

The Church Between Accommodation and Refusal: the Significance of the Lutheran Doctrine of the 'Two Kingdoms' for the Churches of the German Democratic Republic*

GÜNTER KRUSCHE

When the unity of Germany broke down in the cold war between the two power blocs, it also became impossible to maintain the unity of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), thus producing a more or less unique situation in the ecumenical movement: two separately organised church structures in two 'antagonistic' social systems came into existence, which nonetheless shared a common history, were inspired by a common tradition and remained very similar to one another in their institutional character.

Despite all the changes in society the *Landeskirchen* (regional churches) retained the form given to them by the Augsburg treaty of 1555 and by the decision of the deputation of German states of 1803, as well as their administrative hierarchy, their *Volkskirche* (folk church) background and, above all, their theological traditions. The Protestant churches in the Soviet Zone of Occupation – later the German Democratic Republic – also therefore took part in the fierce dispute over the doctrine of the 'Two Kingdoms' which had fallen into disrepute after the unfortunate Counsel of Ansbach in 1934. At that time notable Lutherans such as Werner Elert and Paul Althaus had spoken out against the Second Thesis of the Barmen Theological Declaration. This thesis stated: 'We repudiate the false teaching that there are areas of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ but to another Lord.' The Elert and Althaus view was: 'As Christians, expressing thanks to God, we respect every state structure and authority even when they are a distortion... and therefore, as believing Christians, we thank God our Lord that he has given the Führer to our people in their need as a "pious and faithful ruler" (Luther)'.

The tension between the doctrine of the 'Two Kingdoms' and the doctrine of the sovereignty of Christ has been a theological issue ever since, and the Leuenberg Agreement (no. 39) even cites it as a doctrinal difference between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. In this comparison the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms always comes off worse because it appears to be an 'accommodating' ideology rather than a 'confessing' Christianity.

*This paper was originally delivered at the conference 'Christian Freedom in Retrospect: Lutheranism in the Aftermath of Communism' at Mansfield College, Oxford, 12–24 July 1993.

It is no coincidence, then, that the way in which the Protestant Church appeared to adapt itself to socialist society as the 'church in socialism' is attributed to the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Thus one of the chapters in a booklet published by *Neues Forum* which links state security (*Stasi*) documents in a fairly indiscriminate way with church representatives in the former GDR bears the significant title 'Submit to the Authorities'. The foreword states that 'The number of those involved is frighteningly high and the reasons for this spirit of submission go far back into the roots of German Protestantism.'

The facts need to be examined. Were the churches in the GDR submissive and what was the role of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in their struggle to find the right approach?

The Church in Socialism: an Example of Contextualisation

As the example of a Protestant majority church in a socialist country, the church in the GDR attracted a lot of ecumenical attention very early on. When Marxist ideology was brought into Eastern Europe on the bayonets of the Red Army, the national churches it encountered were mostly Orthodox or Catholic; but in the GDR it came up against a Protestant church which also still saw itself as a national church, a church of the people. It had thus remained faithful to its Reformation heritage: the principle of the religious peace treaty of Augsburg, *cuius regio, eius religio* (the faith of the ruler is the faith of the region), had remained determinative for German Protestantism, and the Lutheran tradition predominated in the regional churches of East Germany because the regional rulers had been Lutheran. Even in the former Prussian church provinces, which had been united by government order, Lutheran confessional writings were the most influential. When one speaks of the Protestant churches in East Germany, then, one should think of them as churches of the Lutheran reformation in which the Reformed parishes constitute a small minority. In the same way, the Catholics have always constituted a minority in the eastern part of Germany.

The history of the church in the GDR therefore constitutes a case study on the importance of circumstances to the witness and form of the church in a changing society. Forty years of separate development and different challenges led to the development of different attitudes and behaviour on the two sides of the Iron Curtain, and now that the separation has come to an end it is proving difficult for the churches to work together.

