

East German Protestantism Under  
Communist Rule, 1945 - 1961

by Kurt Gust

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Submitted to the Department of History and  
to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## PREFACE

Since 1945 East Germany has been a field of bitter conflicts between the Christian religion and the Marxist ideology. Even though a final chapter about the present conflicts cannot be written at this time, an account of this confrontation is presented here with the hope that it will offer a meaningful understanding of the factors and events that have determined the course of church history in East Germany since 1945 and that, at the same time, it will lend new insights into the cataclysmic nature of the world-wide struggle between the Christian church and the Communist state.

The thesis is advanced in this paper that Communism as an ideological-political power is determined to obliterate every vestige of religious faith on the face of this earth. The very nature of Marxism as a pseudo-religion demands the complete annihilation of old creeds and faiths, and makes peaceful coexistence between the Christian church and the Communist state impossible. The persistent goal of Communist leaders has been to bring about the ultimate death of religion, even though for reasons of political expedience the church was at times treated with open tolerance or even "benevolence." An attempt will be made to prove the validity of this thesis through a study of the relations between the Protestant church and the Communist state in East Germany between 1945 and 1961.

By way of anticipation, it should be noted that the following are the principal points of the thesis:

(1) Aside from being viewed as an obvious socio-political world power, Marxism is also seen as a new religion which brooks no opposition by old religious faiths. Equipped with its own cults and creeds, Marxism vies with the traditional religions for the complete devotion and unswerving loyalty of man. Its very nature propels Marxism into a collision-course with the Christian church.

(2) In 1945 Communism encountered Protestantism as a principal power in the East German society. The Soviet Russians pursued a moderate church policy which, however, was abruptly changed in 1949 with the creation of a new East German state, the German Democratic Republic. The new government initiated a Kirchenkampf, a fierce battle against the church, to stamp out all organized religion through the use of brute force. The Kirchenkampf came to a sudden end in 1953 and a new course was adopted; it proved to be an ideological crusade against religion.

(3) In an endeavor to break the church's influence in society, the government established a monopoly over public education and obstructed the church's program of religious instruction. Then the state proceeded to attack the church's youth organizations in order to destroy their effectiveness and attraction. When this attack proved to be futile, the state established pseudo-religious rites as a means to win the allegiance of the East German youth.

(4) The East German government sought to use religion for political purposes, but was repeatedly rebuffed by the church in this matter.

Reprisal measures against the church were then initiated.

(5) In an obvious attempt to drive the church into a private ghetto, the state halted some of the church's welfare work, seized several of her colonies of mercy, and impaired the collection of funds necessary for the operation of her institutions.

(6) A militant propagation of atheism was inaugurated by the state in order to administer the coup de grace to the church.

(7) The structure of the traditional Volkskirche in East Germany, a people's church to which everybody automatically belonged, has been shattered under the impact of the attack by the Communist state. People have left the church by the thousands, severing their nominal and tradition-bound ties with established religion.

For two reasons it seemed proper to end this study with 1961. First, the term of Bishop Otto Dibelius as council president of the Evangelical church in Germany expired in February, 1961. Since his election to that position in 1949 Dibelius had been the titular head of German Protestantism, being involved in almost all affairs and transactions between church and state in both East and West Germany. At times he directly determined the course of the church; his personality would now no longer dominate the affairs of the church to the same extent. Secondly, the East German government erected a wall in Berlin on August 13, 1961, forcibly dividing the church into two parts. This action would enable the government to pursue even more ruthlessly its objective of destroying organized religion and, therefore, constituted the beginning of a new period in the relations between church and state. It

appears then that the "Dibelius era" is a logical period of study, permitting an assessment of Dibelius' effectiveness as leader of the church and of the government's determination to crush the church.

This is one of two historical studies made thus far of East German Protestantism after World War II. In his book, God and Caesar in East Germany, Richard W. Solberg relates the conflicts between the church and state from 1945 to 1959; however, his book was apparently written with the intention of reaching as many readers as possible and presumably for this reason lacks all technical data. Moreover, Solberg fails to give an account of Marx's and Lenin's important socio-political assumptions about religion, without which the reasons for the collision between the Christian church and the Communist state cannot be fully understood.

Some comments should also be made about the source materials used in the course of this study. The stand of the East German government toward the church has chiefly been documented through articles, books, and government papers published in the German Democratic Republic. Some of this material was reprinted in the church's annual, the Kirchliches Jahrbuch, and in special pamphlets published by the West German government. The most important source in the documentation of the church's position and attitude has been the Kirchliches Jahrbuch.

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## I. THE COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

The specter of a new religion has appeared in the world of the twentieth century. It has swept across continents and nations; time-honored customs and traditions have been ruthlessly uprooted by its appearance and old religions and their creeds have crumbled before it in dust. Over one-third of the world's population--people of every color and race, continent and country--have embraced the new religion and in it have apparently found meaning and fulfillment. The new religion will brook no opposition by ancient faiths and beliefs--old gods and idols must give way to new gods and idols, Marx and Lenin. With terrifying persecutions and intermittent ingratiating gestures the high priests of the new religion relentlessly seek to extirpate the old and to initiate the new, to destroy every vestige of faith in an invisible god, and to instill in man new faith in visible gods, the Communist leaders.

Those who are caught in the collision between the old religion and the new, between the Christian church and the Communist regime, undergo a painful search of conscience accompanied by excruciating anguish of spirit and intellect. If old beliefs and values are found wanting during that process of probing the inner recesses of soul and mind, man comes to accept the new tenets. If old faiths and traditions are found satisfying, man's old convictions become fortified through the fire of his mental anguish and he truly becomes a man who could be described as "a tree

planted by the streams of water.<sup>1</sup> This probing and searching in man has occurred wherever Christianity and Communism have encountered each other; the nominal Christian found it expedient to leave the church and to accept the precepts of the party, while the Christian believer with strengthened convictions now found even greater meaning in the fellowship of the church or because of fear practiced his faith secretly outside of the visible church. From the crucible of fire the church thus emerges in Communist countries with her numbers dreadfully reduced, but with her witness and mission remarkably refined. This in brief has been the story of the church in East Germany since 1945, or rather, since 1933 when the Nazi regime seized the reigns of government.

Open conflicts between church and state have never been confined to Communist countries only, nor have they been just a phenomenon peculiar to the twentieth century. Relations between the Christian religion and political powers have at times been marked by friction or even by outright mutual hostility. The Christian church, which aimed at a moral regeneration of man and attempted to infuse his mind with the spirit of Christ, penetrated into the area of public life, the sphere of the mundane power. Man is usually a whole being; psychological factors exerting an influence upon his intellect and emotions also influence his conduct, decisions, and actions in public life. If the Christian religion has any import on his intellect and emotions, it also has some influence upon his behavior in public life. On the other hand, the psychological pressures and propaganda of the public sector may also extensively influence man's attitudes

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<sup>1</sup>Psalm 1:3.

and position in the religious sector. With the possible exception of the dedicated monk and nun on one hand and the full-fledged hedonist and materialist on the other, man in general stands with one foot in the religious sector and with the other in the public sector of life, and some tension between the two spheres of influence and action is almost inevitable. It is only when church and state are in complete accord about the content of the nation's religious ideology and the course of the nation's political program that a conflict in man as public citizen and religious being will never occur. Such was the case in Greek and Roman antiquity when religion was the public cult of the cities and republic and the state supplied both the religious beliefs and political programs for its people,<sup>1</sup> for then the two powers had merged into one and served primarily the interests of the state. It is precisely at this point that modern Communism reverts to the practice of Greco-Roman antiquity and seeks to provide man with both a religious frame of reference and a political program of action. Communism thereby becomes a modern religion which by necessity must endeavor to destroy the old faith. Therefore, in Communist countries church and state have collided head-on.

With the appearance of the Christian faith on the stage of history, the religious-political situation prevalent in the Greco-Roman world underwent a radical change. The ethical precepts of Christ were at times diametrically opposed to the religious tenets and political directives of the Roman state. A conflict ensued in man as Christian disciple and Roman citizen, and a clash between the Christian church and the Roman

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Erich Feine, Staat und Kirche (Tuebingen: Furche Verlag, 1946), p. 5.

state was virtually inevitable. The temporal rulers apparently regarded the church as just another "social" institution which could easily be erased through the application of brute force. Fierce persecutions were initiated but they did not bring forth the desired results. On the contrary, Christians greatly multiplied during the two and a half centuries of harassment. In order to end this precarious relation between church and state, Constantino I (288?-337) decreed in 311 an edict of toleration for the Christian religion and two years later he established religious liberty for all subjects.

Constantine's decree by no means removed all difficulties in the relations between church and state. Christ had admonished his disciples to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, friction between the spiritual and temporal authorities continued to plague nations and empires, for precisely which of the two possessed the right to define what belongs to Caesar and what to God? Each of the two powers insisted that it had the peculiar right to define the extent of not only its own sphere of influence, but that of the other as well. To this very day a completely satisfactory solution to this ancient problem has not been found, but as a rule some overt or covert agreement between church and state regulates their relations in many nations. To be sure, the exact nature of the agreement varies from country to country, but each of the two powers recognises the rightful existence of the other and respects its peculiar authority, securing thereby a maximum degree of mutual good will.

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 22:21.

In contrast to the workable agreements reached in many neutral and Western countries, the relations between church and state in almost all Communist nations represent a regression to the conditions similar to those of the Greco-Roman world or the pre-Constantinian era.<sup>1</sup> The people of antiquity regarded their emperors as both military leaders and incarnate gods, and worshiped them as the embodiment of the "highest good." In like manner the Communists of the twentieth century receive their religious and political, social and economic directives and inspiration from their leaders who compose the "infallible" dictatorship of the proletariat. Marxist leaders do not only issue political and economic directives to the members of the party, but they also demand an unwavering devotion to the mission of the proletariat. The Communist regime seeks to exercise complete control over all facets of life, public and private. It is partly through this endeavor that Communism becomes a religion which cannot permit the existence of any rival cult or faith. The church which may be in position to vie with Communism over the intellect and volition of man must be crushed through any available means.<sup>2</sup> It is the specter of this new religion which has haunted the world of the twentieth century.

#### A. The Specter of a New Religion

A number of Christian theologians and Western intellectuals state in their writings that they have noted the existence of a remarkable

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<sup>1</sup>"Aus der evangelische Kirche in der Ostzone Deutschlands," Kirchenblatt fuer die reformierte Schweiz, CXIII, Nr. 3 (February 7, 1957), pp. 36-38.

<sup>2</sup>"Die Christen hinter dem eisernen Vorhang," Fuer Arbeit und Besinnung, XV, Nr. 20 (October 15, 1952), p. 232.

similarity between Christian theology and Communist ideology. Some even believe that Communism is nothing but a perverted form of Christianity and all agree that much of the appeal which Communism has in some regions of the world today may be due in part to its pseudo-religious character. They asseverate that Communist beliefs inspire the hope in many people, particularly in underdeveloped countries, that they will be redeemed from the shackles of social injustice and from the bonds of economic want through proletarian efforts.

Gustav Wetter, a prominent Jesuit scholar, contends that Christianity and Communism resemble each other in a number of tenets and beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Christians and Communists alike believe that evil in this world was introduced through a "fall" of man. To be sure, to a Christian, the fall constitutes the volitional disobedience of man to God as symbolised through the story of the "Garden of Eden." To a Communist, evil appeared in the world through the introduction of private property and through selfish greed and surplus production in the bourgeois society. According to Christian teaching, redemption from the daemonic evil in the world comes through the efficacious suffering of Christ, but according to Communist teaching redemption is accomplished through the efficacious suffering of the proletariat. Furthermore, in Communist understanding the proletariat will not only succeed in liberating itself from social injustice, but will liberate all of mankind as well. The Bible constitutes for the Christian the infallible authority for his life, his morals, and conduct.

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<sup>1</sup>Gustav Wetter, Dialectical Materialism, expanded and trans. by Peter Heath (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958).

The Marxist classics serve the same purpose for the adherent of Communism. In spite of these similarities, Wetter believes that there exists one basic difference between the Christian religion and the Communist ideology and it pertains to the concept of the absolute. The Christian concept of the ultimate and absolute centers in God, a supernatural power; the Communist idea of it is fixed in matter, a natural phenomenon.

Rudolf Karisch, a Roman Catholic intellectual, makes an interesting comparison between the teachings of Communist ideology and Christian theology:<sup>1</sup> (1) Absolute matter is eternal, uncaused and omnipotent vs. the absolute God is eternal, uncaused and omnipotent; (2) Original sin is private property vs. original sin is pride and disobedience; (3) Actual sin is the self-estrangement of man from his social responsibility vs. actual sin is the personal moral deficiency of man; (4) The incarnation of matter vs. the incarnation of the second person of the divinity; (5) Redemption through the proletariat vs. redemption through Jesus Christ; (6) The atoning suffering of the proletariat vs. the atoning suffering of Christ; (7) The elected proletariat vs. the elected people of Israel; (8) The revelation of the natural way of salvation by historical materialism through Karl Marx vs. the revelation of the supernatural way of salvation by the Gospel through Jesus Christ; (9) The teachings of Marx as absolute truth vs. the teachings of Christ as absolute truth; (10) Class struggle vs. sin struggle; (11) The injunction "realise yourself" vs. the invitation "follow after me";

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Karisch, Der Christ und der dialektische Materialismus, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Morus Verlag, 1954), pp. 156-157.

(12) The commandment to become one with the world vs. the commandment to "subdue the world"; (13) The exhortation to work and work still more vs. the exhortation to work and pray; (14) Man created himself through work and production vs. God created man in His own image; (15) The elevation of the canonical works by Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin vs. the elevation of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments; (16) A religion of militant hatred vs. a religion of abundant love; (17) The Communist party is the guardian of truth vs. the Christian church is the guardian of truth; (18) The axioms of the materialistic dialectic vs. the axioms of religious dogma; (19) The Marxist slogans, contingent upon the economic base, are the inspiration for moral action vs. the Ten Commandments given by God are the unequivocal basis for moral actions; (20) The infallible authority of the Communist party as anchored in the central committee vs. the infallible authority of the Roman Catholic church as manifested by the pope and ecumenical councils; (21.) Unrestricted censorship of non-Communist literature for all citizens of the Communist state vs. restricted censorship of forbidden books for members of the Roman Catholic church; (22) The Communist youth dedication rite with preparatory instruction vs. Christian confirmation of youth with preparatory instruction; (23) Self-criticism as an instrument for the destruction of individual personality vs. confession as a means for the renewal of individual personality; (24) The chanting of slogans and singing of Communist hymns by masses in liturgical form vs. praying and singing of Christian hymns by congregations in liturgical form; (25) Through world revolution to world power vs. through world mission to a universal church; and (26) Social progress means

"forward to victory with the Communist movement" vs. social progress means "closer to God."

Heins-Dietrich Wendland, a Protestant professor in Germany, in one of his books also undertakes a comparative study of Communist and Christian beliefs. Since many of his points are similar to those in Karisch's analysis, it would be superfluous to list them all. It will suffice merely to mention two or three significant observations made by him about the eschatological beliefs of Communism and Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

It is Wendland's conviction that Communism and Christianity each has a definite eschatology. Communists believe in an imminent realization of a classless social order which is to follow the dictatorship of the proletariat. This belief fills the minds of millions of people with tenacious hope and ardent zeal and is somewhat identical to the Christian anticipation of a climactic end of this world and the simultaneous inauguration of a visible kingdom of God. Nikolai Berdiajev, a Russian philosopher, thinks that the eschatological hope of Communism--the advent of a classless society--cannot be proved at all scientifically; the idea of a utopian Communist society may be at best regarded as a religious vision and not as a scientific fact, because Karl Marx was unable to prove it on the basis of scientific historical data.<sup>2</sup>

Wendland observes that a second eschatological note in Communist ideology is based on Marx's teaching that the bourgeoisie represents the

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<sup>1</sup>Heins-Dietrich Wendland, Christliche und kommunistische Hoffnung (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1954), pp. 217-219.

<sup>2</sup>Nikolai Berdiajev, Wahrheit und Luege des Kommunismus, trans. by J. Schor (Darmstadt and Geneva: Holle Verlag, 1953), p. 22.

evil force on earth while the proletariat represents the righteous force. The latter must wage a ceaseless battle against the evil bourgeoisie until the decisive victory is won. A world revolution is necessary to stamp out the evil and daemonic force. This corresponds to the Christian concept of the struggle between good and evil, between God and the Devil, and to the final judgment of the world when the wicked will be condemned to eternal punishment. Wendland agrees fully with Karisch that Communism as a dynamic religion has inherent potentials to win the world for its cause. He states that "it is the great, successful missionary religion of our time."<sup>1</sup> The social concepts of dialectic materialism are elevated to a position of church doctrine. For instance, such concepts as "class struggle," "dictatorship of the proletariat," "revolution," and "exploitation" are not merely charged with socio-economic implications but with pseudo-theological sentiments as well.

