

where the church may have been acting under duress.

A second reason lies in the confidential nature of the work itself and the decision to act with diplomacy, avoiding confrontation. This did not mean, however, that "valour" was necessarily sacrificed at the expense of "discretion" (to use the words of Trevor Beeson's book\*). These are surely complementary concepts, not opposites. As an Orthodox Bishop once put it, "The kiss on both cheeks should be accompanied by some very hard questions". The Group followed this advice.

A third limitation, some would judge, is the less-than-prominent place given to the theme of religious liberty. It is true that this was indeed the topic at Miskolc and that many of the "cases" were of this kind. But it is to be hoped that more attention will be given to this aspect of human rights in the days ahead.

On the positive side, perhaps the greatest achievement has been the growth of the Working Group itself into a unity, despite the ideological, political, and economic divisions represented amongst its members. Differences of judgement remained, but agreements were reached which went far beyond those recorded in the United Nations or the Helsinki Final Act, and these were passed on to the governments concerned.

One of the Programme's most

important contributions has been to underline the need for confidence-building. Eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation will only lead to the exacerbation of an already highly dangerous situation. Confidence-building is to be clearly distinguished from appeasement. It will include plain talking, but will avoid using human rights issues simply to score points off an opponent.

Another emphasis has been on the indivisibility of human rights — which are for the whole person within a just and peaceful society, and are the equal rights of all. The new CEC Programme, it would appear, has this broad setting very much in mind.

By its very nature, the "reflective process" which characterised the Programme does not show quick or dramatic results. But its careful examination of "causes" and not only "cases" makes a valuable contribution to the thinking of the churches and may even have its effect on government policy. The results arising from consideration of individual cases may have been limited, but attention has been focused on a whole variety of violations which cry out for speedy remedy.

Modest though the results of the Programme may have been, its members have worked long and hard at what they regard as vital issues, and offer their work as a contribution to the cause of justice and our common humanity.

DAVID S. RUSSELL

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\*Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour*, (Revised Edition; Collins, Fount Paperbacks: London, 1982).

## Christians and the Wall

The churches did not pass over 13 August 1986 (the twenty-fifth anniversary of the building of the

Berlin Wall) in silence.

The Roman Catholic Church has never adjusted its diocesan bound-

aries in recognition of the frontiers of the GDR. Thus the diocese of Berlin, which extends from the river Elbe near Wittenberg to the Baltic Sea, still includes West as well as East Berlin. The Bishop, Cardinal Meisner, has permission to visit West Berlin on a regular basis. A representative of the Bishop's office, commenting on the anniversary in the Catholic newspaper *St Hedwigsblatt*, writes as follows:

A certain measure of thankfulness (despite the great volume of sorrow brought about by the building of the Wall, which continues right up to the present time) must accompany our prayers for a genuine peace. We thank God that this only too precarious peace — in so far as the mere absence of war can be described as "peace" — has been preserved. The price of this peace is of course regarded by many as too high; but is it in fact too high, when one considers how much the outbreak of an open conflict would almost certainly have cost?

It is hinted that the wall does not represent an unmixed evil. Among other things, Catholic spokesmen have not forgotten the very serious numerical losses sustained by the church before 1961; an extreme example is the East Berlin confirmation class of 45, which the flight to the West reduced to a mere eight. The Catholic Church is not unaware of the element of stability brought about by the Wall.

The main Protestant Churches, on the other hand, separated themselves from the West in 1969, and the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR was formed. East Berlin is the responsibility of Bishop Gottfried Forck, of Berlin-Brandenburg, while the Bishop in West Berlin is Martin Kruse.

An exchange of correspondence, published in July 1986, shows a

considerable area of agreement between the Protestant Bishops on both sides of the Wall. They agree that one of the tasks of the church is to work for a future in which the division brought about by the Wall is effectively bridged. This goal must be sought by prayer, by careful reflection and by well-judged action. The church in both German states must contribute towards neighbourly feelings based on common sense, and work for reconciliation and understanding. They agree that the Wall has greatly increased the distress caused by division. They call attention, however, to the strenuous efforts made by the church to facilitate travel — for example, the success of Bishop Mitzenheim in 1964, when GDR pensioners were given permission to travel to the West. The notion of a reunited Germany was at the moment outside the sphere of practical politics, but all should resolutely work for the time when all citizens of both German states can go to the main station at Berlin-Friedrichstrasse and travel freely to any part of the world.

Bishop Kruse sees a few signs of a growing neighbourliness. He goes on to ask if there is anything that the church in the West can do to make sure that GDR citizens can continue to live in their state with clear consciences, but Bishop Forck has no suggestions to offer.

Nevertheless Bishop Forck has, for his part, a good deal more to say. He is sure that the building of the Wall has led to a gradual normalisation of relationships between the Germans. He is none the less convinced that a relaxation of travel restrictions of the kind that the GDR churches are advocating would help people to feel genuinely at home in their Republic. Bishop Forck refers to the discrimination which believers still suffer in the GDR; in spite of the improve-

ment in church-state relations, he continues, many government officials find it difficult to believe that a Christian is able and may wish to play a responsible part

in a socialist state.