Until the GDR was founded in 1949 the unity of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), established by the German regional Protestant churches in 1948, was maintained successfully. In 1945 church leaders from East and West had together drawn up the Stuttgart confession of guilt which made it possible for the German churches to enter the ecumenical movement. Together they overcame the consequences of the domination of the church by the 'German Christians', drew up a basic constitution for the EKD and rebuilt the consistories in their traditional form. The guiding image of the folk church remained in force in East and West, as did the clerical and regional church structures. The church continued to be a corporation under public law. State contributions went on being paid, even in the East, although at a lower level. Most of the articles on the church in the Weimar Constitution were incorporated, for lack of new insights, into the Basic Law in Bonn and into the Constitution of the GDR. It was just as Bishop Dibelius had said: 'In 1945 we simply carried on from where we had had to stop in 1933.'

Naturally, the churches in the newly established GDR soon found themselves facing new challenges. The propagation of atheism, in accordance with the Marxist theory that religion would automatically die out, led to the first conflicts, as major obstacles were created for the churches' youth and educational work. A deliberate agitation campaign resulted in a massive exodus from the church. What this demonstrated, of course, was how weakly the Protestant faith was rooted in the heart of the people. Pressure both heavy and subtle persuaded the career-conscious to turn their backs on the church. In this way, the church began to find itself in a minority position. Today just 30 per cent of the total population of eastern Germany belong to the church; in large urban areas like eastern Berlin the figure is only 7 per cent and in the new housing areas only about 3 or 4 per cent.

The break with church traditions had a very marked effect within families. In the dispute over the *Jugendweihe*, a socialist dedication ceremony designed to replace confirmation, the church found the battle hopeless from the start; it became clear that opportunism was more important to families than adherence to a confession of faith. The consequence is a younger generation in the East today which is not even familiar with the rudiments of Christianity. Thus Christians have been brought into what I call an 'ideological diaspora'.

The church as an institution came under fire because of its membership in the EKD, which was denounced as a 'NATO church' after the treaty on military chaplaincy had been ratified. In addition, the existence of the EKD was a thorn in the flesh of the government because it was the only remaining institution common to Germany as a whole. The state therefore interpreted the separation of church and state as signifying the marginalisation of the church. It was excluded from all public affairs and lost all its 'privileges'; church taxes were no longer collected by the state finance offices and the church became financially independent; Christian teaching was no longer permitted in schools and the church had to develop its own structures for Christian education. As the Cold War became more intense, the church soon began to be seen as the 'fifth column of the West', and this provided ever new reasons for creating difficulties in the churches' work with young people and children.

During the first few years after the founding of the GDR, Protestant Christians clung to the hope that it would soon come to an end, and in this they were encouraged by West German politicians. For many this meant hibernating for a while and hoping reunification would be just around the corner. As the GDR progressed from its provisional form to become a state enjoying political recognition, however, this attitude changed. People began to recognise that God was at work on this side of the Iron Curtain as well and that he needed missionaries who would take the given situation seriously.

It started with a leaflet published by the Protestant Church of the Union (EKU) in February 1959 which clearly described the temptations facing Christians in the GDR but without succumbing to resignation. It rejected both withdrawal into a private sphere and politicisation of the gospel. By referring back to the 'sovereignty of Jesus Christ' it established a link with the tradition of Barmen. An attitude of political submission was unacceptable because 'we must obey God before human beings' (Acts 5: 29). This was completely in line with Karl Barth whose *Brief an einen Pfarrer in der DDR (Letter to a Pastor in the GDR)* (1958) had been an encouragement to accept the new situation. One consequence of this thinking was the appeal from the Synod of the EKU in 1960 to 'stay in the GDR' at a time when more and more people were swelling the stream of 'refugees from the republic'.

In all these discussions the term 'authorities' in Romans 13 played an important

part. Was the GDR government an ‘authority’ in the sense of Romans 13 or not? Bishop Dibelius said ‘no’ and called on people to ignore the GDR traffic regulations. He encountered vigorous opposition from those who considered even the GDR to be ‘God’s benevolent provision’ as stated in the Fifth Thesis of the Barmen Declaration. The stimulus for this opposition was the recognition that Christians cannot go on objecting for ever if they want to remain faithful to their mandate. They were beginning to learn what it meant to be a Christian in a ‘post-Constantinian era’ (Günter Jacob). With the socialisation of agriculture the church lost influence and members in rural areas as well. A diaspora church came into being and it no longer made sense to generalise about church membership. That was the period when new concepts of mission were drawn up based on the role of the laity in society – because, unlike the pastors, they still had access to areas of public life. The theologians learnt to take second place and saw themselves more as the advisers and enablers of Christians in society (‘enabling the enablers’). This gave the church in the GDR its first missionary impetus, which was then reinforced by ecumenical experience.

