against. It would require 4.500 additional teachers who would have to be trained in Germany, present Islam in the German language and be loyal to the constitution. One of the main obstacles is the fact that the Moslem community is highly divided so that the government claims it has no organization to negotiate with.

Conclusion

Today Germany is a highly secular and multi-cultural society. Most Germans, including church people, are not at ease with religious pluralism and do not know how to deal with this relatively new situation. The vast majority of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical territorial churches even though in the East the majority (80%) is unchurched. Therefore, the membership rate in the whole country dropped dramatically after unification. The majority of the members, however, do not actively practice their religion. It may seem like a contradiction that nonetheless a large portion of the people avail themselves of the "rites of passage" such as baptism, confirmation, marriages, burials and the Christmas services. Still, it is not surprising that in this context the ACK has recently entered into a joint process to discuss "mission and evangelism" in the "new Germany" upon the suggestion of free church people, notably the Methodists.

It seems that Roman Catholics are far more willing to enter into a dialog on this topic than the territorial churches. Pope John Paul II has repeatedly called on the European churches to re-evangelize the continent. To many observers, especially secular and Protestants, this call of the Pope sounds more like "re-catholizing" than re-evangelizing. The territorial churches are reluctant to discuss the issue as to them active missionary work has never been high on the agenda. There was no need to do so as the populace was on the church rolls with or without evangelistic efforts. Evangelism is rarely, if ever, discussed in theological faculties, and some evangelists, including Billy Graham's "crusades" in Germany – the very word is shocking to theologians -, have not made the debate easier. It seems, however, that the discussion and practice of new ways to reach the unchurched must get under way before it is too late. Moreover, many people today are leaving the churches to save the church tax or for other reasons. Free churches cannot sit back and see this happen because in the long run they will also be effected by the ongoing process of secularization. The society urgently needs action on part of the churches, and if ways and means could be found to work together, so much the

better. The "signs of the time" are not very favorable as far as religion is concerned. The mass media, print, TV and radio, are very critical of religion, and it seems that a generation is growing up to whom religion in whatever form is far removed from their reality. Free churches, it seems, should be better equipped to win people as they are less identified with an "established" form of religion, but they are not visible and courageous enough to come forward with new ideas and to accept the challenges in a free, democratic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

The author, Dr. Erich Geldbach, is professor of Ecumenical Studies at the Ruhr-University in Bochum. Before he was appointed to his present position, he served for nearly 15 years at the EKD-related Institute for Ecumenical Study and Research in Bensheim. He taught also at the Philipps-University in Marburg and was a visiting scholar at Harvard Divinity School in 1975/76. For the past 15 years he has represented the Union on the "faith and order commission" (DÖSTA).

When the theological faculty of the Ruhr University decided unanimously to extend a call to him, a long debate began whether a Baptist could be part of a theological faculty. The territorial churches must give their approval to candidates before the State may appoint a person. In this case the territorial church of Westphalia withheld its authorization for more than a year, rejected his candidacy on the ground that there exists no "official" fellowship between the Baptist Union and the territorial church of Westphalia, but then received so much criticism that it revoked its decision one month later. He was appointed early in 1997.