According to Arthur Rich, the main difference between a Communist party member and a Christian disciple lies in their understanding of the nature of the redemptive agent.<sup>2</sup> The Communist expects the proletariat, a natural phenomenon, to shape the course of history and to bring about the eschatological event of the classless society. The Christian believes that Christ, a supernatural phenomenon, is the Lord over history and that in due time the kingdom of God will be ushered in by Him. The Communist is convinced that a redemption of mankind must be achieved

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<sup>1</sup>Wendland, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Rich, Marxistische und christliche Zukunftshoffnung (Zuerich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955), p. 12.

through human initiative, while the Christian believes that a redemption of humanity can be brought about only through divine intervention. In other words, in Communist ideology the imminent event becomes a transcendental hope, the historical processes are transformed into superhistorical ideals. In Christian theology the transcendental God becomes an imminent man, the superhistorical realm breaks into the historical world.<sup>1</sup>

One of the Marxist goals is the transformation of man from a bourgeois "slave" to a self-reliant and confident Communist person. This change takes place when man awakens to a conscious perception of the dialectic processes in history and becomes aware of the significance which these processes have for him.<sup>2</sup> He comes to the realisation that the class struggle between the capitalist and proletarian classes is not an artificial creation of Communism, but that it is determined by precise scientific-dialectic laws of history. The utter destruction of the bourgeois class according to these laws is inevitable, since it occupies a position in history which the proletarian class by necessity must negate. During the act of his "regeneration", man comes to perceive the pragmatic truth and validity of the dialectic principle and volitionally decides actively to participate in the processes of history. "Marxism means nothing else but a free participation in a dialect of necessity, in a movement, which is necessary and free--not free because man could create

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Lauroix and Henri de Lubac, Der Mensch in marxistischer und christlicher Schau, trans. by n.n. (Offenburg: Dokumente Verlag, 1948), p. 17.

or stop it, but because when it is recognized he is able to shape it extensively, or when it is not recognized, he must bear it."<sup>1</sup>

The road which leads to the classless society as it faces the newly "regenerated" Communist is hard and difficult. In order to reach the goal he must struggle against the bourgeoisie with all his strength. To be sure, the capitalist system is doomed in any case by the scientific laws of unfolding history, but an active participation in historical events may hasten the destruction of capitalism and accelerate the inauguration of the utopian classless society. Even world wars waged against capitalist society or among bourgeois nations themselves are desirable because they speed up the pace of bourgeois disintegration. With this in mind the Communist entertains a new concept of morality: everything that serves to expedite historical processes is intrinsically good and, conversely, everything that tends to impede these processes is inherently evil. In other words, all actions which enhance the revolution of the proletariat are considered moral and those which retard the revolution are considered immoral.<sup>2</sup> Imbued with such a sense of morality, the Communist experiences no qualms of conscience when in his battle against the capitalist world he must resort to practices which by Christian standards would be immoral. A statement by a Soviet Russian scholar, P. F. Kolonizki, clearly illustrates this concept of morality:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>P. F. Kolonizki, Kommunistische und religioese Moral, trans. by Gottfried J. Wojtek (Berlin: Verlag Junge Welt, 1953), p. 19.

In contrast to religious morals, Communist morals are based on responsibility to people. Whatever serves the cause of the people, the interests in the liberation of laboring people, and the creation of the classless society--that is unconditionally moral. In contrast, whatever harms the cause of the people, whatever serves to suppress the laboring people, and whatever impedes the battle of Communism--is unconditionally immoral. This criterion is completely clear and infallible . . . Here exists no mythical responsibility but a real one--the cause and well-being of people are regarded as the highest good. The best example of Communist morals is the life and struggle of the great leaders of the laboring people, the builders of Communism, Lenin and Stalin.

The unique attraction which Communism has for many people lies in its attempt to redeem mankind from the shackles of social injustice.<sup>1</sup> Thus the socially underprivileged people, particularly in underdeveloped areas, easily fall under its spell. Just as Christianity wishes to redeem mankind from disobedience to God as the source of all sin, so Marxism intends to redeem man from private property as the root of all social injustice. Christ is the Redeemer in the former case, while the proletariat is the redeeming agent in the latter case. The World Council of Churches succinctly perceived this aspect of the new religion at the Amsterdam assembly in 1948 when it declared that Communism held forth to mankind "a promise of an almost complete redemption of humanity within history."<sup>2</sup> The Council further stated that Christians throughout the world should recognize that the inception of Communism and its present strength is due largely to the prevailing socio-economic injustices in many countries. The church is partially responsible for these conditions, and thus for the rise of Communism, because she had usually sided with the forces

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<sup>1</sup>Willem Banning, Der Kommunismus als politisch-sozialo Weltreligion, trans. by Paul Bann (Berlins: Lettner Verlag, 1953), p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

which defended the status quo. Therefore, Marxism with its glowing promises has a much greater appeal to the starving and suffering masses of the world than the Christian church and her message.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to appealing to people in underdeveloped countries, Communism also casts a spell over some people in the West, largely because they admire the advances in technology and the physical sciences in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Superhuman powers are ascribed to technology in our day and age, and it is expected that through its use the face of the earth will be altered. During the Christmas season of 1918 a Socialist newspaper in Germany featured an article entitled "A Machine is our Savior."<sup>3</sup> This heading precisely expressed the promise of technology to mankind: the machine is your savior that will free you from your material want and needs. Man is called upon to make himself the ruler and lord of this planet through the use of the machine and any reliance upon supernatural powers is discarded as patent superstition. This faith in technology is taught in all Communist countries as part of classical Marxist doctrine while in Western countries it is proclaimed by certain private organizations alone. Nevertheless, this belief constitutes a bond of unity between East and West; the Soviet Union and its Communist ideology are idolized as a technological leader in the twentieth century by some people in the West.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Jakob Hommes, Kommunistische Ideologie und christliche Philosophie. 4th ed. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale fuer Heimatdienst, 1953), pp. 37-38.

<sup>3</sup> Wendland, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> Hommes, pp. 37-38.

Intellectuals constitute a third group which is easily susceptible to the spell of Communist ideology. Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish diplomat who broke with the Communist regime, made an interesting study of the intellectual's attitude toward Marxism. He did this primarily with reference to the intellectual's position in the Soviet satellites, but his conclusions may well be applicable to intellectuals anywhere. Milosz thinks that theology was the unifying bond that held nations and civilization together in the medieval age. The peasant behind the plow as well as the scholar behind books were occupied with questions of theology. Today the church has long since ceased to influence and guide the masses of people in that fashion. Scholars and artists have completely put aside theology and occupy themselves with questions of philosophy, and peasants hold to old religious doctrines only through the force of tradition. The unifying principle has disappeared in society; there is a schism between intellectuals and "common" people so that the latter are no longer able to understand the thoughts of intellectuals and to comprehend the art of modern painters and sculptors. Yet the intellectual wishes to be a part of the mass of people in society. Communism steps into this vacuum and supplies society and its people with a unifying system of thought; the kitchen boy in a restaurant, the peasant in his field, and the manager of a business concern read the same Marxist literature and once again the intellectual becomes a part of the people.<sup>1</sup> Of course, some intellectuals join the ranks of Communism for entirely different reasons and not necessarily for the one given by Milosz; keen

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<sup>1</sup>Czeslaw Milosz, Verfuhrtes Denken, trans. by Alfred Loepfe (Koeln-Berlin: Verlag Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1954), p. 15.

disappointment with Western democracy or personal convictions about the validity of Marxist claims could certainly be plausible reasons for an acceptance of Communism by intellectuals.

By way of recapitulation, it should be emphasized that Communism is not merely a socio-political phenomenon but rather that it is a modern religion with its own unique creeds, values, sense of morality, conversion experience, eschatological hope, and redemptive agent. This explains better than Communism's direct rejection of Christianity the reason for an inevitable head-on collision between the Christian church and the Communist regime whenever a country of hitherto Judeo-Christian orientation falls under the control of Soviet Russia. Communism is not just a socio-political movement but it is also a modern religion, which cannot tolerate the existence of an old rival religion. As a matter of fact, the founders of Communism repeatedly made it plain that with the victory of the proletariat all religions and churches would have to vanish from the face of this earth. The Communist manifesto's call for the ruthless extirpation of religion and the church will be better understood after a brief analysis of pronouncements on that subject by the four major figures of Communism, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Nikita Khrushchev.

#### B. The Communist Estimate of the Christian Religion

Statements made by well-known Communist theoreticians and leaders indicate that a peaceful coexistence between Christianity and Communism is impossible. Marx firmly believed that with the demise of the bourgeoisie the Christian religion would die a natural death and when this

did not come about in Soviet Russia after 1917, open warfare against religion was initiated by Lenin and continued by Stalin and Khrushchev. A brief analysis of the estimate of the Christian religion held by these four leading Communists will clearly show that the unwavering goal of Communism is the unequivocal obliteration of religion through every available means.

### 1. Karl Marx

The law of economic determinism is undoubtedly one of the most integral parts of Karl Marx's (1818-1883)<sup>1</sup> "science" of dialectical materialism. According to this law, processes of history and structures of society, physical labor and intellectual pursuit are solely determined by economic motive. In other words, men in their daily activities are incapable of responding to any other than economic incentives. Material want and needs shape life in its manifold patterns of expression; all feeling and emotion, institutions and industries, and wars and revolutions are determined by a material base. This does not mean that the economic base cannot change; on the contrary, depending on the availability of the material necessities of life such as food, clothing, and shelter, the intensity of material motivation may decrease or increase among people. By the force of this logic Marx concluded that the economic base is the sole factor which determines the behavior pattern of man

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx was educated at the Universities of Berlin and Bonn; he expressed his Socialist views as editor of the Rheinische Zeitung; in exile he helped to organize the German Workingman's Association and the Communist League; with Engels he jointly issued the Communist Manifesto; while in exile he wrote his best known work, Das Kapital; he took an active part in the organization of the International Workingman's Association in 1864; Marx is regarded as the founder of Marxist Socialism.

as an individual and of society as a corporate body.

Marx asserted that all institutions and organizations, including the church, constitute superstructures which overgird the economic base. Superstructures are not capable of motivating man in his actions but, rather, are reflections of real economic want or selfish economic desires. For example, entrepreneurs and capitalists may create a superstructure in terms of an industrial cartel in order to keep the price level of a certain product artificially high, or laborers may establish a superstructure in the form of a union in order to bargain more effectively for better wages and a higher standard of living. The reason for the religious superstructure is also economic in nature, namely, it is nothing less than the economic misery of the masses and their protestation against that misery.<sup>1</sup> A further elucidation of this concept may be necessary in order to gain a clear understanding of Marx's definition of the religious superstructure.

People who live in economic misery and general drudgery will ultimately turn to some mechanism in order to escape the unpleasant and harsh realities of life. Religion is unquestionably one of the most expedient devices for escape; it is relatively easy for man's imagination to turn to a dream world and to visionary glories of an after-life in heaven in order to find consolation and comfort in his present disagreeable surroundings. Man forms a nebulous religious world of imagination so that he might be better able to endure the cruel realities of his environment.

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<sup>1</sup>Hermann Scheler, Die Stellung des Marxismus-Leninismus zur Religion. 3rd ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958), pp. 4, 15.

Religion becomes "the opium of people" which causes man to fall into a religious trance of tranquility, without which the odious realities of life could become intolerable. The fact that man must resort to mental escape and seek consolation in a life after death constitutes a negative protestation against the economic condition in which he finds himself. With this in mind, Marx asserted that "religion is the groan of a creature in pain, and the conscience of a heartless world."<sup>1</sup>

The superstructure of religion is comparable to a mirror which objectively reflects the image of a given object. The very existence of religion in a given country is a strong indication of the presence of miserable economic conditions for the vast majority of people. If these oppressive conditions were removed, the need for religion would cease to exist; therefore, it may be taken for granted that whenever religion is found in a nation a large number of people suffer great economic hardship.

The really heinous aspect of religion in Marx's view lies in the fact that the bourgeoisie uses the church in an attempt to secure a firmer grip over the proletariat and to manipulate it materially to the greatest degree possible. As long as poverty-stricken people are led to believe in a world of religious fantasy, they will not attempt to improve their economic lot through revolution. It is always in the interest of the wealthy to steep the destitute in their superstitious religious beliefs. The more firmly the proletariat is led to believe in religious promises, the quieter and less demanding it is apt to be. The more that "religious opium" is administered to people, the greater the material profit gained

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Ueber Religion (Berlin: Diets Verlag, 1958), p. 31.

by the selfish bourgeoisie. Most clergymen are in partnership with capitalists and reinforce the superstitious notions of religion among people in order to keep them in a perpetual state of suppression and poverty, ignorance and fear.

Marx thought that the proletariat could be freed from the enslavement of religion only through a drastic improvement of economic conditions. Religion would die a natural death as soon as a positive change was effected at the economic base; when the economic misery of hapless people ended, the need for religious escape would automatically cease to exist.<sup>1</sup> The change at the economic base would come about only through the initiative and victory of the proletariat. It would be absurd to expect it to come through bourgeois efforts, since the material gain of the proletariat realized through its victory would be the material loss for the capitalist class. Only a victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie would put an end to religion. By the same token, Marx felt that neither an intellectual enlightenment of people nor an ideological campaign against religion would free the masses from their "religious prejudice and superstition" because the roots of their religious faith were not intellectual, but material in nature.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, he thought it important not to initiate an ideological attack upon religion but rather to cut off the roots of religion itself, namely, the economic misery of people. When this occurs the superstructure of religion would collapse and religion would wither away in a most natural manner.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. pp. 74, 108-109.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 63.

Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), a close friend and associate of Marx, was in complete agreement with Marx's views on religion. In 1876 he reiterated Marx's optimistic remarks that religion would fall into oblivion as soon as a positive change took place at the economic base:<sup>1</sup>

. . . when through seizure of the total means of production and through a planned management thereof, society has liberated itself and all its members from the slavery wherein it is presently kept . . . then will also disappear the last foreign power which presently is still reflected in religion, and thereby will also disappear the religious reflection itself, simply because there will no longer be anything left to be reflected.

When a political struggle between Bismarck's government and German Catholicism took place in the 1870's, Engels warned repeatedly against the use of measures by the government which were directed at the suppression of religion. He feared that these measures would create religious martyrs, around whom Christian believers would rally. Harsh laws aimed at a quick death of religion may have an adverse effect since they may actually strengthen the religious beliefs of people. With this in mind Engels admonished Socialists in Germany not to do anything violent or hasty about religion, but to wait patiently until the elimination of economic misery would force religion to die a natural death.

Walter Sens, a Protestant pastor in Germany, states that Marx was a competent scientific thinker and that his writings reveal an accurate portrayal of socio-economic conditions in nineteenth century England. However, even though these deplorable conditions no longer exist in present-day England, religion has not died a natural death in that country. The same observation could be made about a number of other

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

countries. In view of this fact, the validity of Marx's "scientific" data on the origin and roots of religion could be seriously questioned. Sens further notes that Marx was already a full-fledged atheist when he resided in the camp of the Prussian bourgeoisie and that he developed some facets of the Communist ideology at that time. Thus his negative findings about religion as revealed in dialectical materialism may not necessarily be the direct result of scientific research, but they may have been determined by his prior bourgeois antagonism towards religion. With every fiber of his being Marx devoted his life to a cause which he thought would redeem mankind from the shackles of social injustice and economic misery.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Vladimir Lenin

Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870-1924)<sup>2</sup> was in full agreement with Marx's dictum that religion is the opium of people and that its roots are found in economic misery, but he also injected the idea that the ultimate death knell of religion would be tolled by ideological warfare. The latter concept, which evolved through pragmatic experience with religion from 1917 to 1924, differed greatly from Marx's belief that religion would die a natural death.

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Sens, Die irreligiöse Entwicklung von Karl Marx (Halle: Eduard Klins Buchdruck-Werkstätten, 1935), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>Lenin was educated at the University of Kazan, from which he was expelled because of revolutionary activities; at a party congress at Brussels in 1903 he organized the Bolsheviki faction of the Socialist movement, advocating a tightly-knit party nucleus; after the overthrow of the czarist government in 1917, he returned to Russia from exile; in October, 1917, the Bolsheviki under his leadership seized the reins of government; from 1917 until his death in 1924, Lenin remained the head of the Soviet government in Russia; his most important written works are: The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1899), What is to be Done? (1902), and Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916).