It was simply logical for the churches in the GDR to come together to form a ‘community of witness and of service’, since after the defensive measures of 13 August 1961 (the building of the Wall) all hope of a change in the status quo in Europe vanished completely. The work of the EKD had come to a standstill. Joint synods were no longer possible and the various bodies of the EKD could no longer meet together. Communication became more difficult. After long and painful deliberations the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR was founded on 10 June 1969. This confirmed the organisational separation of the two federations of churches but at the same time confirmed the ‘special communion amongst Protestant Christians in Germany’. This unanimity between the East and West German churches should not be forgotten today.

The churches in the Federation wanted to be a ‘community of witness and service in socialist society’, neither identified with it nor against it. This goal implied resistance to marginalisation as well as the rejection of the role of a political opposition. It can be seen as stemming from the doctrine of the ‘Two Kingdoms’. ‘The church must remain the church’ was a basic principle behind the church’s action right through to the ‘*Wende*’ (the political turning point) in the autumn of 1989. In the early years of the Federation it was very important to define the place of the church in a socialist society, as it tried to find its way ‘*zwischen Anpassung und Verweigerung*’ (‘between accommodation and refusal’) (Albrecht Schönherr). It saw itself as a ‘church for others’ along the lines of Bonhoeffer, whose theology became increasingly important for the churches in the Federation. The church tried to communicate with society for the sake of the members of that society while ‘making clear distinctions in its cooperation’; Christians were to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ (Jer. 29) ‘constructively and critically’ and to share in solving the problems of all people in ‘critical solidarity’. From the point of view of the supposed victors of history, this approach has now been denounced as ‘accommodation’, but at that time there was really no alternative except for the church to retire into a religious corner of its own – which the party and state authorities would have been all too happy to allow – although that would have contradicted the ‘Protestant principle of criticising and shaping’ (Tillich). Attempting to determine the relationship between church and state or between church and society is one of the permanent features of Protestant social ethics. The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, which is still disputed today and which Karl Barth described as ‘*die paradoxe Lehre von den beiden Reichen*’ (‘the paradoxical doctrine of both kingdoms’), supports this distinction.

The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: a Disputed Issue

When the church's struggle under National Socialism was being debated in the period after the Second World War, there was recurrent discussion of the respective merits of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and that of the Sovereignty of Christ. 'Under the pressure produced by the church's struggle', wrote H.-W. Schütte, 'the doctrines of the Two Kingdoms and of the Sovereignty of Christ as programmatic formulae became expressions of legitimate or illegitimate political thinking.'¹ At the EKD synod of 1955 in Espelkamp a battle was fought against the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms with telling slogans: 'fear plus the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms'.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms has served repeatedly as an instrument for critical discrimination. Those conservative Lutheran churches belonging to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) examined the issue in two documents: *Der Christ in der DDR (The Christian in the GDR)* (1961) and *Der Atheismus als Frage an die Kirche (Atheism as a Question to the Church)* (1962). These refer explicitly to Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms which is cited as the basis for criticising, in particular, the messianism of Marxism with its totalitarian claims. In the early years of the existence of the GDR it was indeed this atheistic component to which the church objected. Let us make it absolutely clear: it was the rejection of the ideological claims of Marxism that from the outset prevented Christians in the GDR from surrendering their faith to the Marxist way of thinking. Atheist propaganda in politics and science, schools and kindergartens was itself an obstacle to the development of 'ideological coexistence'. Incidentally, this was also an important point for the Marxist ideologists right up to the end. A phenomenon like that of the 'German Christians' was never going to be a possibility in the GDR.

Even when one is considering the political activity of the church, however, it cannot automatically be claimed that the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is an 'ideology which encourages adaptation and suppresses conflict' (Heino Falcke). It can be misused in this way, as demonstrated by the reinterpretations and misinterpretations of the doctrine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which referred to Luther in support of a desire to limit the church to the religious sphere and regard politics and the social sphere as subject to the Max Weber's *Eigengesetzlichkeit* (autonomous laws), where the most that was required was 'responsible ethics'. Similar arguments were put forward in the Federal Republic of Germany against the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches and against representatives of political theologies.

