

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbct-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php)

## **Repress, Retaliate or Reconcile? How to Come to Terms with the Truth\***

HEINO FALCKE

### **The Difficult Task of Dealing with the Past**

#### *In Society*

How should we deal with yesterday's rulers and collaborators, and how should we deal with the way we ourselves developed within the old structures of injustice? These are crucial questions after every revolution, but especially after a non-violent one. How we answer them depends to a great extent on how much benefit to humanity the revolution actually brings. This benefit is currently under threat, as we see for ourselves daily. Current political and economic interests hide continuing injustice and bring former functionaries into new positions of power. It is threatened by the culprits' not having the faculties of self-criticism to recognise (or not wanting to recognise) what they have done, as demonstrated by appearances in the media – and in many a talk between culprit and victim. It is threatened by the written records and knowledge of the past being misused by those in power and generally for political ends. It is further threatened by scapegoating, by means of which blame is foisted onto a particular group of culprits so as to mask the crimes of other groups such as political factions. There is, moreover, a tendency for the West to make the entire population of the former GDR into a collective scapegoat by projecting onto them the image of the hateful German, an image which thus replaces the old enemy image of communism. This degradation ends up giving rise to self-justification and makes a self-critical, sophisticated reappraisal of our past by ourselves almost impossible.

One of the benefits to humanity is the establishment of the rule of law, which is a prized possession. But the inability to administer justice so as to include political crimes and misdemeanours jeopardises the authority of the law and people's trust in the rule of justice. However, if we expect the law and the justice system to undertake the process of 'overcoming the past' (*'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'*) then we ask too much of them and risk bringing them into disrepute. They are indispensable instruments urgently in need of further development, so as to prevent a continuation of injustice in a society as yet unreconciled with its past, in part to see to it that compensation be made, and to facilitate a fairer social contract; but no more than that. The

\* This paper was first presented at the first Seminar on Reappraising the Recent Past in the Churches of Eastern and Western Europe, Berlin, 25–27 April 1993.

very concept of ‘overcoming the past’ is in itself misguided and misleading. It suggests that the past is a feasibility study like economic or technical projects. Language itself reveals this in expressions like ‘destalinisation’ or ‘cleansing’ or ‘self-purification’ (*Selbstreinigung*). Whoever wants to ‘overcome’ the past has to take forcible measures. What we should be seeking and talking about is the free and liberating act of facing up to the past. According to biblical and Protestant thinking, however, we are to undertake this liberating task not through the Law but only through the Gospel, not through our own works, but through forgiveness of sins, which can only be accepted. So we come to the task of the church.

### *In the Church*

It is to the church that this Good News is entrusted; indeed it is at the heart of its message. Those behind the Reformation pointed to the sinner’s justification by grace alone, through faith, as being the article of faith by which the church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Today we need to understand this living core of the church as part and parcel of its social relevance. Those who constantly stress that the church must remain the church are simply out of touch at a time when the church in its centre-stage position is being asked for what are political responses by way of social welfare work, and guidance from the Gospel on dealing with the past.

Our churches have or create some difficulties of their own, however. Werner Krusche gave a lecture in 1984 called *Guilt and Forgiveness: the Basis of Christian Peace Negotiation*.<sup>1</sup> He shone a critical light on the way our church deals with the question of guilt, and in particular with the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt of 1945. The lecture repays rereading. Taking some of Werner Krusche’s observations, I shall try to identify a few of the dangers and temptations connected with the task of dealing with the past in our churches.