At the turn of the twentieth century Lenin still accepted Marx's views on religion without much deviation. He stated in 1909 that "religion is the opium of the people--this dictum of Marx's is the cornerstone of the whole Marxist view on religion;"<sup>1</sup> he also reaffirmed his mentor's contention that socio-economic misery is the main cause for all religious phenomena and that "the deepest root of religion today is the social oppression of the working masses . . . ."<sup>2</sup> Lenin avowed that "Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches and all religious organizations as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to drug the working class."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is the foremost task of the proletariat to unite and overthrow capitalist rule, thereby eliminating economic misery and obliterating every trace of religion. But already in 1909, when he reiterated these classical Marxist statements, Lenin suggested that it would also be possible to undermine the fabric of religion through atheistic propaganda. To be sure, the destruction of the bourgeois yoke would continue to be the most urgent task for the party, for "no educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of the masses, who are crushed by the grinding toil of capitalism . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Yet this does not mean that the possibilities of anti-religious books and of sweeping atheistic propaganda

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<sup>1</sup>Vladimir I. Lenin, Marx-Engels-Marxism, 3rd ed. revised and enlarged (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 243-244.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 240-241.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

campaigns should not be thoroughly investigated, even though it should be understood from the beginning that if such campaigns are undertaken they will play only a very negligible role in the proletarian battle against the bourgeoisie. Aside from this new idea on religion, Lenin did not deviate from the legacy of Marx until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

Marx was a dogmatic thinker who looked at religion from a detached and scientific point of view and then wrote his conclusions. On the other hand, Lenin, as head of the Soviet government from 1917 to 1924, was compelled to deal with religion in a pragmatic encounter. When the Bolsheviks assumed control of the government in 1917 they were all apparently convinced that the natural demise of religion was at hand; when this did not happen a fierce persecution was initiated by them in order to expedite the death of the church. It was made public in 1922 that by that time 20 bishops and 1,414 priests of the Russian Orthodox church had already been executed by the Soviet government.<sup>1</sup> In spite of these brutal measures the desired result was not obtained, for organized religion was not completely wiped out. This may account for the new church policy set forth by Lenin in 1922, namely, that Communism should resort to ideological warfare in order to bring about the annihilation of religion.

Lenin wrote an article in 1922 entitled "On the Significance of Militant Materialism." In that article he urged all Soviet editors and publishers to use their journals and newspapers as organs of atheistic

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<sup>1</sup>Horst Schrey, Die Generation der Entscheidung (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1955), p. 25.

propaganda. Lenin opined that one of the worst errors which a Marxist could make would be to believe that the millions of peasants and laborers of Russia's vast population, who for centuries had been steeped in "religious ignorance and superstition," could be persuaded to sever their relation with the church through a slight acquaintance with Marxist thought. On the contrary, it would take patient ideological work to break the magical spell which religion casts on people: "These millions should be supplied with the most varied atheistic propaganda material, they should be made acquainted with facts from the most varied spheres of life, they should be approached in this way and in that way, so as to interest them, rouse them from their religious torpor, stir them from the most varied angles and by the most varied methods, and so forth."<sup>1</sup>

In his zeal for anti-religious propaganda, Lenin was even willing to use certain anti-Christian books written by bourgeois authors and to publish them for mass distribution. Arthur Drew's book, The Christ Myth, and R. Y. Wipper's pamphlet, The Origin of Christianity, were thought to have particularly good potential in spreading atheism in Russia, if rewritten with a proper Marxist interpretation. Nadezhda Krupskaja, Lenin's wife, stated that her husband felt all along that a deep penetration of atheistic ideas should take place among people before the influence of religion could be broken.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of his death in 1924 Lenin had changed some of his views about the demise of religion--he had come to know through practical experience that religion does not disappear automatically with the

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<sup>1</sup> Lenin, p. 478.

<sup>2</sup> John Shelton Curtiss, The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-1950 (Boston: Little & Co., 1953), p. 200.

overthrow of the bourgeoisie and he now advocated the use of ideological warfare to bring about the desired goal.

### 3. Joseph Stalin

The ideological warfare of militant atheism directed at the extermination of religion in Soviet Russia found the full support of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1879-1953), the successor of Lenin.<sup>1</sup> He stated in 1934 that "religious notions" had not yet been fully overcome because the comprehension of the intellect and the development of consciousness always lags behind the actual economic situation;<sup>2</sup> this explains the persistence of religious faith among some people, but in due time even the few who still cling to the church would come to understand the false nature of their religious beliefs. In addition, the capitalist world attempts unceasingly to revitalise religious ideas and to steep the consciousness of Soviet people with them, impeding the transition from "religious ignorance" to atheistic enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> In order to intensify the ideological warfare the program of the Communist party in regard to religion was rewritten in 1934 under the direction of Stalin. The revised program stressed much more a systematic and consistent dissemination of anti-religious knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup>Stalin was educated at the Orthodox parochial school of Gori and theological seminary of Tiflis; as editor of an outlawed Marxist paper, he was arrested by czarist police and exiled to Siberia; in 1917 he was elected a member of the Bolshevik party's first politburo and in 1922 first secretary of the Communist party in the Soviet Union; after Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin eventually became the head of the Soviet Russian government, a position which he retained until his death in 1953.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph V. Stalin, Problems of Leninism (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), p. 630.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 630.

Stalin thought that even though the Soviet state should remain neutral toward religion--a concept which was advocated by Lenin and was actually anchored in article 124 of the Soviet Russian constitution--the Communist party of the Soviet Union could not be indifferent to religion. In the constitution freedom for both the exercise of religion as well as for anti-religious propaganda was granted to all citizens. Stalin believed that the Communist party should make use of its right as laid down in article 124 to engage in vigorous propaganda against religion. This was absolutely necessary because religion as a "superstitious force" impeded the scientific development of Soviet Russia, and also because religion was diametrically opposed to the interests of the working people.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Stalin felt that a new intensified ideological campaign leading to the extirpation of religion was in order.

#### 4. Nikita Khrushchev

In 1953 Nikita Khrushchev (1894 - )<sup>2</sup> succeeded the deceased Stalin as first secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Although in February, 1956, he condemned some of Stalin's policies, Khrushchev did not deviate from the precedent set by Lenin and Stalin in regard to religion. On July 24, 1954, Pravda called for a "Broader Development of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda" against such remnants of bourgeois

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph V. Stalin, Works (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), vol. II, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> Born as a son of a wealthy peasant, Khrushchev received his education at the Workers' Faculty of Kharkov University; in 1939 he was elected to the politburo of the All-Union Central Committee; during World War II he was a member of several military councils; upon Stalin's death in 1953, he was elected first secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union and in 1958 chairman of the Council of Ministers; he retained these posts until his involuntary "retirement" in 1964.

ideology as religion. Since Pravda, as the official organ of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, never published important articles without approval by highest political authorities, this article really signified the renewal of an ideological crusade against the church initiated this time by Khrushchev.

One of the most viable and harmful remnants of capitalism in the consciousness of people is religion--the religious prejudice. This prejudice still poisons part of our nation and prevents people from participating actively in the construction of Communism.

The propaganda of the materialistic world view, the spread of natural-scientific knowledge, and the battle against any kind of prejudice and superstition constitute an important part of the gigantic work which our party renders in educating people towards Communism, and towards the overcoming of the remnants of bourgeois ideology.<sup>1</sup>

The article pointed out that article 124 of the Soviet Russian constitution guarantees all citizens of the country complete freedom in the practice of religion as well as in the exercise of anti-religious propaganda. Organizations of the Communist party and labor unions should not remain passive toward religion, but should make use of their freedom and engage in an ideological battle against religion. The same applies to institutions of learning and the press, whose foremost duty is to liberate people, particularly peasants, from their religious prejudices through scientific-atheistic propaganda. However, the campaign should be conducted in such a way that the religious feelings of believers should be offended neither by the method nor by the content of the propaganda, for otherwise they might become steeped even more with their superstitious prejudices and hold on even more tenaciously to their religious tenets. The scientific-atheistic propaganda should be carried

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<sup>1</sup>Pravda, July 24, 1954.

on so as to influence people and to win them for Communism through "conviction and the spread of scientific knowledge." The depiction of Soviet successes in science and technology should constitute the most important part in this propaganda.

The ideas presented in the above article were crystallized in a directive issued by the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The directive was entitled, "Mistakes in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda Among People," and it apparently met with the full approval of Khrushchev since it was signed by him. The directive stated that under the impact of the success of Soviet science and the rise of the cultural level of the country, most people in the Soviet Union had severed their ties with religion and only a few still held on to religious beliefs. In order to win even this small minority for Communism it would be imperative to wage in earnest a scientific-atheistic campaign against religion so that it would not offend the religious feelings of believers.

The directive further stated that "thorough and patient scientific-atheistic propaganda conducted in a matter-of-fact manner" would ultimately liberate believers from their religious errors.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the Soviet state considers religion to be the private affair of the citizen, yet the Communist party, which alone stands on the scientific basis of dialectical materialism, cannot remain neutral toward religion because the church promulgates ideas which are completely unscientific and

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<sup>1</sup>Pravda, November 11, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Pravda, November 11, 1954.

thereby obstruct the furtherance of the material welfare of mankind provided by science. Therefore, religion must be stamped out entirely so a greater degree of material prosperity and a rise of the cultural level of people would be achieved. "While science stands upon scientific experimentation and upon facts rigidly tested and confirmed by life, religion stands upon Biblical or some other kind of tradition and some fantastic fabrication of the imagination." For this reason the party and its organizations must engage in an ideological battle to stamp out religion. However, the battle should not be political or administrative in nature, but purely ideological, the directive warned. To be sure, recent attacks on religious believers and their spiritual leaders, made by lecturers and newspaper editors, had been insulting in character, but such a development was not in keeping with the intention of the party--insulting attacks and administrative measures directed against believers could actually strengthen them in their "religious prejudices." The directive concluded that such abortive practices should be abandoned and be replaced by a systematic dissemination of scientific-atheistic knowledge.

In 1961 Khrushchev repeated once more the arguments of the previous directive.

Communist education presupposes the emancipation of the mind from the religious prejudices and superstitions that still prevent some Soviet people from displaying their creative ability to the full. A more effective system of scientific-atheistic propaganda is needed, one that will embrace all sections and groups of the population, and will prevent the dissemination of religious views, especially among children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev Reports to the 22nd Congress of the CPSU (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), vol. I, p. 177.

In brief, the Communist estimate of religion has always been that religious faith and Communist ideology are incompatible and that a clash between the two powers is inevitable. Marx believed that the Christian religion would die a natural death with the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Lenin came to the tacit realization that Marx's dictum would not come about and so he sought to achieve the destruction of religion through a brutal persecution, later he initiated an ideological battle against religion which was continued by Stalin and Khrushchev. Even though different approaches toward religion were used by these four prominent Marxist leaders, their goal of obliterating religion has remained the same.

### C. The Communist Encounter with the Christian Religion

It has been shown that Communism is determined to eradicate religion. This goal was clearly set forth by the founding fathers of Communism and its most notable leaders repeatedly pledged that they would continue to work for its speedy realization. In its first actual encounter with religion in Soviet Russia, the Communist regime made it patently clear that it was bent on obtaining that goal by every available means. The validity of its theoretical estimate of religion could now be tested in the crucible of a pragmatic encounter with the Russian Orthodox church. Since the practical experiences gained in this encounter were later used by Communist leaders in dealing with religion in other Soviet-dominated countries,<sup>1</sup> a brief account of it may be helpful in gaining a better understanding of Communist aims and policies towards organized religion in East Germany.

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<sup>1</sup>Gary MacEoin, The Communist War on Religion (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1951), p. 1.

Czarist Russia had developed a closely-knit alliance between church and state. Already Grand Duke Vladimir (956-1015), the first Christian ruler of Russia, elevated the Russian Orthodox church to a position of great eminence and influence and made her the official state church. Originally, the Russian Orthodox church was a part of the Greek Orthodox church centered at Constantinople. Through this link the Russian Orthodox church was imbued with the theological tradition that the church should be obedient and submissive to temporal powers.<sup>1</sup> This concept, although rejected by such sectarian groups as the Old Believers, made it relatively easy for the Romanov dynasty (1613-1917) to incorporate the Russian Orthodox church into a bureaucratic apparatus of the state. In the early part of the eighteenth century Peter the Great (1682-1725) made an ecclesiastical innovation which considerably increased the power of the secular authorities over the church. He convened the "holy synod" which replaced the patriarch as the authoritative head of the church; the synod's decisions and activities were then subject to approval by the czar. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the czar's personal lay representative in the synod was in charge of all ecclesiastical affairs in Russia. In the name of the czar he exercised complete control over the church. At his will, or rather at the czar's will, the imperial official appointed and removed bishops from office and approved or disapproved the synod's decrees. For all practical purposes, the czar was the unchallenged ruler of the church and religion became a tool for manipulation, designed to keep subjects submissive to temporal

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<sup>1</sup>Curtiss, p. 3.

power. To make matters worse, the larger part of the Russian Orthodox church identified itself frequently with the interests of the reactionary nobility and opposed those who advocated reform.<sup>1</sup> Marx's concept of religion being the opium of people described the close alliance between church and state in czarist Russia far better than copious words.

When the Bolsheviks assumed control of Russia, they issued on January 23, 1918, a "Law Concerning the Separation of Church and State." It was intended to regulate relations between church and state in the Soviet Union and contained legal sanction for Communist policies and objectives designed to seal the fate of the Russian Orthodox church. The law proclaimed the separation of church and state; it prohibited the promulgation of any statutes by local authorities which would either limit freedom of conscience or grant special privileges to religious groups. It further forbade the performance of religious ceremonies in connection with public and political acts. All public records such as the registration of births and marriages would henceforth be kept only by civil authorities. The use of religious oaths in judicial matters was abolished. The law declared that all religious groups would henceforth be subject to the rules which governed all private societies and that they would receive no special privileges or subsidies from the government. The property of religious groups was nationalized and education was secularized.<sup>2</sup>

The law of 1918 also provided the legal basis in Soviet church

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<sup>1</sup>Materials For the Study of the Soviet System, eds. James H. Meisel and Edward S. Kozera, 2nd ed. (Michigan: The George Wahr Publishing Co., 1953), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

policy for the immediate pursuit of four objectives which were designed to facilitate the final demise of religions: to eliminate the church's influence in public life, to secure church support for the Communist cause, to confine church life within a ghetto, and to render the coup de grace to the church through ideological warfare.

The first great objective of the Communist party in its church policy was to eliminate the church's influence from public life in Russia. The church was at once forced out of the fields of publication and education, which then constituted the most powerful media of propaganda. The spheres of publication and education became the exclusive monopoly of the Soviet government, which now used these media to instill in children and youth its ideology. Religious books and journals could not be published by the church without special permission from the government. Section nine of the law of 1918, which dealt with the matter of education, stated: "The school is separated from the church. The teaching of religious doctrine is forbidden in all school establishments of general culture operated by the state, be they public or private. Citizens may teach or be taught religious subjects in a private manner."<sup>1</sup> These restrictions were broadened even more by article 122 of the Soviet Criminal Code of 1921, which made religious instruction of children or minors in public and private schools a crime punishable with up to one year of hard labor.<sup>2</sup> Even though they were harsh in nature, these restrictions were not too painfully felt in the educational efforts of the Russian Orthodox church

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Vgolornyi Kodeks RSFSR (Moscow, 1957), p. 65.

because she had never been overly active in the field of education in the first place, but instead had relied upon a performance of magnificent rituals and ceremonies for public influence.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a new decree passed in 1928 permitted parents to give their children private religious instruction and in 1944 the government allowed priests to gather small groups of children in their homes to teach them religious subjects.<sup>2</sup> It appears then that the injunction of the Criminal Code was never fully applied. Nevertheless, the influence which the Russian Orthodox church had once exercised upon the public was decidedly curbed through these measures.

A second objective of the Soviet church policy was to secure the church's support for the Communist cause. This objective emerged strikingly before the outbreak of World War II when the Soviet government reckoned with a possible conflict with Nazi Germany. The Soviet regime was at that time eager to win the favor of the Russian Orthodox church in order to strengthen the country internally. The violent religious persecutions of bygone years were abruptly stopped in 1939 and the anti-religious propaganda campaigns suddenly ceased. In 1943 the Russian Orthodox church was given permission to publish a few religious journals and to open theological seminaries. Stalin announced in the same year that he would no longer oppose the election of a Russian Orthodox patriarch, and Sergius was promptly set apart for that office. The government presented to Sergius one of Moscow's finest palaces, the former German

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<sup>1</sup>Curtiss, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

embassy building. Upon the death of Sergius in 1944, Alexis was chosen as his successor. A government order of 1945 again allowed the ringing of church bells and parishes were permitted to possess monetary funds.