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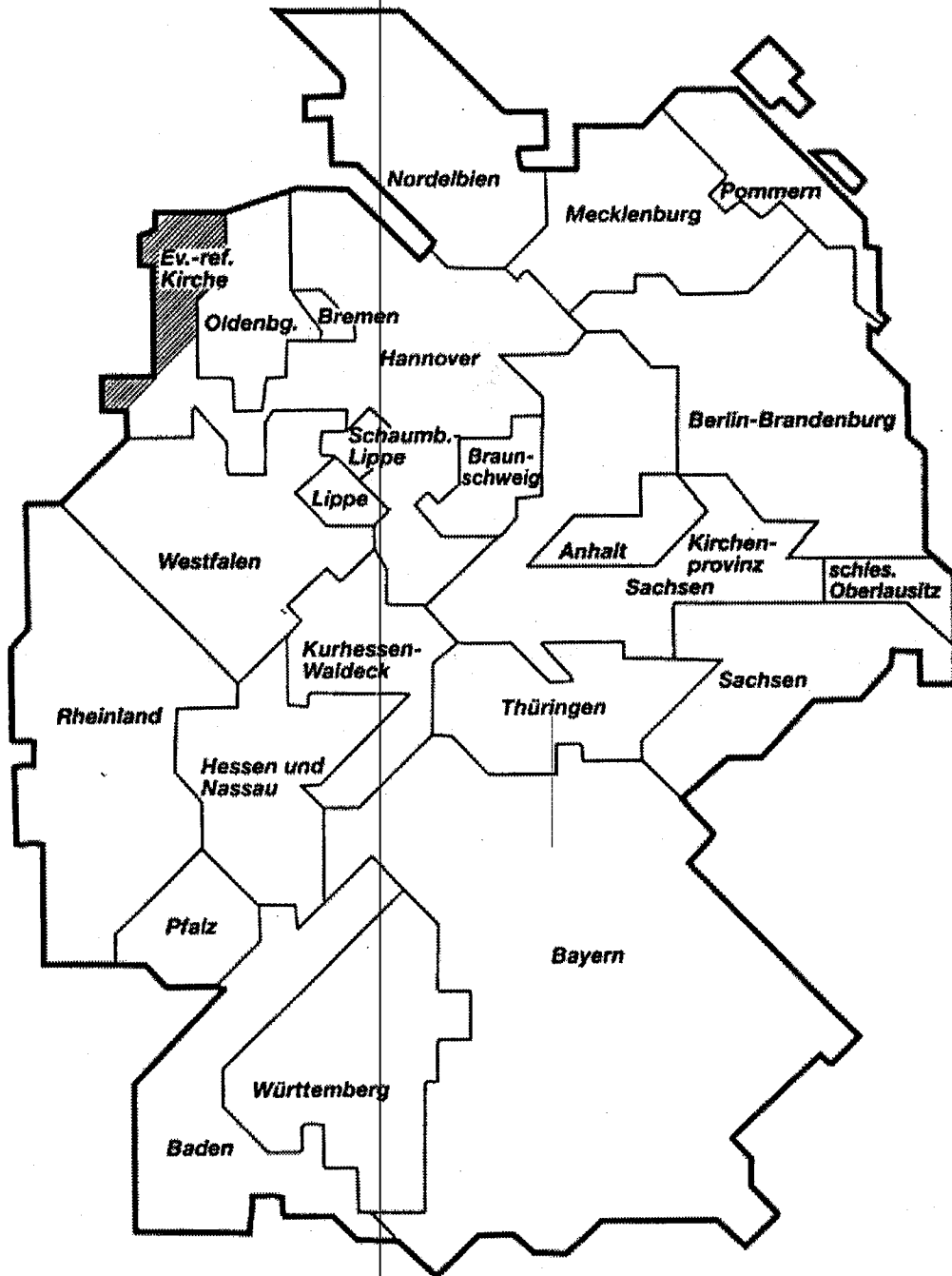
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This paper is gratefully dedicated to Noel Vose, President of the BWA (1985-1990) and to John and Cora Sparrowk

Appendix



Map of the territorial churches

Structure, Bodies and Central Office of the EKD

Anhalt Berlin-Brandenburg Pommern Rhineland Province of Saxony Silesian Oberlausitz Westphalia	form the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU)
Baden Bremen Hesse and Nassau Hesse Electorate Waldeck Palatinate	are thr remaining United churches
Bavaria Brunswick Haniver Mecklenburg North Elbia Saxony Schaumburg-Lippe Thuringia	form the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of German (VELKD)
Oldenburg Wuerttemberg	are the remaining Lutheran Churches
Lippe Evangelical Reformed Church	are the Reformed Churches