We acknowledge and confess our guilt before God in the person of Christ. In the presence of God – *coram deo* in the words of Luther – confession is both compulsory and liberating. Here it is removed from any tactical consideration, any calculation of advantage. This ‘standing before God’ takes absolute precedence for the church, and must be retained at all costs. However, our churches are now in danger of actually giving precedence to ‘standing before men’. In the light of the current media campaign this is all too understandable, and hence such a temptation. The smear campaign against the ‘Church in Socialism’ aims to destroy the church’s authority and its ability to adopt a critical, active role. Thus the church swings to and fro between ‘honour and dishonour’ (2 Cor. 6:8), between the book by Gerhard Besier accusing the Protestant Church in the GDR of collaborating with the authorities and the article by Reinhard Henkys in *Frankfurter Rundschau* defending the church’s record. Out of concern for its own image, the church is but a step away from submitting the exposure of its guilt to the publicity this would generate and thus delivering it in calculated doses. Paul, whom I have just quoted, comprehensively defended himself against ‘malicious rumours’; but at the same time he was careful to retain the right perspective. He says ‘I care very little if I am judged by any human court. ... It is the Lord who judges me’ (1 Cor. 4:3–4). If the church remains a church, it lives before God, and there the church’s political calculations are left out of the equation in the acknowledgement and confession of guilt.

Werner Krusche regards ‘privatisation’ or ‘internalisation’ on the part of the church as a departure from the Stuttgart Confession. Particularly from the Lutheran side it was stressed that Stuttgart had been a confession before God and before one’s

Christian brothers, but not before public opinion.<sup>2</sup> Are guilt and forgiveness then an internal matter for the church? Certainly, insofar as first and foremost we must speak to one another in the church and cannot decide internal church conflicts in the media. 'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you ...' (Matt. 18:15) is worth keeping in mind here. But true as it is that guilt is acknowledged and confessed before God, it must also be confessed before men. 'Guilt is always at once guilt before God and before men, at once personal and political guilt.'<sup>3</sup> This is all the more true when it is a matter of guilt in the realm of the church's public testimony and service. Only by honourably and honestly facing up to its own guilt – and that means publicly – can our church help public opinion towards a liberated and liberating treatment of the past.

To quote Krusche again: 'Recognition of guilt also includes recognition of the historical mistakes which have given rise to that guilt.'<sup>4</sup> Within the church guilt is often falsely personalised, and at the very least this comes close to scapegoating. A church official from Thuringia said in *Thüringer Allgemeiner* that the Stasi collaborators amongst church workers were now going to be tracked down and 'separated out'. Good disciplinary measures are necessary in some cases, but does the church thereby cleanse itself? Self-purification of the church by separating out the wrongdoers? No, proposals like the 'Thuringia way' need critical reappraisal: the least they have done is to lower considerably the inhibition threshold for collaboration with the state and security services. An analysis of this kind has in fact at last begun.<sup>5</sup> It is not the case that the churches of the *Kirchenbund* (the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR) have to make a confession just because they chose the way of the 'Church in Socialism'.

The people who are now asking us for a confession of guilt are the very people who through their anticommunism suppressed German guilt towards the people of Eastern Europe and who are now transferring their enemy image onto the church in socialism. No, we consciously accepted the socialist society as a field of activity and opportunity for service as our Christian calling. As well as uncovering evidence of Stasi collaboration it would be appropriate to acknowledge the evidence of what this calling entailed: the many, many questions of conscience that Christians had to decide concerning confirmation or youth dedication, military service or conscientious objection, and the issues constantly raised every day at work over which risks could responsibly be taken and which compromises made. Whoever followed the way of the 'Church in Socialism' already has a track record in training his conscience, and we need such people in our new society.

What need critical reappraisal, however, are theological positions which led us astray and hindered us, such as the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms as an ideology of accommodation and the suppression of conflict,<sup>6</sup> or the shocking misuse made of the Barmen Theological Declaration by Hanfried Müller.<sup>7</sup> I must also say that I was really horrified when in a television discussion with Gerhard Besier Bishop Hempel quoted the two phrases 'the church must remain the church' and 'the church is for everyone but not for everything' among the (I think) three elements he saw as essential for the path followed by the *Kirchenbund*. These very phrases were the two watchwords which were constantly held before the church as 'expectations on the part of the state' and which were supposed to serve as the church's political instruments against informal groups.