In return for these favors the Russian Orthodox church was expected to closely collaborate with the Soviet government and to support its political moves, and apparently the church was sometimes willing to do this. During the conflagration with Nazi Germany, Sergius offered prayers for the victory of the Red army, raised funds in parishes for military purposes, and sent a large sum of money to Stalin for the creation of a tank division.<sup>1</sup> After World War II the church apparently continued to support in some measure the political program of the state. Alexis publicly praised the Soviet government for its "peaceful" world politics. It is not known whether the church's collaboration with the government was due to an internal infusion with Marxist ideology or whether it was based on principles of expediency. It may well be that by endorsing the program of the state, the Russian Orthodox church was given her only and last chance for survival. In spite of the church's seeming support of the Soviet Russian regime, the government returned after World War II to many of its previous anti-religious policies. For instance, anti-religious propaganda campaigns were undertaken with renewed vigor.<sup>2</sup>

A third objective of the Soviet regime was to confine all expressions of religious life within a ghetto. Almost all church property was confiscated by the government by April, 1921; the nationalized property

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<sup>1</sup>Schrey, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>John Newbold Hazard, The Soviet System of Government (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 129.

consisted of 637 monasteries, 827,000 acres of land, 4,000,000,000 gold rubles, 84 factories, 436 large estates, 602 small estates, 1,112 rental buildings, 704 apartment houses operated by monasteries, 304 work houses, 277 hospitals and homes for the aged.<sup>1</sup> It was hoped that the activities of the Russian Orthodox church would now become confined to the mere performance of rites within the four walls of church buildings, since the socio-economic channels through which the church had participated in national affairs were all eliminated. On September 23, 1955, Nikita Khrushchev restated the objective of Soviet church policy as one which seeks to reduce all activities of the church to a performance of religious rituals. He said that "the state fully recognizes freedom of conscience and everybody could practice the religion which he likes best. Therefore, the state does not meddle in religious affairs, but neither does the state tolerate church interference in the political and secular affairs of the government."<sup>2</sup> This meant that if the church decided to take a stand on a national or social issue that negated the government's interests, she could be accused of being a capitalist tool which unlawfully intruded into the public sector of life. Yet ideally speaking, the very nature of the Christian faith would compel the church to take a stand against socio-economic injustices in whatever form they might appear. Such stand may at times by necessity be directed against the state and the interests of the government.

The Soviet church policy included a fourth objective, which was

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<sup>1</sup>Efrain Briem, Kommunismus und Religion in der Sowjetunion. trans. by Edzard Schayper (Basel: Friedrich Reinhard Verlag, 1948), p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>quoted by Walter Adolph, Atheismus am Steuer (Berlin: Morus Verlag, 1956), p. 98.

designed to render the coup de grace to religion through the use of ideological weapons. This differed drastically from Engel's plea that religion should be allowed to die a natural death. When contrary to Marx's prediction religion did not automatically wither away with a successful proletarian revolution, Lenin and later Stalin in their consternation sought to stamp out religion through ruthless terror. It has been estimated that during their rule of Soviet Russia, about 20 bishops and 22,000 priests of the Russian Orthodox church were put to death.<sup>1</sup> When this failed to effect the complete demise of religion, they resorted to ideological warfare.

The Soviet citizen's right to engage in anti-religious propaganda was guaranteed in article 124 of the Soviet Russian constitution: "In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the USSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens."<sup>2</sup> The last sentence of this article is particularly noteworthy for through it the Soviet citizen was given the right to propagate anti-religious views, but he was not permitted to disseminate religious knowledge. Thus the freedom to engage in ideological campaigns was exclusively reserved for those who wished to spread atheistic knowledge and anti-religious sentiments, but certainly not for Christian believers. The church was prevented from publicly defending her faith and from propagating her teachings.

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<sup>1</sup>MacEoin, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Materials For the Study of the Soviet System, p. 263.

Making use of the constitutional provision, the League of Militant Godless People was called into life and had at the height of its strength in 1930 a membership of 5,500,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The task of this organisation was the mass publication and distribution of atheistic propaganda literature. In January, 1941, the League of Militant Godless People was outlawed by the Soviet government as a gesture of good will to the Russian Orthodox church. All anti-religious propaganda was permitted to lapse at that time, but at the close of World War II anti-religious campaigns were resumed again. While the League of Militant Godless People was not revived, a Society for the Dissemination of Scientific and Political Knowledge was created in 1949. Its task was to proclaim that religion and science were incompatible and that progressive young people could not with sane minds embrace the "superstitious beliefs" of religion. Ideological warfare in the Soviet Union has unabatedly continued to this very day, with prominent Soviet leaders intermittently calling for even more prodigious efforts in disseminating atheism among the people. This shows that the Communist government has by no means given up its goal of obliterating even the faintest expression of religious life in Soviet Russia.

The goal of Communism is the complete extirpation of every form of religion. When it seized in Russia, for the first time, the reins of political power, Communism used all available means of legal and administrative oppression and of brutal terror for the realisation of its goal. This occurred a generation ago. A certain change has taken place in the choice of method . . . the focal point consists no longer in the use of terror but of propaganda, that is, of political and ideological "enlightenment" and education. However, many incidents and events in

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<sup>1</sup>Schrey, p. 44.

Communist-dominated countries offer ample proof that Communist governments are even now willing to use without further ado all such brutal power as might be deemed necessary.<sup>1</sup>

After World War II most Communist-dominated governments made use of the experience gained by the Soviet Russian regime in dealing with organized religion. The pattern of the East German government's church policy reveals a striking resemblance to that of the Soviet Union and the four objectives pursued by the Soviet government have been clearly discernable in the German Democratic Republic.

By way of summary, it must be noted that Communism is not only a socio-political movement but also a modern religion which vies with old religions for the unequivocal devotion and allegiance of man; Communism has its own peculiar creeds, morals, aspirations, and promise of redemption. The Communist estimate of religion has always been that religious faith and Communist ideology are incompatible and that a collision between the two powers is unavoidable. The founding fathers of Marxism believed that religion would die a natural death but when confronted by the persistent existence of religion in proletarian Russia, Lenin and Stalin resorted to violence in order to stamp out religion. In their attempt to erase religion, Communist leaders pursued four objectives: to eliminate the church's influence in public life, to secure church support for the Communist cause, to confine church life within a ghetto, and to render the coup de grace to the church through ideological warfare. The present standing of the church in the Soviet Union indicates that the

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<sup>1</sup>"Die Christen hinter dem eisernen Vorhang," Fuer Arbeit und Besinnung, XV, Nr. 20 (October 15, 1952), p. 232.

extirpation of religion is still the ultimate goal of Soviet church policy.

## II. THE COMMUNIST CHURCH POLICY IN EAST GERMANY

In keeping with the basic policy set forth by the founders and leaders of Marxism, the Communist government of East Germany has sought to facilitate the rapid demise of religion in its country. The approaches and methods used in the pursuit of its aim have been flexible and varied. During the period of Soviet Russian administration organized religion was treated with some degree of tolerance and leniency, but this policy was abruptly changed in 1949 when the Soviet occupation was officially terminated and indigenous Communists created the German Democratic Republic, a Soviet satellite state. The new government attempted at once to hem the church in and to cripple religion through harsh and oppressive measures. This open attack on the church lasted until 1953, when a violent revolt broke out against the Communist regime in East Germany; at this time the government modified its approach to the church and supplanted the use of brute force with that of subtle pressure and ideological propaganda, but its goal of eliminating organized religion remained unchanged and overt attacks on the church were renewed again with great intensity starting in 1957.

The vast majority of the people in East Germany, about 82 per cent of its total population, belonged to the Protestant church.<sup>1</sup> The major

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<sup>1</sup>Heins D. Brunotte, Die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Hannover: Verlag des Amtsblattes der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 1959), p. 17.

encounter between Marxism and Protestant Christianity took place in East Germany. In order better to comprehend the conflict which ensued between these two forces in East Germany, one must understand the nature and structure of German Protestantism, a brief description of which follows.

#### A. The Nature and Structure of German Protestantism

The nature of German Protestantism was largely determined by the Biblical orientation and theological thought of Martin Luther (1483-1546). In his teaching Luther made a distinction between the spiritual and secular realms of human existence. He attached great significance to the former realm, because it represented to him the transcendental kingdom of God. The secular realm was thought to be of subordinate importance; it was an order perverted by sin which could not be redeemed by mere human effort but only by efficacious Christian love. Luther put greater emphasis on the salvation of individuals than on the Christianization of the social order.

Luther regarded the state as a divinely appointed institution--God had given it a sacred mandate to execute judgment and to maintain order in the secular realm. The church as the community of believers depending on God for life and faith was to exercise her authority in the spiritual realm, infusing men with the Spirit of God and thereby indirectly molding the character of the secular realm. Christians were to obey temporal rulers in all things that pertained to the secular sphere of existence except when they were asked to do things which contradicted the will and commandments of God, for then it became the duty of Christian believers

passively to resist the demands of the state.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the government's divine mandate instilled in German Protestants a deep respect for temporal authority. Willingness to obey rulers and to accept their wishes and orders as an expression of the divine will made them splendid followers but poor leaders. Their deep-seated respect for authority caused German Protestants to become socio-political conservatives who supported the status quo and upheld the Biblical injunction "to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." With the passing of time princes and kings exercised authority not only as temporal rulers of German states, but also as spiritual officials of the Protestant churches in their respective states and territories. Consequently, a close alliance between church and state came into existence in many German principalities.

The traditional Protestant esteem for secular authority received a serious blow when the Hohensollern monarchy was overthrown in 1918; Kaiser Wilhelm I abdicated both as the supreme political ruler of the nation and as the highest spiritual head of the Protestant church in Germany. The close ties between church and state were now broken because the church would henceforth elect her spiritual leaders from her own ranks without supervision or interference by the government. It was under the Hitler regime that German Protestantism for the first time in history was called upon to obey God before the state. Hitler sought to impregnate Protestantism with his Nazi ideology and to make the church

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<sup>1</sup>Works of Martin Luther, ed. Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), vol. II, pp. 64-78.

a subservient tool of his regime. This was adamantly opposed by many laymen and pastors who established an anti-Nazi Confessing church. Opposition by some clergymen and lay people to certain demands of the state, even to the point of martyrdom, represented a radical departure for German Protestantism from its time-honored tradition of docile obedience. Subsequently in 1945, when the Communist regime wished to impose its will upon Protestant Christianity in East Germany, the church was in no mood to accept that invitation to subservience.

Since its inception during the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Protestantism in Germany developed on a territorial or regional basis rather than on a national basis. Germany was at that time not a united nation, but was divided into a large number of sovereign principalities. Even as late as the turn of the nineteenth century there still existed about three hundred independent German states. The subjects of each principality were compelled under penalty of expulsion to accept the faith of their ruler. This principle, which was firmly anchored in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, was largely responsible for the development of Germany's religious structure along territorial and geographical lines.

Like the host of political principalities, most Protestant territorial churches maintained their complete autonomy and for nearly three hundred years spurned all efforts designed to unite them into one national church body. Attempts to unite territorial churches into such a centralized body were made as early as at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussian territory did finally merge in 1817 and became known as the Evangelical church of the Prussian Union. Another endeavor to bring about a closer cooperation between

territorial churches was undertaken in 1852 with the creation of the German Evangelical Church Federation which, however, had no jurisdiction or authority in the internal affairs of the territorial member churches.

With the disappearance in 1918 of the traditional ecclesiastical government composed of secular rulers, territorial churches proceeded to draft constitutions for their constituencies and to establish new church governments and efforts were renewed to bring about a closer unity among German Protestants. A Federation of German Evangelical Churches, created in 1922 with a permanent office in Berlin, was authorized to represent the member churches in matters of world missions and ecumenical work. The peculiar confessional stance of the territorial churches such as Lutheran, Unionist, and Reformed, was not changed by their membership in the Federation. Yielding to widespread demands for an even closer union of Protestantism, the member churches of the German Evangelical Church Federation in April, 1933, formed a committee with authority to revise the Federation's constitution, to create the office of a national bishop, and to establish a national synod and permanent national church council. The new constitution was ratified on July 11, 1933, by the Evangelical Church Congress at Eisenach. The government of the Federation was centralized by the constitution and was even given authority to alter the constitutions of the territorial member churches.

Through a series of clever maneuvers the National Socialists gained control over the newly-created national synod and were able to dictate to its delegates the appointment of a Nazi-oriented national bishop. Under his leadership the central government of the German Evangelical

church eventually sided with Hitler's regime and associated itself with Nazi ideals. All "undesirable" pastors and bishops were dismissed from key positions in the church and their vacant posts were filled with "reliable" clergymen who were known to favor National Socialism.

Opposition to the developments within the German Evangelical church crystallized at once with the establishment of the Confessing church by Pastor Martin Niemöller of Berlin-Dahlem. In 1934 the Confessing church already had on the ministerial roll four thousand pastors who regularly used their pulpits to voice protests against the policies and aims of Hitler. The Confessing church prevented the Nazi regime from completing its seizure of Protestantism and from fashioning the work and life of the church to its liking. The authority of the Nazi-oriented ecclesiastical government of the German Evangelical church was effectively undermined by the Confessing church.

After the collapse of Germany in 1945 it became evident that the authority and structure of the German Evangelical church had completely disintegrated. Through its association with the Nazi regime the church's constitution of 1933 was repudiated by territorial churches. In view of this situation, it became imperative to reorganize German Protestantism and to draft a new constitution. Bishop Theophil Wurm summoned the leading clergy of the Confessing church to a meeting at Treysa in August, 1945, with the avowed purpose of reorganizing the structure of the church. After thorough discussions, preliminary agreements were reached concerning the new legal structure of the church: the constitution of 1933 would not be restored and the church's name would be

changed from "German Evangelical church" to "Evangelical church in Germany."<sup>1</sup>

Endeavors to draft a constitution for the Evangelical church in Germany could not immediately be realized. Territorial churches first had to reshape their own legal structure, which had to some extent become invalidated with the collapse of the Nazi government. From 1945 to 1948 territorial churches formed new presbyteries on a parish level, which in turn elected delegates to territorial synods. After these preliminary steps the territorial churches proceeded to give a definite structure to the Evangelical church in Germany and to draft a constitution. On July 13, 1948, an all-German church assembly held at Eisenach ratified the new constitution.

According to her constitution the Evangelical church in Germany became a federation of Lutheran, Reformed, and Unionist churches, manifesting the existing fellowship of German Protestant Christianity.<sup>2</sup> The church federation's members were not individual believers or parishes but rather twenty-eight autonomous territorial churches with distinct confessional identities. Church laws could be issued only with the consent of the territorial member churches and such internal matters as doctrine and worship came under their sole jurisdiction. The Evangelical church in Germany was invested with authority to represent the member churches in public and legal questions before the state, to coordinate

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<sup>1</sup>Die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

<sup>2</sup>"Entschliessungen der Kirchenversammlung der EKID von Treysa am 6. Juni 1947," Amtsblatt der EKID. Nr. 14 (July 1, 1947), pp. 15-16.

all works of mercy and mission, to maintain contact with the ecumenical movement, and to operate a public information bureau. In 1949 Otto Dibelius, Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, became President of the Evangelical church in Germany and Hans Lilje, Bishop of Hanover, was elected Vice-President.

In 1954 the relative numerical strength of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Unionist territorial churches was reflected in the following statistical data: thirteen of the twenty-eight territorial member churches were Unionist churches with 21,334,000 people; thirteen were Lutheran churches with 20,474,000 people; and two were Reformed churches with 443,000 people.<sup>1</sup> In the light of a national census held on August 13, 1950, the potential significant role of the Evangelical church in Germany in shaping the country's destiny became quite obvious. According to this census, Germany in 1950 had a population of 69,186,209 people. As many as 41,093,643 people, or 59.4 per cent of the population, were Protestant; 24,539,596 people, or 35.5 per cent, were Roman Catholic; and the remaining 5.1 per cent were without religious affiliation or belonged to some other religion.<sup>2</sup> These statistics indicated, in other words, that well over half of Germany's total population belonged to Protestant territorial churches and thus to the Evangelical church in Germany.

The Evangelical church in Germany remained the only institution which functioned both in East and West Germany, serving as a spiritual bond between the people in the divided country.<sup>3</sup> Eight territorial churches

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<sup>1</sup>Brunotte, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Schrey, p. 230.

were located in East Germany: the Unionist church of Anhalt, Silesia, Pomerania, Berlin-Brandenburg, and the Province of Saxony, and the Lutheran church of Mecklenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony. In 1950 of the 18 million people living in East Germany, Protestant Christians made up 82 per cent of the population, Roman Catholics 11 per cent, and only the remaining 7 per cent had no religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> Protestantism was deeply embedded in the fabric of East German life and history--when the Communist government started in earnest to attack the church<sup>2</sup> in 1949, it had to reckon with the strength and power of a formidable institution which had thrived on East German soil for well over four hundred years.

#### B. The Period of Soviet Russian Administration, 1945-1949

The defeat of the Nazi regime in 1945 and the simultaneous disintegration of all political power left the church as the only authority which could guide and aid the bewildered and disheartened German people. The material and spiritual resources of the church at that time were greatly depleted as a result of stringent Nazi measures and actual war losses. Hundreds of church buildings were greatly damaged, others were completely destroyed, and there was everywhere a shortage of clergymen. Older church leaders who had opposed the Nazi regime were exhausted from the strain of the long struggle. Many clergymen had been killed in action while others were prisoners of war, and only a few young pastors were available to take their places because few had been able to pursue

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<sup>1</sup>Brunotte, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the Evangelical church in Germany will from now on simply be referred to as "the church."

theological studies since the outbreak of World War II. Nevertheless, the church was the only effective institution in some regions through which the occupation powers could hope to reorganize and revitalize local communities.

