

²¹ *Newsweek*, 6 September 1976.

²² J. Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 161; T. Beeson, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-4.

²³ For an analogous situation in Yugoslavia, see Stella Alexander: "Church-State Relations in Yugoslavia: Recent Developments", *RCL*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1977, pp. 239, 240.

²⁴ See "GDR: Evening in a Parish" by John Arnold, *RCL*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1977, pp. 241-3. The author finds similarities in the situation of churches in East Germany and in Great Britain.

²⁵ Since 1974 West German journalists have been working in East Berlin.

Postscript

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In recent months improving church-state relations in the GDR have culminated in an agreement that could inaugurate an entirely new phase, both in church history and in the attitude of the ruling Socialist Unity Party to Christian citizens. On 6 March 1978 Party Secretary Erich Honnecker met the Presiding Bishop of the Federation of Protestant Churches, Dr. Albrecht Schönherr for a "summit conference" which has no East German precedents. Both men were accompanied by senior officials of (on both sides) their own choosing.

A detailed communiqué was given pride of place in all of East Germany's media the following day. It was read in full on television. Far from being a bland statement of "total accord on a wide range of issues", both leaders were separately quoted stating on the one hand the State's position, on the other the Church's. There was no suggestion that these are or could be identical. There was the clear affirmation that Christians could have a distinctive and not unimportant role to play in society. This reflected the church leadership's contention that the Church was neither pro-communist nor anti-communist, but a distinctive entity, playing a positive role "within socialist society".

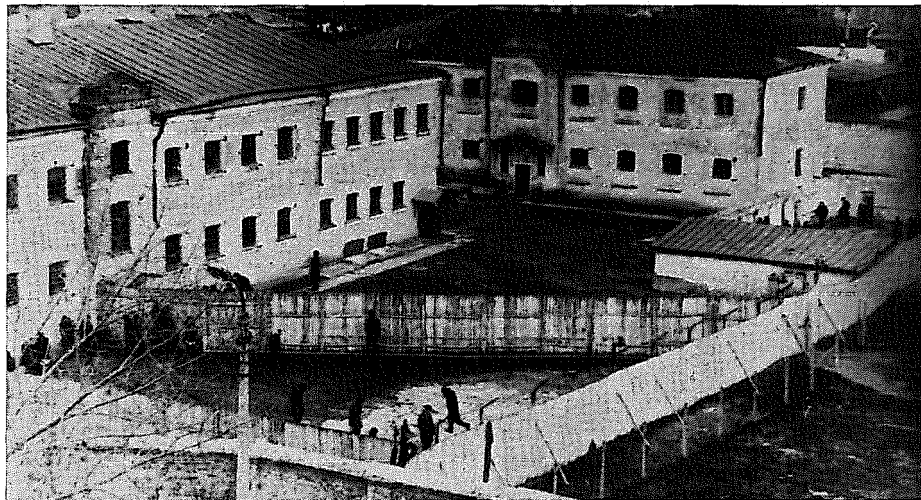
For the first time the State was implicitly accepting this position, and at the same time explicitly giving far more positive content to the concept of freedom of religion. For one thing, it was clearly implied that the Church speaks for Christian citizens. To be realistic, the Protestant Federation probably speaks for up to a quarter of the population. Hitherto it was officially held that the Christian Democratic Union (the pro-communist politically active Christians) spoke for Christians. At the 6 March meeting the chairman of the CDU was not even present. He was merely briefed by Herr Honnecker a few days later.

In effect the State has made some major concessions. It has given a firm assurance that young Christians will have the same opportunities in higher education as all others. This had been a major area of church-state friction. Permits have been given for the building of some 50 new churches in new towns and suburbs; this is in addition to the rebuilding of Berlin Cathedral next to the new "Palace of the Republic" which houses the parliament. This vast building programme will be largely paid for by the Church in West Germany. The State will benefit from the hard currency.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the new development in church-state relations is that the State has agreed to give time on radio and even television for the Churches. On radio both a weekly service (this is not new) and religious news will be broadcast. On Good Friday channel two of GDR Television inaugurated the new policy: a recording of the St Matthew Passion from St Thomas's Church in Leipzig was broadcast and was followed (at peak viewing time) by a meditation conducted by Bishop Schönherr.