The 24 regional churches

and the EKU
form the
Church Conference
of the EKD

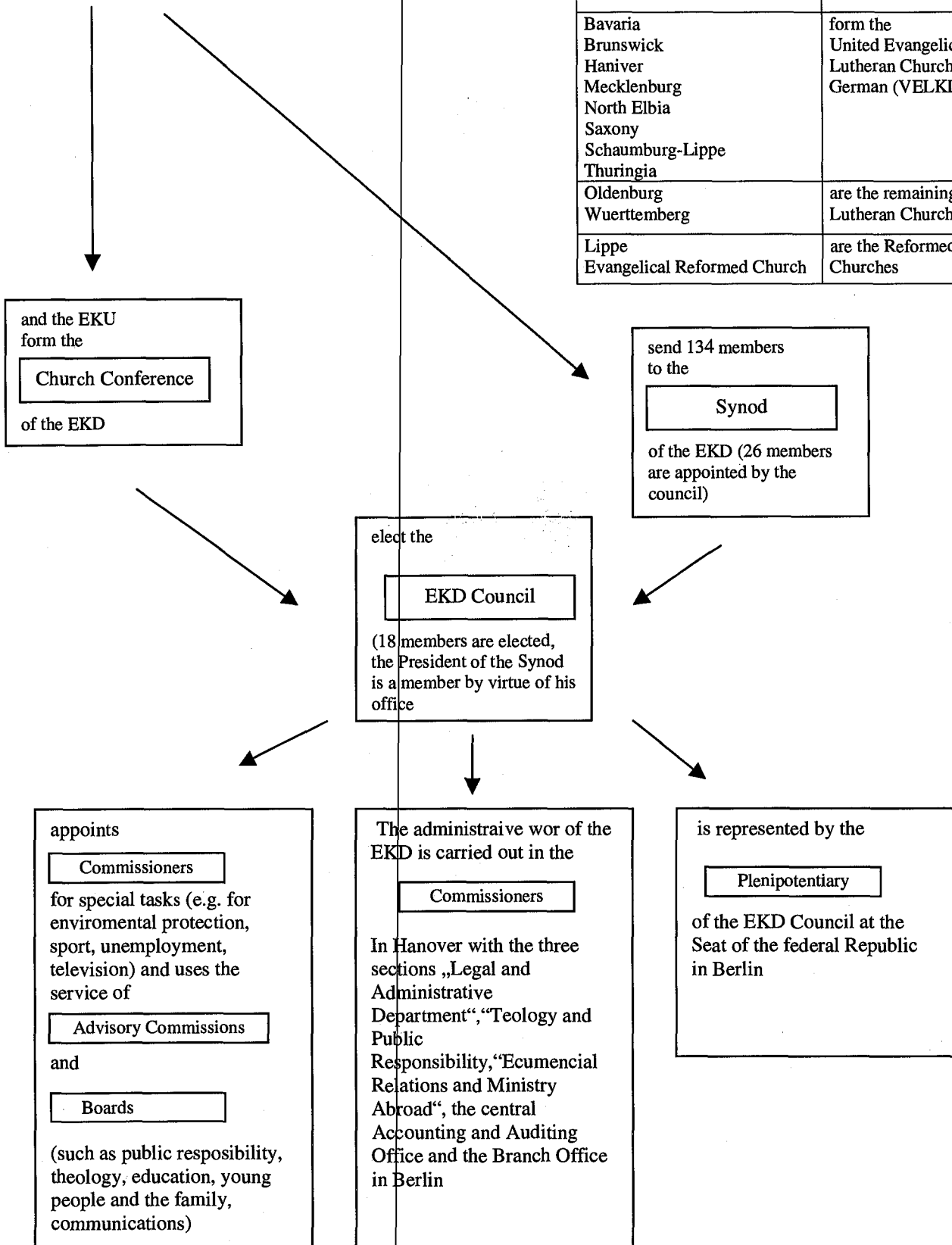
send 134 members
to the
Synod
of the EKD (26 members
are appointed by the
council)

elect the
EKD Council
(18 members are elected,
the President of the Synod
is a member by virtue of his
office)

appoints
Commissioners
for special tasks (e.g. for
enviromental protection,
sport, unemployment,
television) and uses the
service of
Advisory Commissions
and
Boards
(such as public responsibility,
theology, education, young
people and the family,
communications)

The administraive wor of the
EKD is carried out in the
Commissioners
In Hanover with the three
sections „Legal and
Administrative
Department“, “Teology and
Public
Responsibility, “Ecumencial
Relations and Ministry
Abroad“, the central
Accounting and Auditing
Office and the Branch Office
in Berlin

is represented by the
Plenipotentiary
of the EKD Council at the
Seat of the federal Republic
in Berlin



Press Office
Public Relations Desk

Study and Planning
Group

Desk for
Women's Concerns

EKD Church Office

headed by:
the Executive Group led by the President of the Church Office
assigned to the President of the Church Office

Selection I „Legal and Administrative Department“				Selection II „Theology and Public Responsibility“			Selection III „Ecumenical Relations and Ministry Abroad (Office for Foreign Relations)		
Organs, Church Office, Basic Issues of Church Politics	Law	Finances	Branch Office in Berlin	Theological Socioethical and Political Issues	Proclamation, Education, Church Services and Agencies	Education	Ecumenical relations, Church Development Service	Europe, Ministry Abroad and Regional Ecumenical Relations	Overseas Ministry Abroad and Regional Ecumenical Relations
Council, Church Conference, Church Office	Synod, Legal Issues	Finances	General Affairs of the Branch Office	General Principles	Bible Worship, Catholica, Judaism	Education	Basic Ecumenical Issues, World Federations	General Affairs	Near and Middle East
Staff, Administration, Organisation	Labour Law	EKD Budget	Legal Issues	Theological Issues	Congregation, Ministry, Work with Senior Citizen	Adult Education	Free Churches, Orthodox and Churches in Exil	Notern and Eastern Europe	Far East, Australia
	Legal Advice, Constitu- tional Law	Special Budget- ary Issues	Theological Issues	Issues of Public Respon- sibility	Church Associations and Agencies	Education ,Students and Ideo- logical Issues	World Religions, Islam, Work with foreigner	Western, Europe, Education in Work with Foreigners	Regional Legal Issues
	Special Legal Issues	Taxes	Human Rights Issues	Social Policy		Educa- tional Aspects of Eastern Member Churches	Church Development Service	Southern Europe, Holiday Ministry	Africa
	Registration, Church Membership		Work with Foreigners	Communi- cations			Studies on Development Policy	Regional Legal Issues	Brazil, North and Central America
	Church Service Law		Forestry	Conscien- tious Objektion			Dialogue on North-South Issues		La Plata Countries, Chile, South America
	European Community Law		Agriculture	Eastern Member Churches and the Enviroment			Human Rights issues in the Third World		Ecumenical Education Scholarships
	Statistics			Foreigners, Ethnic Minorities					