With the exception of initial clashes between some troops of the Red army and pastors in local parishes, relations between the church and officials of the Soviet Military Administration were courteous throughout the occupation period.<sup>1</sup> Due to the terrible devastation of the country during the last days of World War II, Soviet officers were confronted by various pressing socio-economic problems, a situation compounded by a great influx of refugees from Silesia and Prussia. Sometimes the officers sought the advice and cooperation of clergymen when attempting to solve those problems. As a rule the clergy was quite willing to aid them in the execution of their tasks.

. . . So far as the fate of the Church was concerned, one thing seems to be clear: it was not part of the Red Army's policy to liquidate the German clergy. The Protestant and Catholic clergy of the Russian-occupied area not only resumed their ordinary parish activities as much as possible, but began to work among evacuees, refugees, and released war-prisoners wherever possible. Sundays and other religious holidays were observed again, as in the pre-Nazi years. Russian commanders in some instances summoned the leading ministers and either ordered or requested them to proceed as usual. The Communist Mayor of Dresden, where twenty-seven Protestant churches have disappeared, called Pastor Lau to him and after taking office said, "Now the Churches must resume their work, too."<sup>2</sup>

. . . It may be said that the main energy of the Church no longer had to be expended--as under the Nazis--in defense against the deliberate assaults of a hostile regime.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George N. Shuster, Religion Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Stewart W. Herman, The Rebirth of the German Church (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946), p. 186.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

In 1945 the Military Administration established in Berlin a central office for religious affairs, which was to coordinate the Soviet church policy in East Germany. The tolerant attitude manifested by Soviet officials was in harmony with the guidelines for the occupation powers set forth by Harry Truman, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin at the tripartite conference of Potsdam in the summer of 1945. They agreed at this conference that no administrative interference or discrimination against churches and religious associations should ever be tolerated by the occupation powers.<sup>1</sup> Aside from the morally binding character of this agreement, several other considerations also weighed heavily in the Soviet Administration's decision to pursue a moderate church policy in East Germany.

In the first place, their encounter with Protestantism was a new experience for Soviet officials and they may have thought that a restrained attitude towards the church was the best policy during the occupation period. The contact of the Soviet Russian state with religion before 1945 was confined primarily to the Russian Orthodox church. With the occupation of Eastern Europe the Soviet Russians were confronted by the largest Christian body, the Roman Catholic church. It has been estimated that the following number of religious believers (excluding those in East Germany) fell under Soviet rule during World War II:

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<sup>1</sup>Documents on Germany Under Occupation, 1945-1954, ed. Beate Ruhn von Oppen (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 19, 43.

42,800,000 Roman Catholics, 18,000,000 Greek Orthodox believers, 4,800,000 Evangelical Christians, 1,900,000 Greek Uniate believers, 1,700,000 sectarian Christians, 1,200,000 Mohammedans, and 750,000 Mosaic Jews.<sup>1</sup> With the occupation of East Germany, Soviet Russia met the third large force of Christendom, the Protestant churches.

East Germany is the birthplace of Protestantism; such historic places connected with the Reformation are located in this area as Eisleben, Wittenberg, Eisenach, and the Wartburg. One must note as well the city of Leipzig where Johann Sebastian Bach in decades of labor created his immortal music and Herrnhut where Count Zinzendorf established an influential center of Evangelical piety. Protestant learning had become renowned in East Germany through the Universities of Jena, Leipzig, Greifswald, Rostock, and Berlin; their theological faculties had for centuries trained many German Protestant clergymen. In short, for Protestantism in Germany and Lutheranism throughout the world, East Germany is a country of historic interests and cherished memories. The Evangelical Christian faith based on the Scriptures had been deeply ingrained in many East German people.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in contrast to the Russian Orthodox church, the church in Germany through her institutions of mercy and social agencies had taken an active part in the socio-economic life of the nation. The church's consciousness of her responsibility in the political sphere had been heightened during the Nazi period, and through their experience with National Socialism church leaders had learned to deal with a totalitarian government. After

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<sup>1</sup>Otto Rudolf Liess, "Die Koexistenz der Kirche in den europaeischen Volksdemokratien," Schweizer Monatshefte. XXXV (1955-56), p. 491.

<sup>2</sup>MacEoin, p. 216.

the collapse of Nazi Germany and the resulting disillusionment, many Germans turned to the church as the place where they might find spiritual comfort and some alleviation from their distressing material plight.<sup>1</sup> These various factors, coupled with the deep attachment of the people to the church, made German Protestantism a vital force in 1945. Their recognition of the significant role which Protestantism played in East German life may have persuaded Communist leaders to show--at least tentatively--leniency and tolerance in their church policy.<sup>2</sup> Because of the church's great attraction for the vast majority of Germans immediately after World War II, a Communist drive against religion at this point would have antagonized them and actually would have weakened, rather than strengthened, the Communist cause.

A second reason for the propitious church policy of the Soviet Military Administration may have been derived from a genuine feeling of respect which the Communists had for some spiritual leaders at the time. In their common resistance against the Nazi regime hosts of Christians and Communists were put together in prisons and concentration camps and were frequently executed together,<sup>3</sup> so in spite of their obvious differences in conviction they had come to respect each other. At a conference in January, 1947, functionaries of the Socialist Unity

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<sup>1</sup>Religious Affairs (Education and Religious Affairs Branch, Internal Affairs and Communications Division, Office of the Military Government), August, 1946, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Guenter Jacob and Christian Berg, Evangelische Kirche Jenseits der Zonengrenze, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Lettner Verlag, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Rothfels, The German Opposition to Hitler (Hinsdale: Henry Regnery Co., 1948), p. 45.

party<sup>1</sup> publicly expressed their esteem for certain church leaders, "The courageous conduct which a part of the clergy has displayed in the battle against Hitler's barbarism obliges also the Socialist working class to express its respect and recognition to them."<sup>2</sup> Of course, the feeling of mutual respect based on common suffering, although quite strong for a while, was likely to wane with time. Ideological conflicts between church and state would cloud the feeling of comradeship within the span of a few years and would persuade Communists to follow their own interests by adopting a more stringent church policy.

Uncertainty about the attitudes of West Germans towards Soviet Russia may have been a third factor that persuaded the Soviet Military Administration to adopt a moderate church policy. The Soviet state had apparently hoped eventually to bring all of Germany under its control.<sup>3</sup> A restrained policy might have been thought advisable in order to create a favorable climate of opinion towards the Soviet Union among West Germans. The Communists may have realized that their objective of achieving control over Western Germany--already difficult--would become hopeless if, through an anti-Christian campaign in East Germany, they aroused the animosity of millions of West German Christians.<sup>4</sup> In 1949 with the creation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Die Sozialistische Einheits-partei Deutschlands, referred to henceforth as "SED".

<sup>2</sup>"Die ideologische Entwicklung in der DDR," Kirche in der Zeit, VIII, Heft 6 (June, 1958), p. 192.

<sup>3</sup>Werner Erfurt, Moscow's Policy in Germany, trans. by Patrick Lynch (Esslingen: Bechtle Verlag, n.d.), pp. 33 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Beryl R. McClaskey, The History of U.S. Policy and Program in the Field of Religious Affairs Under the Office of the U.S. High Commander for Germany, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1951, p. 91.

Federal Republic in West Germany, the Communist aspirations were suddenly shattered. This meant that in their political and ideological programs for East Germany, Communist leaders were no longer obliged to take the public opinion of the West German population into serious consideration. They now could feel free to adopt a harder line against religion.

A fourth motive for the Soviet Military Administration's tolerance to the church might possibly be attributed to the carefully planned socio-political development that each Soviet satellite country supposedly undergoes. According to this plan, the change from capitalism to Communism comes about through a sequence of three distinct stages of development, each having a different socio-political emphasis.<sup>1</sup> The first stage calls for an elimination of all remnants of the old "fascist-capitalist" society. The second stage calls for strenuous reform efforts in the socio-economic, political, and ideological realms to bring about the Socialisation of the entire country. Conflicts between the Christian church and the Communist party are nearly inevitable, since anti-religious campaigns are a part of this stage. The third period of development ushers in the Communist order. From 1945 to 1952 East Germany underwent the anti-fascist stage of development.<sup>2</sup> Since Communist agitation against religion was not supposed to take place during that period, the Soviet Military Administration could be expected to display religious tolerance.

During the immediate post-war period German Communists expressed the

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<sup>1</sup> SBZ von A bis Z. 4th ed. comps. Eugen Stamm and Guenter Fischbach (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1958), pp. 21, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Ulbricht, Die Entwicklung des deutschen volksdemokratischen Staates, 1945-1958 (Berlin: Diets Verlag, 1959), pp. 26 ff. also: Der deutsche Arbeiter-und Bauernstaat, ed. Herbert Kroeger (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Zentralverlag, 1960), p. 51.

same benevolent attitude towards religion as the Soviet Military Administration. A statement issued in August, 1946, by the central committee of the SED, signed by two prominent German Communists, Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl, stated that "the former rejection of the church by the Socialist workers' movement was not aimed at the Christian faith but at the church as a power instrument of the ruling class. Socialism has always emphasized the principle that religious faith is a personal matter of the individual person. The SED will also hold to this principle."<sup>1</sup>

Although the burden of the church under Soviet occupation was not too heavy, some difficulties arose as a result of the increasing tension between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Apparently in order to lend added force to the Soviet propaganda campaigns against the West, representatives of the Military Administration at times approached pastors asking them to support Soviet political and economic programs. As a rule the clergymen refused to extend their cooperation in these matters. Finally, on May 11, 1948, the bishops of East Germany wrote a letter to Marshal Sokolovski, Supreme Military Commander in East Germany, explaining their position.<sup>2</sup> They stated that although the church is obliged to obey the state as long as its demands are not contrary to divine commandments, she cannot willingly consent to become an instrument of secular politics. If this happens the church would no longer be able truly to fulfill her mission. Therefore, the bishops requested that the Soviet Military Administration should in the future kindly refrain from petitions and

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<sup>1</sup>"Die ideologische Entwicklung in der DDR," Kirche in der Zeit, VIII, Heft 6, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Hat die Kirche geschwiegen? ed. Guenter Heidtmann, 3rd ed., (Berlin: Lettner Verlag, 1958), p. 32.

solicitations of this kind.

Starting in 1947 the Soviet Military Administration began to keep a closer watch over the activities of the church. It requested that the church confine her work within "legitimate" limits or otherwise a special permit issued by the state would be required for every meeting. In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings church leaders in December, 1947, listed the following activities as rightful expressions of Christian life: worship services; Bible studies; activities of mission organizations; meetings of the Evangelical Union, the Evangelical Women's organization, and the youth organizations; religious instruction of the youth; and services to destitute people.<sup>1</sup> For these activities the church would not be required to secure a special permit from occupation officials.

The moderate course of the Soviet Military Administration was not intended to become a permanent feature of the church policy in East Germany. That religious tolerance was a matter of expediency became quite clear when the Soviet Military Administration permitted the publication of a brochure which outlined the future of the church in East Germany. Fjodorov, the author of the pamphlet, stated that dialectical materialism as a scientific world view refutes the validity of religious explanations of social and natural phenomena, and that only through a patient and scientific enlightenment of the people would "religious prejudices" fade away. "The overcoming of religion is a complicated and long process which, in the opinion of the party, should be based

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<sup>1</sup>Schrey, p. 290.

especially on a new political and economic social order and on the education of the people in the spirit of a scientific world view."<sup>1</sup>

These observations based on practical experience with religion in the Soviet Union outlined the future of religion in East Germany. Since this disclosure was apparently made too early, the brochure could be obtained for only a short time in Berlin and was soon completely withdrawn by the Soviet Military Administration. Fjodorov's statements were ominous portents that the Communist policy of restraint would not last forever. Yet the relations between the church and the Soviet Military Administration remained quite amiable throughout the remainder of the Soviet occupation.

#### C. The Kirchenkampf, 1949-1953

The differences in political aims between the East and the West became more pronounced with the passage of time and led to the formation of two separate German states in 1949--the German Federal Republic was established in West Germany in September and the German Democratic Republic was created in East Germany in October. Wilhelm Pieck became the president of the German Democratic Republic, Otto Grotewohl the prime minister, and Walter Ulbricht the first deputy prime minister. This marked the division of Germany into two hostile camps, aligned respectively with the East and the West. The demands for a rapid unification of the country, which had repeatedly been voiced by Germans from all walks of

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<sup>1</sup>O. Fjodorov, Die Religion in der UdSSR (Berlin: Verlag der Sowjetischen Militaerverwaltung, 1947), p. 26.

life including many churchmen,<sup>1</sup> had proved to be in vain.

The constitution of the German Democratic Republic was in some ways patterned on that of the Soviet Union and in other respects on that of the Weimar Republic. All articles dealing with religion seemed to be quite propitious.<sup>2</sup> Article 41 guaranteed freedom of belief and conscience to all East German citizens, however, religious instruction and church institutions were not to be misused for political purposes. The church was invested with the right to form her own opinion concerning vital national issues and to make her stand known in public. Article 42 stated that neither the private nor the legal status of people would be impaired because of their religious affiliations. Citizens would no longer be required to use religious oaths in courts and they would never be coerced to partake in religious ceremonies. Article 43 declared that the government would not establish a state church and that each religious association would have the right independently to administer its affairs. Those associations which in the past had possessed legal status in society would retain this privilege. Churches which enjoyed the status of corporations under public law were given the privilege to levy taxes from their members on the basis of tax lists provided by the state. Article 44 safeguarded the church's right to render religious instruction in public schools. This instruction was to be given by personnel appointed by the church, and no person was to be forced to give, or be prevented from giving, religious instruction. The right of parents and legal guardians to

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<sup>1</sup>Hat die Kirche geschwiegen. pp. 26, 29, 30, 39.

<sup>2</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung der DDR, ed. Guenter Albrecht (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Zentralverlag, 1959), vol. I, pp. 430-432.

decide on the participation of their children in religious instruction was recognized. Article 45 annulled all church claims for state subsidies based on old existing titles and agreements; new laws and agreements were to provide the basis for possible state subsidies to the churches in the German Democratic Republic. The right of churches to hold property was reinstated. Article 46 specified that if a demand existed for worship services in hospitals and prisons, churches would be permitted to hold religious services in those public institutions, but no person could ever be forced to participate against his will. Article 47 prescribed that anyone who wished to relinquish his church membership would merely be required to make a declaration to that effect before a court of law or a notary public. Article 48 stated that the authority for any decision about church membership for a child under fourteen years of age rested with the parents or legal guardians. After the child had reached the age of fourteen he could decide for himself to what ideological or religious associations he wished to belong.

The constitution of the German Democratic Republic, in contrast to that of the Soviet Union, allowed much freedom to the church. For example, the rights of the church to give religious instruction to children, to collect church taxes from her members and subsidies from the state were given a legal basis in the constitution. Its most noteworthy feature was article 41 in which the government extended to the church the right to take a public stand on important national issues. This privilege may have been given to the church in view of the fact that German Protestantism

had for decades taken part in the shaping of national affairs.<sup>1</sup> A clause such as was found in the Soviet Russian constitution, which stressed the right of citizens to engage in anti-religious propaganda, was not found in the constitution of the German Democratic Republic. The only serious loophole which the state could later use to limit the privileges of the church was found in article 41. It stated that the church's actions and institutions should not be misused for party-political purposes which were unconstitutional, but the authority to decide what church activities were "unconstitutional" or "party-political" in nature apparently rested with the state. In order to reduce the church's influence in society the government had merely to decide that certain of her activities were unconstitutional.

In contrast to the state which professed tolerance of religion the SED, as the official East German Communist front organization, held tenaciously to the anti-religious views of its Marxist mentors and expressed its anti-Christian sentiments soon after the creation of the German Democratic Republic. Hermann Scheler, a devoted Communist scholar at the University of East Berlin, stated that the SED was firmly established on the basis of Marxism and could never be reconciled with the "superstitious views of religion." If the SED ceased to fight against religion and superstition, it would betray its cause and destroy the very foundation of its existence. Reconciliation with religion would be tantamount to the voluntary destruction of the party. Scheler concluded that the impregnation of people with Marxist and atheist ideas was one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob and Berg, p. 20.

important means by which they could be liberated from the "odious" influence of religion.<sup>1</sup>

Several other statements made by prominent SED leaders revealed even more clearly the party's official views on religion. At a meeting of East German security officers in June, 1949, the church was branded as an agency of Western imperialism.

Since the church in the Greater German Republic is beginning to allow herself to be exploited as a trumpet of Western imperialists, we must see to it that these comedians of heaven lose all interest in such activities. Enough room is still available in our camps for additional labor companies composed of black brethren. Physical work will persuade them once and for all to quit inciting people who are still gullible enough to listen to them.<sup>2</sup>

A similar comment was made by an influential SED leader of Thuringia in June, 1950.