In the same television discussion the Leipzig theologian Zimmermann gave as his motivation for collaborating with the Stasi his conviction that there had to be a church in that socialist state. This motivation does not justify him, however: the understanding of the church that lies behind it must be questioned critically because

it corrupts the church, as does the functional theory of religion which was taught in Leipzig as the basis for the 'Church in Socialism'.<sup>8</sup> What role did the non-theological factor of a structural conservatism play in the position characterised by Zimmermann? He is describing a basic political model of behaviour, which can be blended with confessions and ideologies and endure under a variety of confessional and ideological systems. This model of behaviour explains the fact that those whose aim was to stabilise the 'Volkskirche' and church structures frequently also contributed to the stabilisation of the GDR as a state, and that after the 'Wende' the very same people were at once to be found amongst those working to stabilise the western system and its church structures.

Structural conservatism was also what lay behind the reservations and aversion some church leaders felt towards the informal groups and the danger they presented to church and state order. Structural conservative thinking expects that even changes will come only 'from above', as a product of tried and tested professional and political competence and in an orderly manner. The conservative values which characterised the thinking of the informal groups did not appear realistic but utopian, idealistic, not 'politically viable'. If these models of behaviour are not reappraised, and worked out afresh, then nothing will change in the relationship between the church and the informal groups despite the experience of autumn 1989.

Manfred Stolpe is constantly attacked on account of his contacts with the state and secret police while he was head of the administration of the church province of Berlin-Brandenburg. Now is the right time to question the whole concept of the church and politics which lay behind his conduct and which he – among many others – has to answer for. Werner Krusche once said: 'A church which only wants to survive (*überleben*) has outlived itself (*ist überlebt*)'. What problematic role has the church's self-interest in its own survival played in this church policy? Where has the strategy of conflict avoidance and conflict minimalisation diminished our witness, a witness that could have altered our reputation as moderates and brought us into conflict situations?

The fortress mentality and strategy of the Catholic Church was also a strategy of self-preservation and in no way the confrontation or stance of a confessing church, as the Catholic Church now seems to like to portray it. At the very least there is tension between the fortress strategy and the church's mission to go out into the world.

Even my own concept of 'reformable socialism' must however be critically analysed in retrospect. Certainly the formula was theologically rather than empirically based and the state regarded it as extremely hostile to socialism. But was the willingness of theologians to entertain the possibility of reforming socialism not also an open door to accepting the real-life socialism then in existence and enabling coexistence with it? And in so doing did we not avoid empirical sociological analysis, which would have exposed the structural unreformability of this socialism and made a more radical critique of it necessary?

In the end, forgiveness and reconciliation are endangered, on the one hand, by cheap mercy, and on the other hand, by the demand for exposure of guilt and for confession as preconditions for forgiveness. At any rate, this seems to be how the discussion is polarising at present. Some people point to cheap mercy in church and society which saves wrongdoers from having their crimes discovered, which handles the scrutiny of the records in a lax way and which demonstrates an inability to grieve. Others appeal to the unconditional mercy of God and see in the zeal for exposing and digging up the past a 'righteous anger' which they want publicly 'laid at the base of the cross'. This is however no witness to Christ's mercy.

It would be disastrous if these positions were to polarise further. We must dig deeper theologically here, in two directions.

- i. It is indisputable that recognition of guilt and confession are inseparable from forgiveness. But how do they belong together? The fathers of the Reformation spoke here about 'Law and Gospel' or 'Gospel and Law' and considered that making a distinction between them with an overall inseparability was the most fundamental and important art of theology and pastoral care. How is this art to be practised today?
- ii. We must resist the tendency to efface the distinction between offenders and victims.<sup>9</sup> Since the epistles of the Apostle Paul Christian teaching on sin has been shaped around the need to demonstrate sin's universality. It thereby testifies, as it were, to the other side of the coin: the universality of atonement, which Christ accomplished on the cross. Because Christ died for all, we must all grasp, Jews and Greeks, Christians and heathens, that we have all sinned and stand in need of this atonement. The socio-political relevance of this understanding becomes clear if we recall what Gustav Heinemann said in the Bundestag against the self-righteousness of anticommunism: Christ did not die *against* Karl Marx but *for* us all.