An analysis produced by the study department of the Lutheran World Federation between 1970 and 1977 is helpful in reaching an understanding of Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. It points out that the doctrine is not used by either Luther or the reformers; nor does it receive an explicit mention in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, not even in Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession (*On Politics and Civil Government*). Luther's writings provide no more than a whole range of references to the subject on a number of different occasions.

According to Duchrow, Luther developed his thoughts on three different fronts: the anticlerical front, the antimonastic front and the antienthusiastic front. On the first front he was objecting to the Roman Church's influence in politics, on the second to contempt for worldly professions (estates) and on the third to the confusing of God's lordship with human government. When one tries to systematise his statements, difficulties arise unless the various fronts, that is the context, are taken into account. Not to make these distinctions is to turn the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

into a labyrinth (Johannes Heckel).

Luther makes the following distinctions:

- 1 Between the *two realms*. This relates to the tension between *God's realm* and the *realm of evil*. The church and the world (society) will be subject to this eschatological tension until the end of time. Here one can talk about a clear *either/or*.
- 2 Between the *two governments*. This relates to the two ways in which God governs the world: in the Realm on his Left (*Reich zur Linken*) through worldly government (authorities, police, power); and in the Realm on his Right (*Reich zur Rechten*) through the word and the sacrament. The church must apply the principle of *Non vi, sed verbo*. Here we have a *both/and*, but God is Lord of both realms. Luther and the reformers did not acknowledge 'autonomous laws' in the political field.
- 3 Between the *three estates (orders)*. This less familiar distinction helps to make things more concrete. It refers to the estates in which Christians, not just monks or priests, practise obedience: *ecclesia, politia, oeconomia*.

The conclusions to be drawn from this are that since God is the Lord of all people, his word in law and gospel applies to everyone equally. The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, or governments, makes all realms of life subject to God. There can be no question of this implying an arbitrary realm in which the Christian can do or not do whatever he or she wills; nor does it support withdrawal into the spiritual as the only area that counts. For Luther there is no dichotomy between the realms. Thus the lasting contribution of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is that of correct distinction or differentiation. The church's contribution to the life of society can be neither the christianising of society nor political domination. Its mandate is the proclamation of the word and the ministry of love.

The same findings emerged from the second commission for doctrinal dialogue between the EKV and the VELKD in the GDR. Because of assumed differences in doctrine between the Lutheran and Reformed churches, a commission was appointed to prepare for deeper unity between the churches by clarifying whether the doctrines of the Two Kingdoms and of the Sovereignty of Christ were mutually exclusive or not. The results are available in the publication *Kirchengemeinschaft und politische Ethik* (Berlin, 1980), although history has overtaken the endeavours for unity between the churches of the GDR Federation. This report points to convergence between the two doctrinal formulations:

The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and the doctrine of the Sovereignty of Christ can be understood as mutually complementary and corrective ways of interpreting the action of the church and of Christians in the realm of politics and society. Action which is socially relevant needs to be accompanied by theological reflection.

On this subject, Gottfried Voigt had already said in 1972 that 'The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms does not contradict the doctrine of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ; on the contrary, it is the right way to talk about it.'

Of course we cannot deny that there were also plenty of attempts in the former GDR to use the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms as an 'ideology of accommodation that suppresses conflict'. This applied particularly to groups close to the CDU, which questioned the church's right to speak critically on social issues and therefore had recourse to the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, naturally misinterpreting it. Günter

Jacob spelled out the errors of these attempts in a pamphlet entitled *Wider eine falsche Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. This was published under the title *Weltwirklichkeit und Christusglaube* (Stuttgart, 1977). However, for the churches which made up the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR, it can be said that they learned to use the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms as an instrument for critical discernment and this gave them freedom to witness and to serve. One could wish the reunited EKD a somewhat greater ability to keep a critical distance from the powerful in state and society, such as the churches in the GDR had to maintain as the 'church in socialism'.

Was There an Alternative to the 'Church in Socialism'?

I have tried to show that the expression 'church in socialism' was not a formula for accommodation but rather an attempt to redefine the task of the church, relying on God's presence in a new and, at first, most unwelcome situation. I hope this discussion has made it clear that the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was certainly not an obstacle, but on the contrary a constructive aid in this undertaking.