We Marxist-Leninists are aware of the fact that religion is merely the opium of the people. We will always maintain this principle, but the situation requires that we deal with problems such as this as diplomatically as possible. It may sound strange, but it is true that we must protect religion even while we are keeping a close watch on the clergy. Should anyone among them become dangerous to us, he must be removed. Every district chairman must report priests to us who seem to be reactionary, so that the necessary further steps can be taken by the regional board.<sup>3</sup>

The correct Marxist attitude towards religion which the SED should display was one of the topics of discussion at the thirty-fourth plenary session of the SED's central committee on February 3-6, 1958. Erich Honecker, one of the party functionaries, made a summary statement of the central committee's discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>Scheler, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Grothe, To Win the Minds of Men (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, Publishers, 1958), p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

The thirty-fourth plenary session of the central committee passed a resolution to arrange for lectures, materials, and seminars on dialectical materialism in the party organizations. Many party organizations have already begun to put the resolution into effect.

In this matter it is apparent that there are comrades who are of the opinion that one's world-view, particularly one's religion, is a private matter. The strength of the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, however, rests on the fact that the party is actuated by a unified and closely-guarded scientific world-view which has no room for faith in a god, in supernatural powers, in superstition and reactionary ideas. It follows from this situation that the masses determine history, that the laws governing the development of nature, society, and ideas can be known and can be put to use for the realization of Socialism.

In order that our party may successfully fulfill its great historic task it is necessary that all members of the party be made familiar with the world-view of Marxism-Leninism and that those comrades who still hold to religious ideas be helped by patient enlightenment to free themselves from the same.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the German Democratic Republic was established in 1949 the SED endeavored to consolidate its power by creating the National Front in January, 1950. Its tacit purpose was to bring all sections of the population under Communist control by uniting them into one mass organization. The National Front was to "embrace all forces of the German people, those with and without party affiliation, in the East and in the West."<sup>2</sup> Clergymen were also asked to join that organization, but almost all declined this invitation.<sup>3</sup> The formation of the National Front was said to be an expression of the "will of the people," but in reality it was the creation of the SED.

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<sup>1</sup>"Die ideologische Entwicklung in der DDR," Kirche in der Zeit. VIII, Heft 6, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup>Neue Zeitung, February 19, 1950.

<sup>3</sup>Kirchliches Jahrbuch fuer die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland. 1951 (Guetersloh: G. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1952), p. 124; referred to henceforth as "KJ".

Undergirded by the National Front, the SED was soon in a predominant political position in the German Democratic Republic and it already had 1,750,000 members in 1950.<sup>1</sup> Walter Ulbricht became the first secretary of the SED, and as its leader, he was in a position greatly to affect the course of political events in East Germany. According to Marxist theory the dictatorship of the proletariat must exercise complete control over a country's socio-political affairs until the state withered away and the Communist utopia, the classless society, was reached. In like manner, the SED as the "dictatorship of the German proletariat" was expected to exercise full control over East Germany. In the first place, this was to be achieved through a fusion of SED functionaries and statesmen of the German Democratic Republic.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Walter Ulbricht as first secretary of the SED was at the same time deputy prime minister of the state. Wilhelm Pieck simultaneously held positions as party chairman of the SED (1946-1954) and as president of the state. Otto Grotewohl was a member of the SED politburo and also was prime minister of the East German government. In the second place, the directives issued by the SED politburo were translated into laws by the government.<sup>3</sup> East German authorities sought to justify the "dictatorship of the SED" by asserting that all "parties and organizations unreservedly acknowledge the leading

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von A bis Z. p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Der deutsche Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat, pp. 183-184.

<sup>3</sup>Ernst Richert, Macht ohne Mandat. Der Staatsapparat in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands (Koeln and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1958), p. 19.

role of the SED as the party of the working class . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In view of the preceding considerations it is evident that, contrary to the pledge given in the constitution, the East German Marxist state could not remain neutral towards religion. The anti-religious sentiments of Walter Ulbricht as party official would also be expressed in his capacity as leader of the state. Ulbricht himself noted that it is impossible for sincere men to fight religion by holding the conviction at one moment that it is a superstitious belief and to assume the next moment a neutral attitude, free of all bias, towards it. If the SED politburo could affect the course of church policy merely by sending directives to the government so that it might rubber-stamp them as the law of the land, the constitutional rights of the church and the claims by the state regarding strict neutrality became nothing but a hollow mockery.

Through the fusion of party and state it was possible for the East German government, in spite of its professed neutrality, to initiate late in 1949 an open attack against the church. Apparently SED directives induced the state to engage in this Kirchenkampf.<sup>2</sup>

After several clashes between church and state over the education of youth and the attempted recruitment of clergymen for the National Front, the signal for the opening of the Kirchenkampf was given by President Pieck at a mass rally of the Free German Youth on May 24, 1950. Pieck

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<sup>1</sup>German Democratic Republic. 300 Questions--300 Answers, ed. Committee for German Unity, trans. from the German n.n. (Berlin: Verlag der Wirtschaft, 1959), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>The term "Kirchenkampf" was first used during the Nazi period, when Hitler engaged in a struggle with the Confessing church. This term has been used by church historians to describe the struggle between church and state in East Germany from 1949 to 1953.

reviled the church for her stand against the teaching of dialectical materialism in public schools and accused her of having joined forces with imperialist warmongers who were determined to drag the German Democratic Republic into a world conflagration.<sup>1</sup> At a party conference in July, 1950, Prime Minister Grotewohl brought serious charges that Bishop Dibelius had secret connections with Western imperialists and warmongers. He pointed to Dibelius' longstanding opposition to Communism and charged him with having given the blessing of the church to the Nazis in 1933.<sup>2</sup> A number of factors contributed to the change from the moderate church policy of the Soviet Military Administration to the Kirchenkampf of the German Democratic Republic.

First, the mutual respect that certain churchmen and Communists had gained for each other during their common suffering under the Nazi regime was gradually replaced by agitation and outright antagonism. Both sides engaged in polemical accusations and by 1950 the psychological tie of esteem no longer existed. The change in Communist sentiment and feeling which had taken place by 1949 was most strikingly expressed by Robert Bialeck, Chairman of the Free German Youth in Saxony. In May, 1946, he stated:

We know that the ecclesiastical work among the youth has created many valuable human beings; we appreciate the heroic battle fought against fascism by the Protestant and Catholic youth. We know that during the underground fight against the terror of fascism, a solidarity developed between Socialist youth, religious youth groups, Communist youth, and democratic

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<sup>1</sup>Taegliche Rundschau, May 24, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>Neue Zeitung, July 8, 1950.

youth . . . We ask that all German youth, regardless to what political party or church they belong, take the hand that we offer.<sup>1</sup>

In January, 1948, Bialeck vowed:

We shall strike the church ten times a day behind her back until she is completely down; then we shall strike her just a little bit until her wounds are healed. Then the church will send out pastoral letters in an attempt to enlist members, and then we will strike her down again. This is the way we operate in Saxony.<sup>2</sup>

A second reason for the Kirchenkampf may have been the fact that the first stage of the planned Socialist development of East Germany, which called for an elimination of fascism from the socio-political structure in society, came to an end in 1950.<sup>3</sup> The second stage of development required strenuous efforts in the socio-economic, political, and ideological realms in order to bring about the Socialization of the entire country. An attack upon the church was consequently almost inevitable. The ideological goal consisted primarily of rendering public schools into institutions of Socialist learning and of raising a new breed of Socialist people,<sup>4</sup> "who would participate actively in the political, economic, and cultural establishment of Socialism . . . and who would act according to the commandments of Socialist morality."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Grothe, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>3</sup>BZ von A bis Z, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup>Der Deutsche Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat. pp. 313, 328.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

In order to reach its ideological goal, the SED engaged in activities which brought the party in sharp conflict with the church, namely, the Socialization of the system of education and the impregnation of students with the ideology of Marxism. To make rapid progress in the Socialist education of the German youth, the SED also attempted to destroy the church's influence over the youth. Toward this objective the SED and the Free German Youth in 1952 launched a vehement attack on the church's youth organizations. The church repeatedly protested<sup>1</sup> and a bitter conflict between church and state ensued.

The fact that the SED had consolidated its political power by 1950 may have been a third reason for the outbreak of the Kirchenkampf. The National Front as the political mass organization of the SED had the task of selecting political candidates for public office and of organizing election campaigns. In the election to the People's Chamber on October 15, 1950, the candidates of the National Front received 99.72 per cent of all votes;<sup>2</sup> this was a solid indication of the predominant political position which the National Front and, consequently, the SED occupied in East Germany by 1950. With its power consolidated, the SED apparently felt strong enough to attack the church.

Fourth, by 1950 it appeared to be no longer necessary to pursue a

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<sup>1</sup>Kundgebungen, Worte und Erklarungen der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 1945-1959, ed. Merzyn (Hannover: Verlag des Amtsblattes des EKID, n.d.), pp. 90-92.

<sup>2</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, 1955 (Berlin: Deutscher Zentralverlag, 1956), vol. I, p. 87.

moderate church policy in East Germany as a means of creating a public opinion favorable to the Communist cause among West Germans. By this time most West Germans, influenced by the blockade of West Berlin and the appalling stories of prisoners of war returning from Russia, had acquired a critical attitude of the Soviet Union, which probably could not have been changed even by a continuation of the moderate church policy. This disparaging view of Communism was reflected in the Federal Republic's elections of 1949 and 1953 when the Communist party lost many votes. In the elections for state governments in 1946 and 1947 the Communist party received 505,000 or 8.2 per cent of the votes in the American zone, 1,182,000 or 10.5 per cent in the British zone, 160,000 or 8.3 per cent in the French zone, and the SED secured 406,000 or 19.8 per cent of the votes in West Berlin.<sup>1</sup> In the federal election of August 8, 1949, the Communists received merely 5.7 per cent of all votes cast and in the election of September 6, 1953, only 2.2 per cent.<sup>2</sup> The Communist party did not participate in the federal election of 1957 at all because by this time it had been outlawed in West Germany. In light of the election returns, it was obvious that the Communists would be unable to change public opinion in West Germany even if the church in East Germany were treated leniently.

A final reason for the Kirchenkampf may have been the government's desire to mete out some kind of punishment to the church in reprisal for

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<sup>1</sup>Deutschland Jahrbuch. 1949. ed. Klaus Mehnert (Essen: Im West-Verlag, 1949), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch fuer die Bundes-Republik Deutschland. 1954. ed. Statistisches Bundesamt (Stuttgart and Koeln: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1955), p. 109.

her refusal to become a subservient political tool of the state. In October, 1949, Wilhelm Pieck wrote a letter to Otto Dibelius stating that as bishop he could render a service of inestimable value to the church and nation if he consented to side with the National Front in accepting Soviet plans for German unity and in castigating Western nations for their "military schemes."<sup>1</sup> Similar invitations were extended to other leading churchmen, and they were also urged to take an active part in the Communist-oriented World Peace Movement and in the East German plebiscite of 1951 which denounced the rearmament of the West German Republic. Grotewohl declared that a refusal by the church to take part in the plebiscite would be interpreted as ecclesiastical support for West German rearmament. Even so, Bishop Dibelius and the majority of the clergy refused to yield to Grotewohl's demands.<sup>2</sup>

In order to make the church politically more pliable, the state used several means of coercion. State subsidies to the church were cut by 30 per cent and as of January 1, 1953, they were no longer to be paid at all. In the long run this would have led to an impoverishment of the church and her local parishes, but through a change in policy adopted in June, 1953, the government resumed the payments of the subsidies before the full impact of financial pressure was felt by the church. A number of pastors were arrested and sentenced to prison terms. Clergymen from West Germany were no longer permitted to take charge of East German parishes. It was made almost impossible for East German church leaders to attend

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1950, pp. 114-117.

meetings and conferences in West Germany by refusing them passports. As a final measure of reprisal, the church's youth organizations were publicly attacked and denounced as "American espionage agencies." It was apparently anticipated that punitive measures would make the church respond to the wishes of the government. "A situation developed for the church in the German Democratic Republic similar to that of 1933--the church could buy her existence from the state if she were prepared not only to recognize the political goals and principles of the state, but also to actively work for them."<sup>1</sup>

It was not just one motive, but a combination of several, that persuaded the East German government to abandon the moderate church policy of the Soviet Military Administration and to initiate the Kirchenkampf. The over-all reason for this change of approach to religion was undoubtedly based on Marxist ideology itself, which called for the eradication of religion by all available means and methods. The government may have thought that the Kirchenkampf would more readily facilitate the destruction of the church than the permissive approach of the Soviet Military Administration. By June, 1953, the state was unexpectedly forced to terminate the Kirchenkampf and to rescind its oppressive measures. The Kirchenkampf as a church policy was then replaced by a new subtle approach, which in the long run proved to be even more dangerous to the church than the use of brute force.

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<sup>1</sup>Schrey, p. 296.

D. The New Course, 1953-1957

The 10th of June, 1953, was a memorable day for the church in East Germany--the persecution of the Kirchenkampf had come to a sudden end and the church was given a short respite from government harassment. The fires of persecution had been burning for many months. Thousands of young people had been suspended from schools of higher learning because of their loyalty to the church. A number of the church's institutions of mercy had been seized by the state. False and libelous accusations had been hurled at the church defaming her leaders, and seventy-two pastors and church workers languished in prisons. Protestations by leading churchmen both within and without Germany had been ignored. Letters requesting a discussion of the points of tension had remained unanswered. Grotewohl had even publicly denied that a Kirchenkampf was waged in his country. Yet quite unexpectedly, in response to a final and nearly desperate petition by East German bishops, Grotewohl agreed to meet with a church delegation on June 10.

On the appointed day leading officials from the eight territorial churches in East Germany filed into the reception room of the large government building in East Berlin. They were received by Prime Minister Grotewohl, Deputy Prime Minister Otto Nuschke, Secretary of the Interior Groetschel, and the Ministers of Education and State Security, Paul Wandel and Wilhelm Zaisser. The opening formalities were courteous but brief and, after a few preliminary remarks by Grotewohl and Dibelius, the church representatives were asked to present their case.

To the complete surprise of the churchmen, when the problem of the attack upon the church's youth organisations and of the expulsion of

young Christian people from school had been aired, Grotewohl introduced a prepared statement from which he read a full retraction of the government's position and a promise to rectify the injustices of the past months. The youth organizations, stated Grotewohl, were not illegal in the German Democratic Republic, and they would be permitted to operate in freedom without government interference. All students who had been suspended from high schools and colleges on account of their affiliation with the church's youth organizations would immediately be allowed to resume their studies. Teachers who had been dismissed from their academic positions for their support of expelled students would also be reinstated. Limitations which had been imposed on religious instruction in public schools since January 1, 1953, were to be removed. With growing astonishment the bishops listened to a similar acknowledgment of error in regard to the seizure of the church's institutions of mercy. Grotewohl promised that confiscated eleemosynary institutions would be returned to the church. All prison sentences which had been imposed upon pastors and lay workers were to be reviewed by East German courts to correct possible injustices. Finally, as if to test the genuineness of these concessions, one of the churchmen pointed out that since the state subsidies to the church had not been paid for some time, the salaries of pastors and church workers were in arrears. Grotewohl replied that the government would resume its financial obligations on a regular basis and inquired what sum of money would presently be needed. Heinrich Grueber, the church's plenipotentiary to the East German government, answered, "Two million marks." Grotewohl immediately ordered a check for that amount made out in favor of the church. At the conclusion of the conference, all these

agreements were released in a communique to the public.<sup>1</sup> This marked the end of the Kirchenkampf and the beginning of a "new course" in the relations between church and state.

After the initial shock, the reaction of church leaders was one of deep gratitude that the Kirchenkampf had ended. The Council of the Evangelical church in Germany, which met on June 12, issued a statement that reflected the gratitude of the church over the termination of the struggle:

In this hour it would not be proper to suggest reasons which have led to this great change. Nor would it be proper to direct our attention to the things which were not achieved. The facts are there. In these facts we can only recognize the answers to the many prayers which have been raised by our congregations. A bitter time lies behind the churches in the German Democratic Republic. In these times we have experienced much of the merciful help of God. We have experienced anew all the blessings which God bestows upon the Christian through suffering. Now we gratefully accept this new beginning from His hand.<sup>2</sup>

There was little doubt, however, in the minds of even the most grateful churchmen that the new course represented not a basic change in the attitude of the German Democratic Republic toward religion. Certainly, the new course was the most spectacular modification of the government's church policy since 1950, but even in the sweeping concessions of the communique there was not the slightest intimation of a possible basic ideological shift toward religion on the part of the Communist state. Experience had taught church leaders to live from one reprieve to another, and they were fully aware that Communist tactics could change rapidly

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953. p. 179.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1953. p. 181.

to meet the needs of a given situation.