Central
Accounting and
Auditing Office

Office of the EKD
Council Chairman

Commissioner for
Data Protection

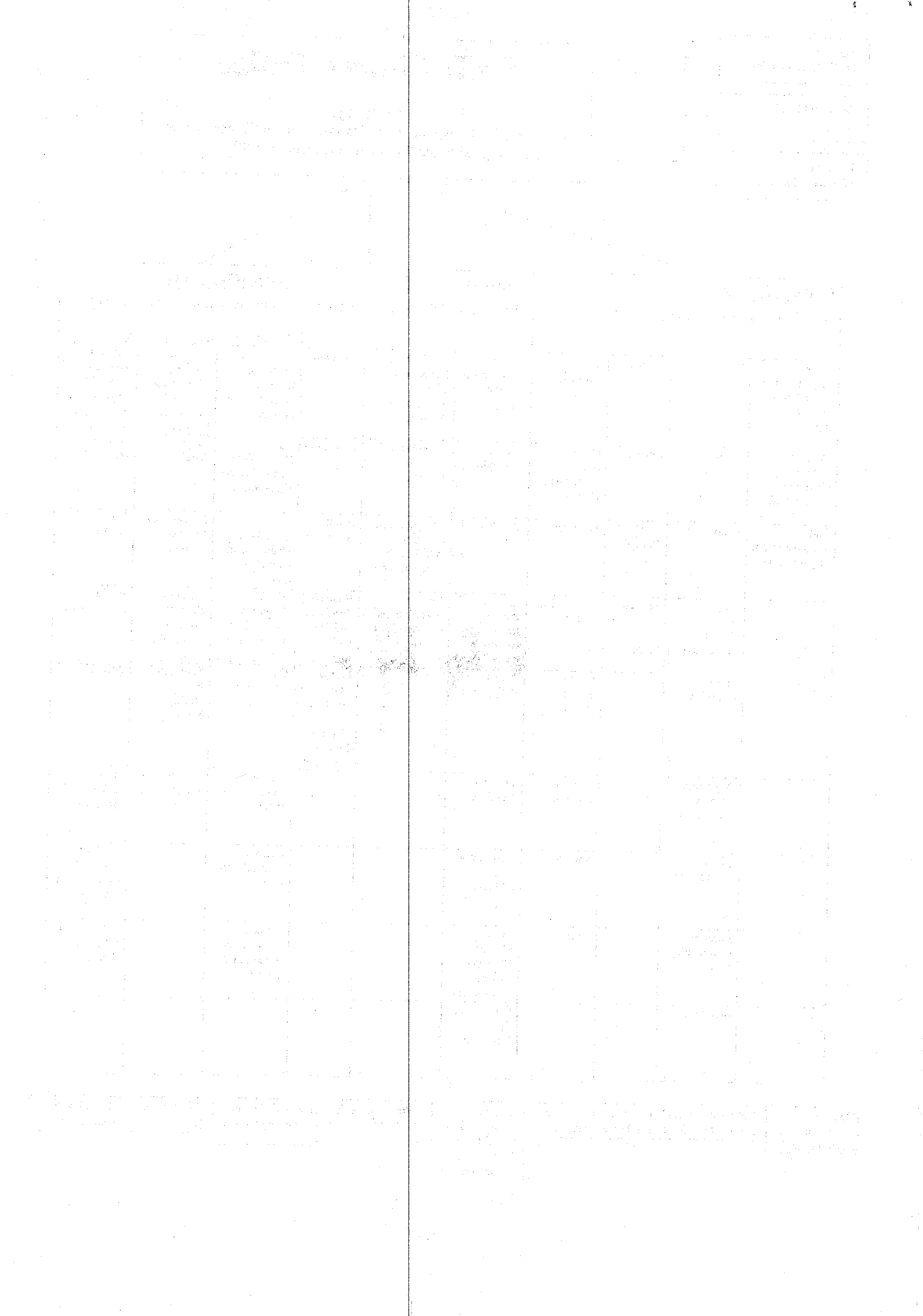
Protestant
Correspondence
School for
Church
Professions