ARVAN GORDON

Note. The above article first appeared in *The Tablet*, 15 August 1986.

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*Reinhard Henkys, a West Berlin expert on GDR church affairs, recently interviewed Bishop Joachim Rogge on church reactions to the 25th anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall and related topics. The interview appeared in Kirche im Sozialismus, Vol. 12, No. 4, August 1986. Joachim Rogge is Bishop of the church district of Görlitz, a small area in the extreme east of the GDR covering the remnant of Silesia which has not passed to Poland. He is well-known as an expert on church history, and was a member of the small church liaison group which sat in at the meetings of the state committee responsible for organising the Luther celebrations of 1983.*

*Henkys asked if there was any sense of dismay among the laity when they considered 13 August 1961, and whether Rogge had any message on the subject for his people.*

*Rogge:* Yes, there is dismay; there are open wounds, which still cause pain. In my view, the anniversary of the building of what is officially termed the "anti-fascist protection barrier" should not be passed over in silence.

One should take into account the whole range of problems associated with the building of the Wall. But that does not mean opening up political arguments among our congregations. No, we must endeavour to deal with the whole matter on a religious plane, so that people do not come to any spiritual harm. As Bishop of Görlitz and as a historian,

I should surely have something to say. The aim should not be to defend or attack the idea of "Wall-building" in a political sense, but to face and clarify problems which undoubtedly exist, and so speak to those who have been wounded in spirit.

It is undoubtedly the preacher's task to make Christian people aware of the need to be close to those of their fellow-men from whom they are physically separated. There is no point in pretending that this suffering does not exist; I must accept the situation for what it is, and help others to realise that the Wall means different things to different people in East and West. One should not keep quiet simply because the topic is unwelcome to politicians. Instead, we should try to bring about some relaxation of the restrictions on meeting people from the other side. We are in constant consultation with the state authorities, to ensure that twinned congregations can meet together and discuss aspects of the Gospel which are of special relevance to people who live under different political and social conditions.

We in the church are dismayed because *people* are dismayed. We are not a political "third force", trying to maintain a political attitude in this situation. We must speak from the standpoint of the Gospel. We do not echo the views of the state authorities, or identify ourselves with them. I readily admit that a particular bishop, or indeed the church leadership, may from time to time adopt an

unashamedly political view, but this view should not be thought of as binding on the man in the pew. There

are problems in this area which I beg you to respect.

## Leading Lithuanian Priest Killed

In Lithuania, the only republic in the USSR where a majority of the population are Roman Catholics, Catholic priests are still regarded as more than "cult servants", in the Soviet phrase. They are often seen by Lithuanians as community leaders, and sometimes as national figures. This year Lithuanian Catholics lost one such priest, well-known all over the country — Fr Juozas Zdebskis, who was killed in a car crash on 5 February. He was one of the five priests who founded the unofficial Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in 1978, and had been a leading campaigner for religious rights since the 1960s. Reports in the *samizdat Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* (No. 70) strongly imply that Fr Zdebskis's death was no accident but "a carefully planned and executed act of violence".

As the most influential and active surviving member of the Catholic Committee, (since the imprisonment of Frs A. Svarinskas and S. Tamkevičius in 1983), Fr Zdebskis was becoming a distinct embarrassment to the Soviet authorities. They had already received mass petitions from Catholic clergy and lay people, signed by over 120,000 people, calling for the release of Frs Svarinskas and Tamkevičius. If Fr Zdebskis too had been put on trial, more protests would undoubtedly have followed. He was a popular figure, and his earlier arrest and trial in 1972 for teaching children the catechism had led to an upsurge in organised

Catholic protest and was one of the reasons for the establishment of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* as the leading unofficial journal in Lithuania. In recent years Fr Zdebskis had been subjected more than once to threats by the KGB and had also been involved in a number of suspicious "accidents", including car crashes. On one occasion he was arrested while driving an invalid to hospital and was charged with "drunken driving", although he was known to be a total abstainer from alcohol. In 1980 he suffered mysterious burns while driving his own car; when he went to a hospital for treatment, the KGB unsuccessfully tried to bully doctors into diagnosing his condition as venereal disease.

Other prominent Lithuanian priests suffered in similar incidents. In 1981, Fr Bronius Laurinavičius, a member of the Lithuanian Helsinki Monitoring Group, died in a traffic "accident". He fell under a lorry, and had apparently been pushed.

On the day of Fr Zdebskis's death, the Soviet authorities seem to have been well prepared. In the morning the rectory telephone in Fr Zdebskis's parish of Rudamina was disconnected, so that friends learnt of the event only a day later. A report on the crash was broadcast on state television — itself a suspicious circumstance — stating that a *Zhiguli* car owned by Zdebskis had collided with a milk-truck after crossing the centre lane, and three of the passengers, including Zdebskis, had been killed. No mention was made of