The weakness of this universal concept of sin is that it threatens to minimise concrete guilt and especially to efface the historical distinction between offender and victim. It rightly sparks off howls of protest from the victim. At a conference of a Christian action group for the abolition of torture a Frenchwoman pointed out that universal forgiveness of sins destroys justice. Nobody on earth would be safe if murderers were simply forgiven. This kind of forgiveness is an expression of the world's indifference, not of its mercy.

The Old Testament talks of guilt and wrong in concrete terms. The redeeming force of justice restores right to the oppressed and brings the oppressor to repentance. The Jesus of the Gospels also speaks plainly of the guilt of the rich and powerful. He turns to the poor and the outcasts and stands as a sacrifice by their side. Contemporary Liberation Theology reflects how victims and offenders can break free from a past dogged by guilt and suffering to a new existence together. We must bring this liberation theology perspective into our Protestant theology of guilt and forgiveness. This leads to the question 'Where is our theological discussion located?' Where do we stand when we speak of guilt and forgiveness? With the victims, with the offenders; or do we think we can speak from a third standpoint? If today more than ever representatives of society's informal groups, that is the victims – this overemotional word keeps cropping up – insist on the crimes of yesterday being brought into the open, this is not only psychologically understandable and forgivable, but is within their God-given right. On the other hand, if others make the unconditional grace of God valid for all, then they must stand unequivocally where the victims of yesterday were, instead of doubting their motives, oppressing, hindering or even intimidating them in their striving towards the truth, and portraying them anew as the disturbers of universal reconciliatory peace.

I would now like to examine both these core theological issues a little more thoroughly.

### **Costly Mercy and the Task of Mourning**

Jesus forgives sins unconditionally without expecting sinners to meet any qualifica-

tions. A lame person is brought to him to be healed. Jesus tells him his sins are forgiven without making it clear to him beforehand that forgiveness is in fact what he needs and without testing his consciousness of guilt (Matt. 9:1–8). At his first meeting with Peter, Jesus guides him to make a wonderfully successful catch of fish. Peter is frightened by the divine mystery of this man and falls at his feet: ‘Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man!’ Jesus does nothing to deepen his consciousness of sin, but rather seems to pass it over, replying: ‘Fear not. From now on you will join me in catching men’ (Luke 5: 1–11). The forgiveness is implicit in his words: I want you, I can do something with you.

A dismissive calumny which circulated about Jesus shows that his unconditional acceptance of the outcasts was what made him the public figure he was: ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ (Luke 15:2). Paul explains the death of Jesus on the cross at Easter in the following way: God justifies the godless without the precondition of good works but through grace alone. He reconciled us to himself on the cross of Jesus while we were still His enemies.

What is the relevance of this unconditional forgiveness of sins for our situation? Paul Tillich has compared it to the experience of psychotherapy. The acceptance given by the therapist to the patient liberates the latter to come to terms with his past. Tillich explains the forgiveness of sins as the unconditional acceptance of those who are unacceptable.

I would like to draw your attention to another aspect of all this. Jesus radically and consistently forgoes any opportunity to make the guilt of people into an instrument with which to wield power over them. He resists the common practice of misusing the knowledge of others’ sins in order to dominate them. This is precisely our current socio-political experience: news about other people’s guilt is used as an instrument of power. We are talking about the power of the media. Their ‘outing’ form of journalism spreads fear to the point of suicide and drives the accused into a corner where they have to cover up their own involvement by the desperate art of ‘denying without lying’ (Friedrich Schorlemmer). Knowledge of other people’s culpability gives one power over them, and this power is exerted not just in the form of punishment but also as pardon. Pardon is an exceptional right, which belongs to the head of state alone. Popes have brought emperors to their knees with this power to grant forgiveness or withhold it through excommunication. Confessionals at court were occasionally an instrument of political influence. Those who have the power to forgive can force guilty parties to humiliate themselves, to crawl to the foot of the cross, while themselves basking in their forgiving magnanimity.