Workshop Desk

Pastoral Care in
Penal Institutions

Work with
Resettlers

Committee for
eastern churches



Many nations are today commemorating the date on which World War II ended in Europe. Every nation is doing so with different feelings, depending on its fate. Be it victory or defeat, liberation from injustice and alien rule or transition to new dependence, division, new alliances, vast shifts of power — May 8, 1945 is a date of decisive historical importance for Europe. For us, the 8th of May is above all a date to remember what people had to suffer. It is also a date to reflect on the course taken by our history. The greater honesty we show in commemorating this day, the freer we are to face the consequences with due responsibility. For us Germans, the 8th of May is not a day of celebration. Those who actually witnessed that day in 1945 think back on highly personal and hence highly different experiences. Some returned home, others lost their homes. Some were liberated, whilst for others it was the start of captivity. Many were simply grateful that the bombing at night and fear had passed and that they had survived. Others felt first and foremost grief at the complete defeat suffered by their country. Some Germans felt bitterness about their shattered illusions, whilst others were grateful for the gift of a new start.

Guilt and Responsibility

On the 8th May, 1945, the second World-War came to an end with the capitulation of Germany and an end to the twelve years of Nazi rule. On the 40th year of the capitulation of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker (President of the Federal Republic of West Germany till 1994) addressed the Parliament with a very memorable speech, from which the following extracts have been taken.



May 8, 1945 –

a date of decisive historical importance for Europe

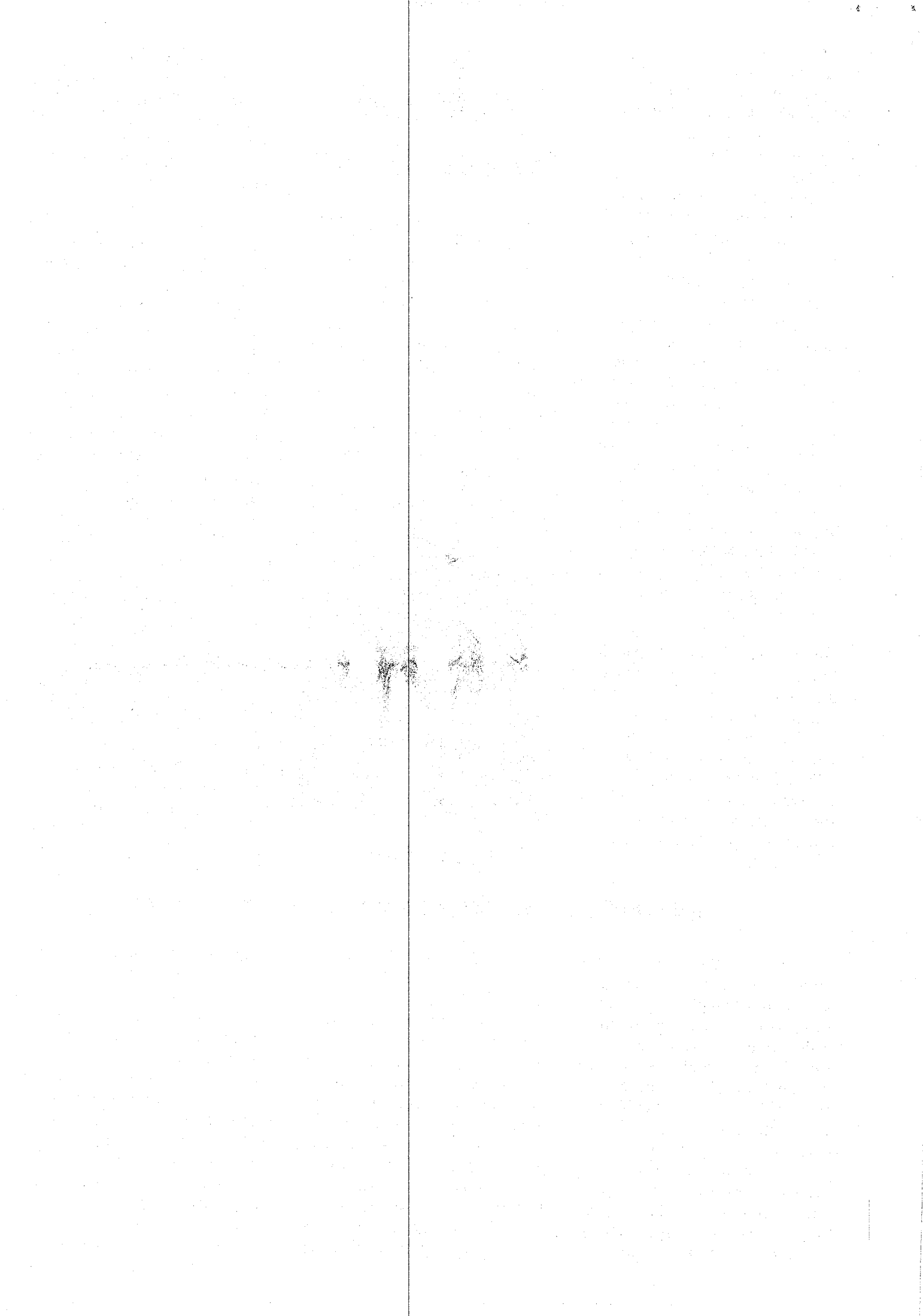
Yet with every day something became clearer, and this must be stated on behalf of all of us today: the 8th of May was a day of liberation. It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National-Socialist regime. Nobody will, because of that liberation, forget the grave suffering that only started for many people on May 8. But we must not regard the end of the war as the cause of flight, expulsion and deprivation of freedom. The cause goes back to the start of the tyranny that

brought about war. We must not separate May 8, 1945 from January 30, 1933.