Nevertheless, there were polemics from the very beginning against the establishment of the Federation of Churches. There was talk of 'surrendering the church's gift of unity', of submitting to the orders of the state which also wanted to destroy the church's unity. Bishop Albrecht Schönherr, one of the church leaders who played an essential part in the founding of the Federation, had already replied to this kind of accusation:

It is not a matter of some kind of accommodation or even of cheap opportunism, but of a most responsible decision about the type of institution and the kind of instruments we believe are best suited to enable the churches to carry out the task Christ has given them.

In this connection it is worth mentioning the Third Thesis of the Barmen Declaration which subordinates not only the Church's 'message' but also its 'order' to its task of witnessing to Christ:

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts today as the Lord in the Word and sacraments through the Holy Spirit. With her faith as well as her obedience, with her message as well as her order, she has to bear witness in the midst of the world of sin, as the Church of forgiven sinners, to the fact that she is His alone, that she lives and wishes to live only by His comfort and His counsel in expectation of His return.

This was the most profound motivation for establishing the Federation. Accepting the historical situation and refusing to see it as outside the realm of God's activity, it was an attempt to act in accordance with the church's mandate and to reinforce this action with appropriate church structures. It could be called an attempt at missionary immigration into a socialist society. The Christians did not want just to accept the facts of history but to make the best of them. As a 'community of witness and service', Christians and the church had to face up to the world situation as it really was. After the failure of the Prague Spring of 1968, the political hope that the system would soon change had died. Then came the 'new Eastern policy' of the SPD government in the FRG and the gradual dismantling of the Hallstein Doctrine which started the process of recognition for the GDR. Was the Protestant Church to be the last remain-

ing cold warrior? Nevertheless, the church could not allow the ideological dictates of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) to define its place in society. At the Federation's synod in Dresden in 1972 Heino Falcke, the provost of Erfurt, stated that 'since Christ sets us free, the church can exist for others' and 'we are right to believe that the socialist society is also subject to Christ'. When speaking of the presence of Christians in society, he said:

This is *not* an ideology of keeping out of things or of finding a third way. It is the way of mature cooperation in faith, supported by a better promise than socialism can provide, aware of a more binding mandate than human beings can give and therefore concretely involved.

The relation between state and church remained full of tensions, especially as there were different groups competing for influence in the state and party leadership of the GDR. A more pragmatic group believed that it was opportune for both internal and foreign policy to let the church do what it wanted in the given framework, while a hard core was constantly doing things that upset the relationship between state and church, particularly in the areas of education, defence training and the militarisation of society. This made things difficult for the forces in church and state that wanted to maintain a balance and to find ways of cooperating.

It was only at a relatively late stage, on 6 March 1978, that the Federation of Churches was fully recognised at the highest level of party and state leadership. In a conversation which attracted a lot of attention between Erich Honecker and Bishop Schönherr the church was for the first time granted a certain degree of independence in its work for peace and the diaconic activities of the church were recognised publicly with the promise of state support. It was clear that this was also in the state's interest. What was not known at the time was that this conversation had been prepared for by tough negotiations, which had even required contacts with the Ministry for State Security, something that many of our contemporaries now claim to be surprised about.

Bishop Schönherr made use of this opportunity to plead for greater freedom in local church life, pointing out that the relationship between state and church is only as good as the experience of individual Christians in their local context. In fact, after this encounter the church really did gain greater freedom of action both internally and externally. Today one may ask whether the price was not too high and whether the church may not have contributed to stabilising the system by developing these better relationships. I would claim from my own experience that at that time the church had no alternative but to go through this open door.

It was indeed precisely because of this 'agreement' that the Protestant Church became an open arena which was not subject to the principle of 'democratic centralism' and was thus able to offer refuge and support to groups with an emphasis on social ethics. During the 1980s tensions in fact increased between state and church, especially over the question of peace: the Protestant Church in the GDR was closer to the pacifist option than was its West German counterpart. The federal synods of the Federation of Churches stated a clear 'repudiation of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence' and described conscientious objection as a 'clearer signal' in the promotion of peace. This stand led the Protestant Church into conflict with the stated military doctrines of the GDR.