Jesus forgoes this power over people although he alone has a right to it. He refers to sins as being already forgiven and does not use a person’s guilt in a repressive way. He does not receive sinners as subjects pardoned by a merciful ruler’s gesture, but ‘he eats with them’, dispels all their fears and celebrates with them as his friends. Only where people are wielding power over the guilty does he aggressively point out their own sins. To those stoning the woman taken in adultery, he says ‘Whoever is without sin, let him cast the first stone!’ (John 8: 1–11).

Jesus does not come as the ruler who makes use of his power of clemency under certain conditions, he comes as the one who serves, as the attendant who does the job of a slave, washing the feet of his friends to symbolise this (John 13). He expressly contrasts his mission to free people from sin with the conduct of the rulers of this world who lord it over their people (Mark 10: 42–45). He thus fulfils the Old Testament promises of the Servant of God who takes the sins of the people on himself and carries them. The Prophet says that the ‘Servant of God’ will be the most despised and

reviled in the eyes of men (Isaiah 53). This is what is fulfilled on the cross of Jesus.

I have gone into all this in so much detail because in my view it gives us a great deal we need to think about. Do not we ourselves use the discovery of others' guilt as an instrument of power? Do not those same civil-rights activists and members of informal groups, who were formerly critics of the authorities and now find themselves in opposition again, need to ask themselves this question? We also must ask ourselves this question if we want to resist the use in our society of others' guilt to gain power over them. Forgiveness is the unconditional non-authoritarian acceptance of the unacceptable. This is my first point.

My second point is equally important, however. Forgiveness can be accepted only in acknowledgement and confession of guilt. Forgiveness of sins in practice is both judgment on sin and an appeal to the sinner to turn away from sin. Rejection of sin is accomplished in the acceptance of the sinner. In the reconciliation which God accomplishes with us the conflict between God and men is not concealed; on the contrary, it comes out in stark relief on the cross.

Forgiveness sets in motion a process of renewal, of catharsis. In the early Christian church the central symbol of this catharsis was baptism. It symbolised a cleansing, a new birth, and Paul understood it in terms of a burial in which the community and the one being baptised bear witness to each other that they have died to sin through the death of Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:1). Very early, the baptism ceremony came to include the express rejection of the devil and all his works.

Let me recall in this connection one of the Easter stories in which this catharsis takes place in the course of a conversation. After a meal with his disciples the resurrected Christ asks Peter: 'Do you love me more than these?' Thus he reminds Peter, the one who denied him, that on the night before he was betrayed he had said: 'Even if all fall away, I will not'. Jesus repeats his question three times in all and thus recalls for us Peter's threefold denial. The Gospel author writes how Peter became upset when Jesus asked him a third time 'Do you love me?', and said to Him 'Lord, you know that I love you'. He realises that he must rely on what Jesus knows about him. Then comes the new commission: 'Feed my sheep' (John 21: 15-17). In this Easter story the fine words of Alexander Mitscherlich, in his postwar book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, on the task of mourning ('*Trauerarbeit* ') find their biblical essence and context. In extremely condensed language and with great reticence the catharsis of mourning is intimated.

How can we today recapture this approach to catharsis? In our inability to mourn we are indeed again or still imprisoned. The mechanisms of self-justification have reached unprecedented levels in our day: I will not list them all. How can we absolve each other for the process of mourning? How can we talk to each other so that the voices of conscience, hitherto drowned out, can be heard again and we can gain real, as opposed to just legal, freedom of conscience?

There are all kinds of ways in which people shirk the task of mourning. In a conversation with an unofficial collaborator who was assigned to me it dawned on me that instant verbal forgiveness can amount to shirking the painful process of catharsis. I myself fear revisiting the painful conflicts and attempts to corrupt people which went on so recently. Verbalised or ritualised forgiveness which bypasses the need to go through any mourning process helps neither the absolver nor the one to be absolved and does not resolve the context of guilt in which they were living. Only a forgiveness which frees them for the mourning process, instead of sparing them from it, is really helpful.