Today we mourn all the dead of the war and the tyranny. In particular we commemorate the six million Jews who were murdered in German concentration camps. We commemorate all nations who suffered in the war, especially the countless citizens of the Soviet Union and Poland who lost their lives. As Germans, we mourn our own compatriots who perished as soldiers, during air

raids at home, in captivity or during expulsion. We commemorate the Sinti and Roma gypsies, the homosexuals and the mentally ill who were killed, as well as the people who had to die for their religious or political beliefs. We commemorate the hostages who were executed. We recall the victims of the resistance movements in all the countries occupied by us. As Germans, we pay homage to the victims of the German resistance — among the public, the military, the churches, the workers and trade unions, and the communists. We commemorate those who did not actively resist, but preferred to die instead of violating their conscience. The perpetration of this crime was in the hands of a few people. It was concealed from the eyes of the public; but every German was able to experience what his Jewish compatriots had to suffer, ranging from plain apathy and hidden intolerance to outright hatred. Who could remain unsuspecting after the burning of the synagogues, the plundering, the stigmatization with the Star of David, the deprivation of rights, the ceaseless violation of human dignity? Whoever opened his eyes and ears and sought information could not fail to notice that Jews were being deported. The nature and scope of the destruction may

have exceeded human imagination, but in reality there was, apart from the crime itself, the attempt by too many people, including those of my generation, who were young and were not involved in planning the events and carrying them out, not to take note of what was happening. There were many ways of not burdening one's conscience, of shunning responsibility, looking away, keeping mum. When the unspeakable truth of the Holocaust then became known at the



end of the war, all too many of us claimed that they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything.

There is no such thing as the guilt or innocence of an entire nation. Guilt is, like innocence, not collective, but personal. There is discovered or concealed individual guilt. There is guilt which people acknowledge or deny. Everyone who directly experienced that era should today quietly ask himself about his involvement then.

The vast majority of today's population were either children then or had not been born. They cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes that they did not com-

ence suffering and injustice long after the 8th of May. Those of us who were born here often do not have the imagination or the open heart with which to grasp the real meaning of their harsh fate. Very soon and in exemplary fashion the expellees identified themselves with the renunciation of force. That was no passing declaration in the early stages of helplessness but a commitment which has retained its validity. Renouncing the use of force means allowing trust to grow on all sides; it means that a Germany that has regained its strength remains bound by it. The expellees' own homeland has meanwhile

the end of the war, on this 8th of May in 1949, the Parliamentary Council adopted our Basic Law. Transcending party differences, the democrats on the Council gave their answer to war and tyranny in Article 1 of our constitution: "The German people acknowledge inviolable and inalienable human rights as the basis of any community, of peace and of justice in the world." This further significance of the 8th of May should also be remembered today.

We certainly have no reason to be arrogant and selfrighteous. But we may look back with gratitude on our development over these

1942: Jews in the occupied Netherlands. Like in all European countries under Nazi regime, there, too, the Jews were persecuted and deported. And not only the Jews. Also the gipsies, and all those who offered political resistance.



mit. No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left them a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it. We cannot commemorate the 8th of May without being conscious of the great effort required on the part of our former enemies to set out on the road of reconciliation with us.

In our country the biggest sacrifice was demanded of those who had been driven out of their homeland. They were to experi-

become a homeland for others. In many of the old cemeteries in eastern Europe you will today find more Polish than German graves. The compulsory migration of millions of Germans to the west was followed by the migration of millions of Poles and, in their wake, millions of Russians. These are all people who were not asked, people who suffered injustice, people who became defenceless objects of political events and to whom no compensation for those injustices and no offsetting of claims can make up for what has been done to them. We have put democratic freedom in the place of oppression. Four years after

40 years, if we use the memory of our own history as a guideline for our future behaviour...

- If we remember that mentally disturbed persons were put to death in the Third Reich, we will see caring for people with psychiatric disorders as our own responsibility.
- If we remember how people persecuted on grounds of race, religion and politics and threatened with certain death often stood before the closed borders with other countries, we shall not close the door today on those who are genuinely persecuted and seek protection with us.