The launching of the new course by the East German government was directly connected with the politics of Soviet Russia and its satellite countries. Joseph Stalin had died on March 5, and the internal political turmoil in the Soviet Union that followed his death demanded a lessening of tension in national and international affairs. The new Soviet Russian leaders formalised these objectives in a policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the West and in a relaxation of the strict Stalinist control within the ranks of international Communism. Personnel shifts in the Soviet representatives to the German Democratic Republic suggested that some basic changes were also to take place there. The Soviet Control Commission in Germany was dissolved and its chief, Marshal Zhukov, himself a close friend and confidant of Stalin, was recalled to Soviet Russia. Vladimir Semjonow, a long-time advocate of closer relations with West Germany, was appointed high commissioner of the Soviet Union in Germany on May 28. He arrived in the German Democratic Republic on June 5, and on June 8 Grotewohl advised church leaders of his government's readiness to confer with them about a lessening of frictions between church and state.<sup>1</sup>

Even more dramatic changes occurred in the SED. At a meeting on June 9 the politburo of the SED's central committee decided to extensively modify the socio-economic program which had been launched as the stage of Socialist development in 1952. The central committee had been urged by the Soviet Russian Communist party on April 15, and again on June 3,

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<sup>1</sup>Arnulf Baring, Der 17. Juni 1953, 4th ed. (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1959), p. 22.

to affect a modification of that program.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the politburo complied and at its meeting on June 9 confessed that the government and party had made a number of mistakes in the attempted Socialisation of East Germany; in order to overcome them the socio-economic program of rapid Socialisation would temporarily be suspended. This resolution was passed on to the government as a party directive.

One reason for this sweeping change in East German policy was the fear that the government had pressed its Socialisation program too far. The assumption upon which the second stage of Socialist development had been initiated was that a sufficient number of people had been gained for it or were willing to accept it. The alarming rise in the number of people escaping to the West in the early months of 1953 manifested that this was not the case. A further indication was the general labor unrest that followed an increase of work quotas without a corresponding wage increase at state-owned factories on May 28. Labor strikes protesting the new quotas broke out at Chemnitz, Eisleben, and East Berlin, and climaxed in a general revolt against the government on June 17.<sup>2</sup> The uprising was swiftly put down by Soviet military units stationed in East Germany. It was quite apparent that the new course as a preventive measure designed to quench unrest had been launched too late.

The church in East Germany was not directly involved in the revolt of June 17. The strikes and mass demonstrations were spontaneous reactions of factory workers against their new work quotas and then broadened into

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<sup>1</sup>Richert, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Baring, p. 41.

a general revolt against the government. Almost all participants of the uprising were members of the church, but only in a few instances did clergymen take an active part. By the same token, church leaders made no secret of the fact that their sympathies were with the striking people. When the revolt had been put down, they contacted the Soviet authorities by telephone and telegraph, urging the use of conciliatory measures and advising against harsh reprisals. On June 24 East German bishops sent a letter to the Soviet High Commissioner Semjonow in which they expressed their genuine concern about the wave of arrests in the country following the uprising. They thought that these arrests would lead only to renewed bitterness and enmity rather than to peace and order and explained to Semjonow that "as Evangelical Christians we have a deep human understanding for the requests of the laboring men as they were brought to light on June 17 and, therefore, we do not believe that any real satisfaction can be achieved merely with soothing explanations and halfway measures."<sup>1</sup>

#### E. Renewed Attacks. 1957-1961.

The thaw in relations between the church and state lasted only through the first part of 1954; it proved to be only a passing and expedient phase in the government's long-range plan of expediting the death of religion. A strong ideological offensive against the church was launched in the fall of 1954, and has since that time been pursued with unmitigated force by the government. The hardening of the new course into one of ideological warfare and renewed persecution was caused by at least three important factors--a directive by Nikita Khrushchev, the successful launching of

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953. p. 183.

Soviet sputniks, and a growing antagonism toward the church that finally gave way to punitive measures.

The ideological onslaught on the church was touched off by the before-mentioned directive issued on November 11, 1954,<sup>1</sup> by Khrushchev and the Communist party. In the directive Khrushchev urged all members of the Communist party and its subsidiary organizations to engage in an ideological battle that would at last stamp out religion. The response of the German Democratic Republic to Khrushchev's directive was promptly expressed in an article by Kurt Hager, Secretary of Science and Education of the SED's central committee:

It is imperative at the present time to accelerate the popular-scientific propaganda under the direction and control of the party. This propaganda work must be carried out patiently without offending the feelings of believers. It is important to spread the teachings of dialectical materialism . . . which prove the validity of materialistic views concerning the development of nature and society.<sup>2</sup>

An even more succinct statement expounding on the necessity of ideological warfare was issued by the thirtieth plenum of the SED's central committee on January 31, 1957:

Marxism-Leninism teaches that coexistence in ideological questions is impossible, that the ideology of the working class stands in a position diametrically opposed to the hostile bourgeois ideology, which will be attacked and fought in whatever form it may appear.

Our party leadership has always insisted that the best way to make progress and to overcome deficiencies and weaknesses consists of attacking and defeating the enemy with ideological

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<sup>1</sup> Pravda, November 11, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Hager, "Ueber den wissenschaftlich-atheistischen Charakter unserer Weltanschauung," Einheit, Heft 4 (April, 1955).

weapons, with bold measures, and even with government means.<sup>1</sup>

The East German government carried out Moscow's directive in two significant ways. Late in 1954 it created a youth dedication,<sup>2</sup> a Communist rite which was intended to replace the Protestant rite of confirmation. The matter of youth dedication became the focal point of the ideological conflict between church and state, and it has remained an unresolved issue to this very day. The second means of ideological warfare consisted of a vast output of anti-Christian books. As soon as Khrushchev's directive was issued, several atheistic booklets were translated from Russian into German and distributed on a mass basis. By 1956 East German authors had had time to add their own contributions to the ever-increasing avalanche of atheistic literature that swept the book market. To intensify the ideological battle against the church, a Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge<sup>3</sup> was called into life in 1954. Its sole purpose was to contribute to the ultimate obliteration of religion by the production and distribution of atheistic booklets and pamphlets.<sup>4</sup> From all indications it appeared the Moscow's directive of 1954 was painstakingly carried out in the German Democratic Republic.

The successful launching of the Soviet earth satellites in October, 1957, may have been another important reason for the change of the

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<sup>1</sup> Neuer Weg, Heft 6 (1958).

<sup>2</sup> Jugendweihe.

<sup>3</sup> Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung wissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse.

<sup>4</sup> Einheit, Heft 7 (1954).

government's church policy. In Communist quarters the appearance of the sputniks in the firmament symbolized the victory of Marxist science over religious "ignorance and superstition." This conviction was reiterated almost daily in newspaper articles and speeches by noted Communist leaders during the months of November and December. Gerhard Grueneberg, First Secretary of the SED of Frankfurt at-the-Oder, asseverated on October 21, 1957:

We teach truth. This truth is much easier to comprehend than certain other unimaginable nonsense. It must be clear to you all by now that the artificial earth satellite, launched into the universe by Soviet scientists, does not circle around the globe merely to say "hello" to a dear God or to angels, but that this greatest achievement of Soviet science shall help humanity to explore the universe.

It is the human being who changes the face of the earth. It is the human being who puts to use the most secret and powerful forces of nature. Man is the mightiest of all beings, for there is none higher than he is.<sup>1</sup>

The spectacle of the sputniks fortified the SED cadre in its belief that Marxist science would soon be victorious over religious "superstition." Thus the SED intensified the ideological attack upon the church in 1957 with renewed convictions that this would accelerate the pace of the church's disintegration.

The ideological assault upon religion was also in part a measure of reprisal for the stubborn refusal of the church to further the political interest of the state. In 1954 the National Front had again approached the clergy with the request that they support a new plebiscite; in 1956 the church was called upon to issue a special declaration of loyalty to the state. To both of these requests the

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<sup>1</sup>Neuer Tag, October 21, 1957.

government received a negative answer.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, the church signed an agreement with the Federal Republic in 1957 which provided the West German army with Protestant chaplains. The East German government vehemently cried out against this agreement and apparently felt betrayed by the "NATO bishops." The ideological battle against the church was now waged with bitter and vicious determination. The relations between church and state were further chilled by the general power conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. After the fiasco of the Geneva Summit Conference in 1955, a feeling of despair and resignation overcame East Germans; since a peaceful settlement of world problems could not be reached at the conference table, the government was now even more determined firmly to implant Socialism in the German Democratic Republic and to strangle religion. These political factors played a part in translating the government's church policy into a relentless ideological drive against religion in East Germany.

By way of summary it should be noted that, although imbued with a deep respect for secular authority, German Protestantism through its bitter encounter with the Nazi regime had learned to obey God more than man and was not willing to accept the Communist bidding for political subservience after World War II.

The church fared quite well under the Soviet Military Administration. This was due to the fact that church leaders and Communist officials had a genuine respect for each other, that the Soviet government sought

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<sup>1</sup> KJ 1956, pp. 17-18.

to ingratiate itself among West Germans by projecting a favorable image through a "benevolent" treatment of the church, and that the first stage of Socialist development called for amicable relations between church and state. With the inception of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, a fierce Kirchenkampf developed. It was caused by the waning of mutual respect between churchmen and Communists, by the consolidation of political power within the SED, by the rapid Socialization of the country, by the refusal of the church to sanction the socio-political machinations of the government, and by the alienation of the West German people from Soviet Russia. The Kirchenkampf was suddenly terminated in 1953 and a new course, supposedly on a friendly basis, was charted by the state. The new course in the government's church policy turned, however, into an ideological attack on the church which has been carried on with ever-increasing intensity. This attack was triggered by a directive from Khrushchev, by the spectacular success of the Soviet earth satellites, and by the obdurate attitude of the church towards political overtures of the state. All indications suggest that even though the church has at times been treated with tolerance, the unswerving goal of the Communist regime is to bring about her ultimate extinction. Whenever the state made concessions to the church they were dictated by political calculation, and not by good will.

### III. ELIMINATE THE CHURCH'S INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC LIFE; EDUCATION

One of the objectives of Communist strategists is the elimination of the church's impact upon public life. Since they endeavor to bring all facets of life under Communist control, the influence of the church in society cannot be tolerated. Among the numerous mass media which influence individuals and mold the political-ideological character of a nation, none quite rivals that of public education in importance. Through the contents of school curricula and textbooks, the minds of even the youngest children can subtly be impregnated with a specific outlook on life and thus, with the rise of a new generation, the political-ideological orientation of an entire nation can fundamentally be modified. If the Communist government wished to be successful in educating people in the Marxist mold, the church's hold on education had to be broken.

When Communists came to rule East Germany in 1945, they gained control over its system of public education. The church was largely expelled from that field, because the state at once claimed public education as its rightful prerogative. In past generations it had been customary in Germany to operate a confessional school system,<sup>1</sup> that is, the physical maintenance of schools and their financial support were provided by the state while pedagogical supervision and religious instruction were the

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<sup>1</sup>Konfessionsschule.

province of the church. In communities with Protestant and Catholic children, the state operated two schools supervised respectively by the two denominations. Before 1933 about four-fifths of all schools in Germany were confessional in nature, and only one-fifth was communal<sup>1</sup> in character, attended by Protestant and Catholic students. The confessional schools were almost completely wiped out by Hitler and were replaced by secular schools under centralized Nazi control.<sup>2</sup> After World War II most states in West Germany decided to reestablish the old confessional system of education, but the Soviet Military Administration stubbornly opposed such a move in East Germany and retained the secular school system imposed by Hitler. In accordance with the stand of the Soviet Military Administration, the City Council of East Berlin promptly resolved that "proceeding from the consideration that German schools should no longer be torn by different creeds and ideologies, the school will be separated from the church."<sup>3</sup> Municipal and state authorities throughout East Germany followed suit and passed similar resolutions.

In utter dismay Bishop Dibelius issued a pastoral letter to the parents of Berlin children on October 25, 1945, in which he lamented over the fact that after a ten-year battle on behalf of the Christian faith the church should again encounter an organized attempt by the state to remove from schools everything Christian in character:

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<sup>1</sup>Gemeinschaftschule.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1949, pp. 455-519.

<sup>3</sup>Richard W. Solberg, God and Caesar in East Germany (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1961) p. 38.

The secular school which is now being introduced is not religiously a neutral school. In education there is no neutrality in respect to the great questions of human life. The children must be given answers to these questions, one way or another! The secular school is clearly and unmistakably a school opposed to the Christian religion. In this we have had ample experience.<sup>1</sup>

That Dibelius' apprehensions were not unfounded has been attested with alarming clarity by the educational program in East Germany since 1945. In the course of time Communists created the conditions which enabled them to transform the school into an educational institution of dialectical materialism. This included the elimination of the old generation of teachers and the raising of a new generation who had been steeped in atheism and materialism. Moreover, as an adjustment to the political situation in East Germany, all textbooks were rewritten in the vein of dialectical materials and published in sufficient numbers for students and teachers. As early as January 19, 1951, the central committee of the SED could openly demand that "schools must proclaim the progressive achievements of science, especially of Soviet science, on the basis of Marxism-Leninism."<sup>2</sup> Opened in 1945 under the guise of strict neutrality towards religion, the schools in East Germany have become wholly transformed into confessional institutions of materialistic atheism. Even the government clearly admitted this in a speech by Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl on March 23, 1959:

Socialism calls for a new man with the best human qualities; and this new man must carefully be brought up, formed and educated with great patience but also with perseverance. The greatest

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>The Roman Catholic Church in Berlin and in the Soviet Zone of Germany. trans. by n.n. (Berlin: Morus Verlag, 1959), p. 25.

and most intensive endeavor must be devoted to the young, oncoming generation.

In order to give them a command in the practice of Socialist advancement, first and foremost they must be provided with a convincing explanation of Socialist theory and Marxist-Leninist science . . . This scientific knowledge also includes the struggle against all kinds of fear, prejudice, belief in miracles and superstition, which give a false idea of the world. . . . Hand in hand with the mental education and the overall educational work of the schools there must be moral education. Simultaneously with the transformation of the social order, the customs and habits of people and their concepts of good and evil and of justice are changing. Morality serves to raise human society and to liberate it from the exploitation of labor. Whatever serves the cause of Socialism is, therefore, moral. That alone is the basis for the moral upbringing and education of our youth.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Public Education

In an endeavor to align the East German school system with that of the Soviet Union, the Central Administration of Peoples' Education passed on May 31, 1946, a law called "The Democratization of German Schools." According to that law, the new structure of education consisted of a kindergarten with voluntary attendance, an eight-grade primary school compulsory for all children, a four-year secondary school for mentally superior children, and a three-year trade school for those who wished to acquire manual skills.<sup>2</sup> Graduates from secondary schools were permitted to enter institutions of higher learning. This statute was intended to eliminate the traditional German practice of admitting into the secondary schools at the age of ten those children likely to be eligible for higher education, while leaving the rest of the children in the primary schools.

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland, March 29, 1959.

<sup>2</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung der DDR, vol. II, pp. 92-96.

The statute also centralized the school system and gave the Ministry of People's Education authority to exercise surveillance over adult education.

### 1. Kindergartens

The central government charged the municipal councils in East Germany with the responsibility of establishing and supporting kindergartens in their communities. In 1956 there existed 7,129 government-controlled kindergartens with an enrollment of 255,710 children and a personnel of 18,716 teachers.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the kindergartens was in part to indoctrinate pre-school children with Marxism and to free mothers from their responsibilities to their small children so that they could work as much-needed laborers outside the home.<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of People's Education of Thuringia thought it desirable to instill kindergartners with such "ideals" as "love for our own nation, for our German Democratic Republic, and with hatred for all enemies who intend to disturb our work of peace."<sup>3</sup> One requirement in the academic training of prospective kindergarten teachers was the acquisition of "solid and scientific knowledge of Marxist-Leninist thought."<sup>4</sup>

The content of many old German legends and fairy tales was somewhat changed by Communist pedagogues so as to meet the need for a children's

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Mitteilungsblatt, ed. Ministerium fuer Volksbildung des Landes Thueringen, Nr. 9 (September 1, 1951).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Nr. 4 (April 1, 1951).

literature with a Socialist orientation. They asserted that the legends and fairy tales had originally been a classical form of literature through which oppressed people expressed their longing for liberation from the yoke of the ruling class.<sup>1</sup> In the course of centuries, the bourgeoisie had maliciously altered their content in order to use them as an instrument of oppression. In other words, all true and unadulterated sagas and folk tales were to reflect something about the struggle and spirit of the proletariat. Communist educators thought it imperative to extricate that folk literature from garbled bourgeois distortions and to restore it to its pristine form. In the process of this "corrective" purge, all references to God and religion were removed as bourgeois interpolations.