In a collective mourning process two elements will have to work together: the



acceptance of the wrongdoer and anger at his actions, or – as the men of the Reformation put it – the grace of the Gospel and indictment by the Law. Through the Gospel and the Law, God contends for the heart of man, that he should accept grace as grace and be renewed by it. There is no set formula for the interplay of these two elements in human communication. It may be that penitence is first engendered and forgiveness then encouraged, or that acceptance is signalled first and the critical ‘but’ follows. Angry remonstrances and aggressive reproaches can be a form of reaching out to the other. On the other hand, to start with forgiveness might merely be the Protestant super-ego making empty gestures and advance concessions, whilst the unresolved emotions of the past cry out in protest. The whole thing hinges on both acceptance and accusation being elements in the process of catharsis which leads to reconciliation and renewal, and not elements in the vicious circle of dominance and self-assertion, fear and retaliation. How we enter into the process of catharsis depends on the situation. What is important, however, is that we do indeed enter into it.

### **Victims and Offenders**

In conclusion I would like to elaborate on a subject I have already mentioned, that of ‘victims and offenders’. As I have already said, the Bible does not efface the distinction between them. Against a general ideology of forgiveness which spreads a general amnesty over the flagrant injustices of the world, victims rightly protest. Evildoers eagerly hide behind the idea of collective guilt: everyone is deemed to have supported the totalitarian system to a greater or lesser extent and even the offenders are said to be victims of the system. Thus individual guilt disappears in the mist of a tragic disaster.<sup>10</sup> True, the latter could be the insight produced by a communal mourning process, and could lead to solidarity in guilt. As an argument for self-exoneration, however, it is unacceptable to those who were ‘the subject of operations’, ‘subverted’, robbed of all prospects in life, imprisoned, discriminated against, excluded.

Liberation Theology speaks of God’s ‘preferential option’ for the poor, and in the Ecumenical Assembly of the churches of the GDR of 1988–89 we made this our own position. Behind it lies the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. The saving justice of God restores right to the victims of violence (Ps. 146: 7; 103:6). Jesus shows solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden. The victims of violence see their experience repeated in the fate of Jesus. The suffering Christ is on the side of the victim, not of the offender. He brings ‘the eternal fellowship of God and the life-giving righteousness of God, through his passion, into the passion-play of this world’.<sup>11</sup>

As the Risen One, the one who hung on a cross is now the judge of the men of violence. They are confronted with their victim, with their victims; that is, for them, the judgment. According to the Book of Revelation the Lamb who was slain sits on the throne as the Judge (Rev. 5:6ff.; 6:16; 14:1). Himmler used to have the bodies of those gassed burnt; Argentinian death squads arranged for their victims to vanish so that there would be no living witnesses who would testify against them. Resurrection means that the people of violence will not be the victors in history; in the person of the crucified Christ they will meet their victims.

Is there hope for the offenders? The messianic Hope of Israel promises that the King of Salvation will bring justice to the wretched, by crushing the oppressors (Ps. 73:4), smiting with the rod of his mouth and slaying the wicked (Isaiah 11). In Isaiah 11: 6–10, however, this messianic hope undergoes surprising modification. There follows here a metaphor of peace among the animals, where wolf, lion and snake live

together with, indeed are at home with, their former victims. Commentators such as M. Buber, J. Ebach and C. Hinz have shown that this metaphor is making a political prophecy. Predator-like evildoers are not disarmed or destroyed, they are transformed. God brings justice to the wretched and corrects the transgressors. Thus, transformed and corrected, set free from inhumanity and restored in their humanity, the people of violence are included in messianic hope as part of a new human community under the rule of God.

Jesus prays on the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). He thus keeps hope alive for the torturers and hangmen. They do not know what they are doing, for they are in bondage to delusion, insensitivity, indifference or hatred. The request for forgiveness for them holds out the possibility of their transformation, when their eyes will be opened to what they have done. An example of this is recounted in the New Testament. The persecutor of Christians, Saul, is radically transformed by meeting the one whom he is persecuting (Acts 9). He becomes a witness for the grace of God which makes righteous the godless, a grace which releases God's enemies from their enmity and transforms them.