- If we reflect on the penalties for free thinking under the dictatorship, we will protect the freedom of every idea and every criticism, however much it may be directed against ourselves.
- Whoever criticizes the situation in the Middle East should think of the fate to which Germans condemned their Jewish fellow human beings, a fate that led to the establishment of the State of Israel under conditions which continue to burden people in that region even today.
- If we think of what our eastern neighbours had to suffer during the war, we will find it easier to understand that accommodation and peaceful neighbourly relations with these countries remain central tasks of German foreign policy. It is important that both sides remember and that both sides respect each other. Mikhail Gorbachov, General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, declared that it was not the intention of the Soviet leaders at the 40th anniversary of the end of the war to stir up anti-German feelings. The Soviet Union, he said, was committed to friendship between nations. Particularly if we have doubts about Soviet contributions to understanding between East and West and about respect for human rights in all parts of Europe, we must not ignore this signal from Moscow. We seek friendship with the peoples of the Soviet Union.

Let us honour freedom.
 Let us work for peace.
 Let us respect the rule of law.
 Let us be true to our own
 conception of justice.
 On this 8th of May,
 let us face up as well as
 we can to the truth.

RICHARD VON WEIZSÄCKER

Church in Socialism

An uneasy course between alliance and resistance

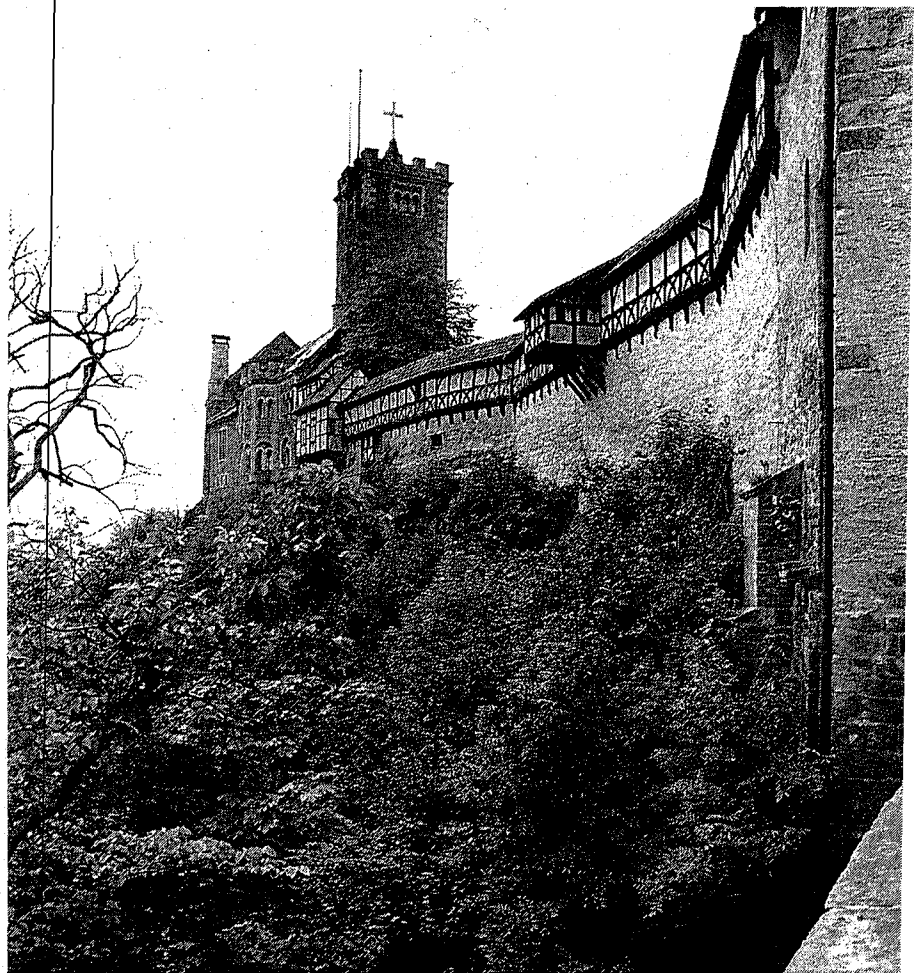
As a result of World War II Germany was divided into two separate states. The Protestant churches had special bilateral relationships across the borders although they had to give up their organizational unity after the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961. The journalist Reinhard Henkys describes the development of the church in the GDR before the "Wende" (1989) and the reunification (1990).

REINHARD HENKYS

The area of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) comprised the core areas of the Lutheran Reformation. When the State was formed in 1949, under the leadership of the Communist

Party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), more than 90% of the people belonged to the Protestant Church. The Catholic Church was and remains in diaspora. In the eighties, according to estimates only 30 to 40% of the citizens belonged to a Christian Church anymore and even less in the cities. This is the result of the socialist reorganization of society, which, at least during the first two decades, was combined with a struggle against the so-called bourgeois ideology of which the

The Wartburg was a most visited place in 1983, the so-called "Luther Year". It was at the Wartburg that Dr. Martin Luther translated the Bible.