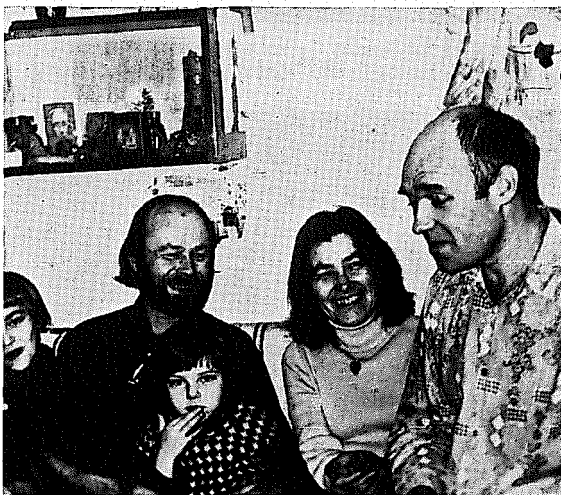
In the communiqué itself Bishop Schönherr is quoted as saying that the agreement will be judged by the effect it has on the lives of ordinary Christians. He was, in other words, saying that concessions to the Church as an institution were not as important as full religious liberty for each individual. Such statements have their only East European parallel in neighbouring Poland with its strong Roman Catholic Church.

Some East German Protestants fear what could become a kind of *concordat*, with almost a state church as in Romania. Given the theology and the intellectual independence of the present East German church leadership this is – most commentators think – highly improbable. What has developed between Church and State is the recognition that good relations are in their mutual interest. There is no reason to believe that this need undermine the critical solidarity with society, for which the leaders of East German protestantism have become known and much respected. Theological development in East Germany fits neither eastern nor western stereotypes conceived in an era of cold war.



(Above) The prison psychiatric hospital in Oryol (USSR), one of a dozen such institutions in which religious and other dissenters are held for periods of up to 15 years. The book *Russia's Political Hospitals* is reviewed on pp. 104-5.

(Top right) (right to left) Pyotr Starchik, Orthodox Christian forcibly interned in psychiatric hospitals partly for his belief; Saida Starchik, his wife; Felix Serebrov, member of the Moscow "Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes", sentenced to one year in a labour camp in August 1977; the Starchik children.

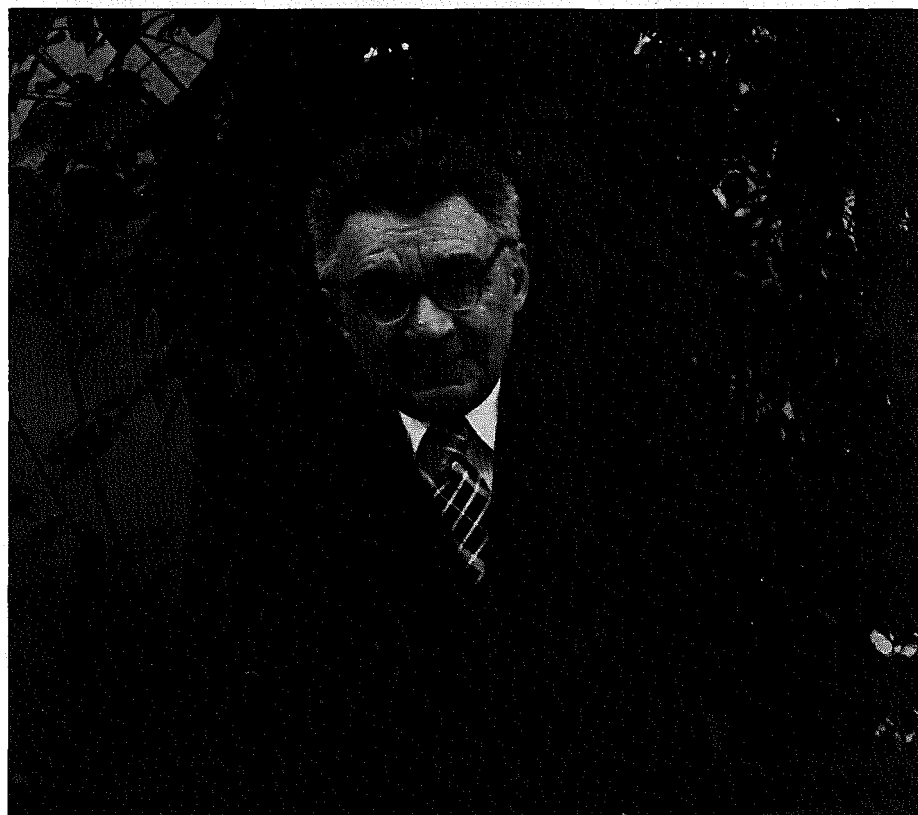


(Bottom right) Gennadi Shimanov and his wife, Alla, and their son (1973). In 1969 Shimanov was forcibly interned in a Moscow mental hospital for his religious beliefs.





The seminary for Roman Catholic priests in Kaunas, Lithuania. Dr Butkus (see document pp. 117-118) is sitting in the front row, fourth from right.



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