Although it had now shrunk to the status of a minority church, the Protestant Church in the GDR thus became a centre of crystallisation for critical minds, rebellious writers and artists who were soon to find that they had lost their public audi-

ences. The peace groups gradually broadened the scope of their activities to include human rights issues and ecological problems. Here they were touching on taboo subjects, however. The conciliar process of 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation' became a platform for all who were pressing for changes in society.

When large numbers of non-Christians poured into the churches in order to underline their desire to leave the GDR, the question of the church's identity again became very acute. Up to that point, Christian responsibility for the world had included commitment to the basic principle of faith in the triune God and to the task of proclamation; but now many non-Christians were gathering in the churches for purely political reasons and creating conflicts of conscience for the parish councils, not because of 'fear plus the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms' but because they had learnt first to ask what their task was as Christians and then to decide what was to be done.

Gradually a situation developed in which theological reservations were immediately judged politically. Every theological inquiry was immediately seen by politically active groups as submission to the demands of the state and accommodation to a state doctrine which was designed to safeguard authority. At that time the church leaders had to walk the tightrope between 'accommodation and refusal'. They granted refuge to political groups and frequently defended their meetings against the state despite serious reservations, but they also had to struggle with the groups in order to preserve the church's identity and credibility. In this context the expression 'the church must remain the church' again became very relevant. Today, this tightrope act has been denounced as mere manoeuvring and difficult negotiations whose primary aim was to maintain a favourable climate have been denounced as nothing more than 'camaraderie with the *Stasi*'. It would appear that hasty political judgment has ousted the capacity for critical differentiation. If we are prepared to learn from the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, however, we must insist that the church's action must always be determined by its mandate.

The other dilemma which the leaders of the Federation of Churches faced was the question of staying in the GDR. The Protestant Church in the GDR always insisted that a pastor had to stay with his congregation unless there were special personal or health reasons for doing otherwise. Since the church also encouraged the other members of the congregations to stay in the GDR, the final wave of emigration, which turned into a mass exodus, was a very problematic experience. Today the church finds itself accused of having prevented 'freedom of movement for its pastors and workers'. Here too, spiritual motivation is being judged by political criteria and it is now almost impossible to make this clear. However, it is no longer a question of a tension between the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and the doctrine of the Sovereignty of Christ, but of whether Christian arguments can be brought to bear at all on a secular society. The church must stick to its task. There is no alternative. Otherwise the church will lose its divinely commissioned identity.

When we look back at the 'church in socialism' we can certainly see weak points, human failings, a lack of courage in our convictions and personal guilt. We have to ask ourselves, and allow others to ask us, whether as responsible church leaders we were not often too much concerned with preserving the freedoms gained, whether we went too far in negotiations or made too many concessions because we were determined to achieve something. For that we have to accept the consequences today. But of one thing we can be certain despite constant assertions to the contrary: the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was not used as a pretext for concessions to the state. The actions of the Protestant churches in the GDR were not determined by abandoning responsibility for the world, but rather by the conscious acceptance of historical chal-

lenges, along the lines of C. G. Jung's insight: 'only if I have accepted something can I change it.'

Similarly, the option for a 'socialism that can be improved' and the rejection of anticommunism, which seemed natural to many Christians in the GDR at that time, were not motivated by a spirit of accommodation but based on responsible political judgment and on the need to work through the historical legacy.

Without the courage to accept the real situation born of trust in God, the Protestant churches and Christians could not have played the part which gradually became theirs in the course of time. In the months before the *Wende* the church in the GDR became a social force which could no longer be ignored even though it was a minority. This was evident once again during the changes in the autumn of 1989 when representatives of the churches served as moderators for the 'round table' meetings and established communication between the various social forces at a time when people in general had lost their tongue. The call for unconditional non-violence is also to the church's credit, and this prepared the way for the gentle revolution of candles. Now we are faced with new and perhaps greater challenges, not only in the as yet unfinished process of unification of Germany but in global changes of unknown dimensions which will demand new faithfulness.

However, there is one insight that the Christians of the GDR bring with them to the new horizons of responsibility, namely that a small, resolute minority can achieve more than a self-satisfied majority. Openness to the world and committed Christianity belong together. A church which remains faithful to its Lord enjoys the promise that 'the gates of hell will not prevail against it'. (Matt. 16:18).

Notes and References

¹ H.-W. Schütte, *Handbuch der Christlichen Ethik*, vol. I, 1978.