Demonstration on 1st May, the Day of Work, in 1963, in East Berlin. The Socialist Union Party (SED) wanted to bring the "farmers and workers" together as a new national group, with centralist and socialistic ideas. Between adjustment and resistance, the Church had to find her own way of being there for the people.

Churches were said to be a main representative. The eight Protestant Churches of the GDR merged with the Churches of the present-day Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to form the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) after World War II. The Churches held onto this organized community of Churches even when the GDR departed from their previously pursued goal of the political reunification of the two states on the territory of Germany and erected the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961. The Protestant Churches were therefore regarded as a type of "fifth column" of the FRG whose government refused to acknowledge the GDR as a state of its own in the 1960ies and claimed to represent all of Germany.

Only in 1969 a fundamental change did come about. The Churches in the GDR realized that in holding on to the unity of the EKD, an effective relationship with the people of the GDR was made increasingly difficult and they decided to establish an independent church federation, dropping their membership in the

EKD. They expressly declared however, that this separation concerned only the legal and organizational domain; there were no theological reasons. There existed an intensive relationship between the regional churches of the FRG and of the GDR and their respective church.

ches have pledged to support a policy aimed at détente and the preservation of peace. And this relationship took shape in a wide reaching network of partner relationships between parishes in East and West. The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR was com-

Cooperation and Resistance

organizations, the church Federation in the East and the EKD in the West. This relationship was more intensive than any relationship to a church in any other country, although the GDR Churches took their participation in the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations very seriously and had systematically built up a network of bilateral church relationships to the East as well as the West. The special relationship of the Protestant Churches in both German States became visible in joint statements in which both Churches

posed of regional churches of varying sizes. The goals of the federation were to grow together through cooperation into a witnessing and serving community. Three of these regional churches — Saxony, Thüringen and Mecklenburg — are bound to the Lutheran tradition and in addition belonged to their own union, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in the GDR. The remaining five churches belonged to the Evangelical Church of the Union in which the Lutheran and the reformed traditions are brought together. This Union was com-

posed of the Berlin-Brandenburg (without W. Berlin), the Province of Saxony, the Anhalts, the Greif and the Görlitzer Churches.

The Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR had taken a position which is summarized in the statement "Church in Socialism." The Church did not challenge the political structure and took the permanence of the GDR and its social system as given. The Federation did not want to enter into a type of religious ghetto in this society characterized by socialism. It did not want to be an association only to take care of cultus and private religious needs, but to help the Christians in the GDR to find their position in society and to actively contribute to the welfare of the whole society. This new definition of the church's position resulted in a new definition of the goals of the state's church politics. The GDR leadership worked from the assumption that Churches and Christian faith are not the remnants of the bourgeois society, but have their own right in the socialist society. Therefore confrontation was to be reduced and cooperation encouraged where it appeared possible to both partners. There was the formula that the Socialist State and the Christian Church mutually respect each other's identity and standing. The new orientation of church politics became evident in a discussion which took place between the chairman of the "Staatsrat" and SED-Secretary General Erich Honecker and the executive committee of the Church Federation, led by Bishop Albrecht Schönherr on March 6, 1978. The Churches once again gained greater leeway, also in public. They got the right to build new churches in the so-called new socialist cities, to have large church gatherings and to report freely about church activities in the church press even addressing themes which were taboo in state-

managed publications. Since 1978, time has been made available for short regular broadcasts of the Church Federation on the state radio and television.

The state has explicitly given the Church Federation the right to independent peace work. The Church attempted an education for peace as opposed to the state's military education. They had not only opposed the new nuclear weapons in the FRG but also in their own country and they were for some time the focus for an independent critical peace movement in the GDR under the motto "Swords to Ploughs".

The new relationship between State and Church has not led to the solution or by-passing of all conflicts. However, both sides attempted to avoid conflicts which would drive them into fundamental confrontations, but to discuss problems.

However, the state was not prepared to discuss all topics. The Church Federation had still not been allowed to negotiate with those responsible for education about the settlement of the fundamental conflict to which dedicated Christian students and apprentices are subject in the education system.

The GDR constitution guaranteed freedom of belief and conscience. However, the state's goal in education was the training of communist personalities. Young Christians who rejected the state approved 'youth initiation' and decided for confirmation or refused certain state requirements, still suffered disadvantages. They were often not able to receive a high school diploma or to study. Leading positions in state and society were in any cases closed to Christians in the GDR system with the exception of the small number of such positions occupied by members of the Christian Democratic Union, a SED-affiliated party.