What conclusions can we draw from all this about the relation between victims and offenders in our own society? Firstly, there can be no forgiveness for the offender without regard to the victim. The request for forgiveness comes from the only possible place, the cross, where the victim hangs. Jürgen Moltmann once said that Protestant teaching on justification is oriented towards the offender rather than the victim. Forgiveness without regard to the victims is cynical and denies Christ, the brother of those who are suffering.

What happens, however, if the offenders refuse to recognise their victims at all? When some secret police officers were interviewed on television recently they appeared as typical bureaucrats for whom everything is just operational procedures reflecting the requirements of secret police regulations. In their world of abstract necessity they clearly had no picture of those affected by their activities, let alone the ability to empathise with them. How can a situation be brought about in which offenders meet their victims, hear their stories, their questions, their accusations? Tribunals? A series of organised encounters between offenders and their victims?

The second conclusion we can reach is that the hope for a change of heart in the offender is a messianic hope. We cannot force people to change. Compulsory 'reeducation' would be a failure. Under the sign of this messianic hope, there is one course to be avoided at all costs: any attempt to anticipate the Last Judgment. 'Judge nothing before the appointed time, wait till the Lord comes' is Paul's warning (1 Cor. 4:5). Hope for a change of heart in the offender can however operate as a kind of regulator in the conscience, which determines our behaviour towards them, shapes our language, makes us inventive in finding ways into how they think and feel and causes us again and again not to be hasty in condemning them.

What can we do, then, to bring about the reconciliation of victims and offenders and a new start for them together? I think very little! We should openly and honestly make this admission in order to counter the presumption which expresses itself in the notion of '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*'. This admission also means, however, that we can never do enough in this respect; but we can live in spite of this shortfall, because there is one person who, once and for all, has in fact done enough.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Werner Krusche, 'Schuld und Vergebung, der Grund christlichen Friedenshandelns', in *id.*

'*Verheißung und Verantwortung, Orientierungen auf dem Weg der Kirche*' (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin, 1990), p. 214.

- <sup>2</sup> Hanns Lillie: 'The declaration is not a political one but an ecclesiastical one. It was ... never meant for the general public.' Bishop Marahrens: 'The confession of our guilt ... is ... a confession before God and not before men. ... It cannot be the task of our church to clarify questions of the political development of international law. It has not been able to see just how guilt and destiny have been entangled in the background to the terrible events of recent years and decades.' The church leadership of Schleswig-Holstein: 'From now on it is clear that no political guilt has been established here. Such guilt is established by a process of political-historical judgment ... no, this is a rigorous religious confession of guilt before God, and as such it is not to be contested.' Quotations by Krusche, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
- <sup>3</sup> Krusche, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
- <sup>4</sup> Krusche, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
- <sup>5</sup> Götz Planer-Friedrich, 'Der Fall der Thüringischen Landeskirche', *Evangelische Kommentare*, no. 2, 1992, p. 75.
- <sup>6</sup> See Heino Falcke, 'Bemerkungen zur Funktion der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre für den Weg der Evangelischen Kirchen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik' (1976) in Ulrich Duchrow (ed.), *Zwei Reiche und Regimente* (Gütersloh, 1977), p. 65; Günther Jakob, *Wider eine falsche Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* (Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart, 1977).
- <sup>7</sup> Hanfried Müller, *Der Christ in Kirche und Staat*, in the series *Hefte aus Bургscheidungen*, no. 4, 1956; compare Falcke, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
- <sup>8</sup> H. Moritz, 'Religion und Gesellschaft in der DDR', *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, no. 8, 1958, pp. 573–87.
- <sup>9</sup> Here, and especially in my section 'Victims and Offenders', I follow Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Geist des Lebens, eine ganzheitliche Pneumatologie* (Kaiser, 1991), p. 137. I also use Moltmann, *Gefolterte-Folterer – christliche Hoffnung?*, a lecture at a Christian conference on torture, Basel, 1990.
- <sup>10</sup> Moltmann, *Der Geist des Lebens* ..., p. 139.
- <sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 145.

(Translated from the German by Edward Thomas)