The following are just two examples of numerous textual "corrections" made in the well-known Grimms' fairy tales by East German Communist pedagogues:

The old version of "Cinderella" read:

The wife of a rich man fell ill, and when she felt that she was nearing her end she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, "Dear child, continue devout and good. Then God will always help you, and I will look down from heaven and watch over you."

Thereupon she closed her eyes and breathed her last.

The maiden went to her mother's grave every day and wept, and she continued to be devout and good.<sup>2</sup>

The purged version of "Cinderella" read:

The wife of a rich man fell ill, and when she felt that she was nearing her end she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, "Dear child, whatever may betide you, always be a good girl."

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<sup>1</sup>Hermann Hartung and Gottfried Paulsen, Was liest die Jugend in der Sowjetzone? (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1959), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Grimms' Fairy Tales, trans. by Mrs. E. V. Lucas, Lucy Crane, and Marian Edwards (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Publishers, 1945), p. 155.

Thereupon she closed her eyes and breathed her last.  
The maiden went to her mother's grave every day and wept.<sup>1</sup>

The old version of "The Elves and the Shoemaker" read<sup>2</sup>

There was once a shoemaker who through no fault of his own had become so poor that at last he had only leather enough left for one pair of shoes. At evening he cut out the shoes which he intended to begin upon the next morning, and since he had a good conscience, he lay down quietly, said his prayers, and fell asleep.

In the morning, when he had said his prayers and was preparing to sit down to work, he found the pair of shoes standing finished on his table.<sup>2</sup>

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In the morning, when he wished to sit down for work, he found the pair of shoes standing finished on his table.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian motif was eliminated not only in such fairy tales but also in quaint German children's songs and nursery rhymes. For instance, the words of the nursery rhyme, "It is raining, God is blessing, the earth is getting wet,"<sup>4</sup> were changed to, "It is raining, it is raining, it is raining quite hard, and if it has rained enough, it will stop again."<sup>5</sup> Religious songs and hymns were not permitted to be sung in schools and

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<sup>1</sup>Grimmsche Kinder- und Hausmaerchen, ed. Walther Polatschek (Berlin: Kinderbuch-Verlag, 1952), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>Grimms' Fairy Tales, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup>Grimmsche Kinder- und Hausmaerchen, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>In German: "Es regnet, Gott segnet, die Erde wird nass."

<sup>5</sup>In German: "Es regnet, es regnet, es regnet seinen Lauf, und wenn's genug geregnet hat, dann hoert's auch wieder auf."

Backe, backe Kuchen: Alte liebe Kinderreime (Poessneck: Verlag Rudolf Forkel, 1959), p. 6.

kindergartens. In an article entitled "The Nursery Song in the Service of Socialist Education," one educator expressed his obvious dissatisfaction with the lax enforcement of that directive in East German schools.

That a song, which stands in contradiction to our aims of instruction and education, must not be allowed in schools presumably need not be mentioned. And songs of a mystic or pessimistic nature will also hardly be sung. Yet at Christmas time it is not unusual that such songs as "O thou Joyful," "Silent Night, Holy Night," or "O Come Little Children," are heard from classrooms, that is, songs whose contents are based on religious views.

. . . But whoever knows what lasting effect the song in school and spread outside the school has on the child and on his environment will be unable to see why such songs, merely on account of tradition, are still sung in our schools.<sup>1</sup>

The preceding examples of literature have indicated that such terms as "God" and "church," "prayer" and "heaven," have carefully been eliminated in kindergartens. The aim of the "corrective" purge of children's literature has been to keep children oblivious of the very existence of religion.

A number of gifted writers kept busy producing appealing story books in order to fill the vacuum of children's literature acceptable to East German Communists. Typical of this new literature have been two picture books, Our little Boat travels through Germany<sup>2</sup> and Min and Go, a Letter from China.<sup>3</sup> The former booklet depicts a group of children in the German Democratic Republic who put a small boat on the Oder river. When the paper toy, to which a red flag had been fastened, reached

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<sup>1</sup>Ch. Lange, "Auch mit dem Kinderlied sozialistisch erziehen," Die Unterstufe, Heft 1 (1959).

<sup>2</sup>Ursula Peter, Unser Schiffchen faehrt durch Deutschland (Berlin: Kinderbuch-Verlag, 1955).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Wiens, Mind und Go. ein Brief aus China, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Kinderbuch-Verlag, 1955).

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Wiens, Mind und Go. ein Brief aus China. 2nd ed. (Berlin: Kinderbuch-Verlag, 1955).

Frankfurt at-the-Oder, it encounters a large train from Soviet Russia, which brings machines and butter into Germany. In the middle of a dark night at the dividing line between East and West Germany, the peaceful course of the little boat is threatened by a barbed wire fence, searchlights and tanks (The author did not relate that the barbed wire fence had been erected by the East German government). In Hamburg, the destination of the boat, a group of workers has just gathered in the harbor, threatening some American "moneybags" and German "traitors." A group of youngsters in Hamburg finally find the toy and gleefully read the message sent by the East German children, "We greet all children of the world, who love peace and fight for it as we do." The children in Hamburg are so impressed by this greeting that they, too, build a ship with a red flag and put it on the North Sea with New York as its destination.

Min and Go, a Letter from China relates the story of a Chinese brother and sister. The large and colorful pictures of the booklet show the development of Communist China, the battle of Mao Tse-tung against Chiang Kai-shek, soil reform, industrial planning, and the increase of literacy among Chinese people. The last pictures show a group of peaceful children at play; one child is disguised as a vicious, emaciated tiger who carries the flag of the United States in his mouth while some children have weapons and drums in their hands and others still wave at the tiger large flags with the white dove of peace. In spite of these gestures of peace, the tiger attacks the children and fights with them until he is soundly beaten.

This type of literature has been used in the Communist education of pre-school children in kindergarten, replacing "outmoded" bourgeois-Christian booklets and pamphlets. Even games played by children were given a Socialist

meaning in school. At the fifth convention of the SED in July, 1958, Eleonore Salomon, a teacher at the August-Bebel school in Greifswald, noted in regard to Socialist education in East Germany:

We start as early as the first year in school. Even when our children are that small, we tell them of our ideology and among other things also of youth dedication. But this is not all. For example, every year we take each grade for a visit to Communist marriage and name-giving rites to have our children observe the new forms of our Socialist life. In our schools and kindergartens, our children no longer play wedding in church, but enact the Communist marriages and name-giving rites.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Primary and Secondary Schools

The education system in East Germany was placed under the direct control of the government, which maintained its authority over schools through a Coordination and Control Office for Education and through the Central Administration of People's Education. The SED also took a direct part in the education policy of schools through its commission on education and other subsidiary organizations. On account of these three control agencies, deviations in local schools from central directives have hardly been possible.<sup>2</sup>

With the transition in 1950 from the anti-fascist to the Socialist stage, the schools were committed to a policy of conscious inculcation of students with Socialist thought. The Ministry of People's Education decreed at that time that the motif of hatred against imperialist enemies

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<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, trans. by n.n. (Berlin: Morus Verlag, 1959), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Carola Stern, "Volksbildung am Gaengelband der SED," SBZ Archiv, IV, Nr. 8 (April 20, 1953), pp. 120-121.

should be one of the basic principles in the education of all children.<sup>1</sup> The National Front declared that "the basis of Socialist education is a knowledge of the objective general laws which determine the development of nature, society and thought. This can be achieved solely with the help of the only scientific philosophy, dialectical materialism."<sup>2</sup> At a conference on education held by the SED in 1958, "principles for improved textbooks" were submitted by the book concern "Volk und Wissen," which has published most of the textbooks for schools in East Germany. It was noted in one of the principles that children possessed by nature a materialistic conception of the universe, and that "this fact must be utilized in the teaching of natural science, in order gradually to develop a conscious, scientific, materialistic attitude which would enable students to hold a materialistic image of life in opposition to religious prejudices."<sup>3</sup> Other guidelines for the writing of textbooks were to show students by example from history how the church has always impeded the advance of science, how the relentless fight between the church and progressive science has continued, and how the ruling class has played an ignoble role in this struggle.

In keeping with these aims, the curriculum consisted mainly of social science and language courses, but this was somewhat modified with the spectacular success of the sputnik in 1957 and more stress was placed

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<sup>1</sup>Antliches Rundverfuegen, ed. Ministerium fuer Volksbildung der DDR, Nr. 31 (1951), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>GDR, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, pp. 24-25.

on the biological and physical sciences. On September 1, 1959, a poly-technical program was added to the school curriculum with the purpose of acquainting students with various processes of production. In 1956 there existed 11,343 primary schools with an enrollment of 1,829,400 children, and 387 secondary schools with 96,380 students.<sup>1</sup>

The schools in East Germany have suffered from a chronic shortage of teachers. On account of war losses and dismissals of former Nazi teachers, the number of teachers was reduced by 30 per cent in 1945 alone. In order to produce new teachers as quickly as possible, graduates from secondary schools and sometimes even from primary schools were granted teacher's certificates after attending one year of a teachers' training college. In 1948 there were 49,944 teachers with only one year of training, and 22,562 experienced teachers who had received more extensive training at institutions of higher learning.<sup>2</sup> In view of the short training period now required for teachers, the academic level in schools left much to be desired. It has been estimated that about 70 per cent of the teachers in East Germany had received insufficient training.<sup>3</sup> Starting in 1950 a more demanding program of training was required for the teaching profession; those who intended to become teachers in primary schools were expected to devote three years of study at a teachers' college and those in secondary schools five years at a university. The large number of

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<sup>1</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, 1956, vol. II, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>SZ von A bis Z, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup>Horst Duhnke, Stalinismus in Deutschland--Die Geschichte der sowjetischen Besatzungszone (Koeln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1955), p. 345.

new personnel admitted to the teaching profession after 1945 made Communist encroachment in schools relatively easy, because all new teachers had to study dialectical materialism. Already in 1950 about 48 per cent of the teachers were members of the SED.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the textbooks used in East German schools were direct translations or adaptations from the Russian. The depiction of historical events was rendered in such a way that it had to evoke a feeling of revulsion towards religion. A few excerpts from history textbooks may illustrate the interpretation of the Christian faith given in East German schools:

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Democrit<sup>A</sup> was of the opinion that neither God nor some kind of spirit was the cause of the world but matter. According to his teaching, matter consisted of very small parts, the atoms, which were in constant flux endlessly uniting with and separating from each other. Through various combinations of atoms, Democrit<sup>OS</sup> explained natural phenomena. With his teaching he dealt a destructive blow to religion. He was the first important materialist and atheist.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian chronology is in use at the present time. The Christians started to count time with the thirtieth year of the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, in which according to tradition Jesus Christ was born.

Whether Christ ever lived has not been proved scientifically. But many began to believe in Him (Christians). Later--in the sixth century--they set the legendary year of Christ's birth as the first year of their chronology.<sup>3</sup>

The last persecution of Christians occurred under Diocletian. His successors even accepted Christianity themselves. Necessity forced them to recognize Christianity. It was now much more

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<sup>1</sup>Die rote Flut, ed. Bundesministerium fuer gesamtdeutsche Fragen (Bonn: Deutscher-Bundes-Verlag, 1950), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>A. W. Mischulin, Geschichte des Altertums (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Wissen, 1950), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

advantageous for the state to recognize the church and to be supported by her in the battle against the revolution. The church did not call upon the masses to rise up in a class war. On the contrary, she preached obedience and submission to the lords. We read in church chronicles, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters."<sup>1</sup>

Out of the midst of the people . . . the myth of Jesus Christ, the God-man, was created. He taught that all suffering should be borne patiently, because all those who suffered and were oppressed would receive their reward after death. On the other hand, sinners would be damned to eternal torture. This myth was formed under the influence of oriental cults.

In none of the historical works of that time is found a word about the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Catholic church realized that it did not suffice to fight a movement of the people with terror alone, she sought to win people through different means. With this in mind she established the "mendicant" order of the Franciscans, whose members pledged to remain poor. The poverty of the Franciscans was only a disguise. Soon the Franciscan monasteries gained much land and wealth. The external poverty of the Franciscans was merely a mask so that they might more effectively win the trust of people.<sup>3</sup>

The church needed educated clergymen, who could read and sing in the church, and preach to people the necessity of obeying masters and rulers.<sup>4</sup>

Calvin introduced strict rules: like the pope, he removed all those from his church who did not agree with his doctrines, imprisoned them and had "heretics" executed or expelled from the country. In 1554 he imprisoned the scholar Michael Servetus from Spain, who had refuted the Christian doctrine of the Trinity of God, which is one of the most nonsensical doctrines of Christianity, namely, that God consists simultaneously of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

The church played a great role in strengthening the power of kings. When Christianity, originally the religion of the suppressed masses, became victorious, it became the prop of the Roman state of slaveholders. Since the church taught the slaves obedience to their

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Kosminski, Geschichte des Mittelalters (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Wissen, 1950), p. 116.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 104

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

masters, condemned uprisings, and declared that masters were instituted by God, the emperor and slaveholders in turn helped the church. Bishops were often the most important persons in Roman cities. They and other clergymen received land and wealth of various kinds from the state.<sup>1</sup>

Spiritual princes, who revelled in luxury and debauchery, plundered their subjects just as severely as the temporal nobility. They blackmailed believers with threats of "eternal condemnation" and other church punishments. For the maintenance of their power they employed mendicant monks, especially of the Dominican order, who as spies searched for discontented people.<sup>2</sup>

Everywhere in France bishops were installed by Clovis. The church received many gifts consisting of royal estates and became thereby herself an estate owner. In return, clergymen admonished all inhabitants of the country to be obedient to the king. They proclaimed that it was the will of God to be obedient to authority.<sup>3</sup>

The church participated also in the subjugation of the Slavs. German priests and monks with the aid of feudal lords began to convert the Slavic population to Christianity by force. This conversion brought great wealth to high and mighty church princes, for all Christians were compelled to tithe. Otto I founded in the conquered territory the new archdiocese of Magdeburg and the dioceses of Brandenburg, Oldenburg (Holstein), Meissen, Zeitz, and Merseburg. There he appointed Saxon feudal lords as bishops.

Henceforth, the German feudal lords proclaimed that they would bring Christianity to the Slavs. They called themselves fighters of God against unbelieving heathens.

However, in reality the spiritual and temporal feudal lords emulated each other by robbing as much land as possible, by selling the indigenous population as slaves, and by forcing them into slavery or by killing them.<sup>4</sup>

Spiritual feudal lords also began to sell their agricultural products in order to come into possession of money. The church had formerly given a part of her surplus of grain to poor people. The

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Lehrbuch fuer den Geschichtsunterricht (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Wissen, 1954), 10. Schuljahr, Heft 3, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5. Schuljahr, 1952, Teil 3, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 6. Schuljahr, 1951, Teil 1, p. 36.

care of poverty-stricken people was now restricted. The limitation of the care of the poor and the suppression of peasants evoked the hatred of destitute people toward the church. High clergymen enforced obedience by severely punishing peasants and by threatening them with punitive retribution from heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The Reformation movement after 1521 proceeded definitely in two directions. Princes and wealthy townsmen as well as the nobility (since its defeat), in contrast to the masses of people, were satisfied with a church reform that included separation from Rome and the expropriation of church property. Martin Luther favored this moderate reform. On the other hand, the reformation of the people found its leader in Thomas Muenzer.<sup>2</sup>

In a scarcely audible voice Luther [at Worms] requested time to think things over. Princes and many knights were shocked by Luther's cowardice. When the first session of the Diet was ended, they sent a delegation to him. They assured him that he stood under the protection of mighty princes and knights, and demanded that he should not recant.<sup>3</sup>

Calvin taught that the wealth of a person was a visible sign of his election. The doctrine of predestination was received with great enthusiasm by the rising bourgeoisie, because its wealth and striving for power was given a Biblical justification.<sup>4</sup>

Communist morals are diametrically opposed to religious morals. The two are as incompatible as freedom and slavery, truth and falsehood, or light and darkness. Whereas Communism is the banner of the fight for the liberation of workers from slavery and exploitation, religion is an ideology to justify and perpetuate slavery.

Communist morals are the morals of the new world, which develops and grows stronger with the passing of each day and to which the future unequivocally belongs. Religious morals are the morals of the old world, which remains static and to which nothing will be added in future except increasing decay and irrevocable destruction.<sup>5</sup>

These citations have shown that the textbook is an instrument of the Communist government through which students are to be impregnated with

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. 6. Schuljahr, 1952, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. 10. Schuljahr, 1955, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. 6. Schuljahr, 1952, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. 6. Schuljahr, 1952, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup>Kolonizki, p. 5.

anti-religious views. Historical facts were presented from a definite anti-Christian vantage point. Since school children in East Germany hardly had access to any other than Communist books, they were not in a position to form an objective view of religion. In order to erase even the faintest positive thought about the Christian faith in school children, religious symbols traditionally found in German schools were removed and replaced with pictures of Communist leaders.<sup>1</sup> History teachers were committed to the task of elucidating the "unscientific" and "superstitious" nature of religious beliefs in their classes. The importance of teaching history from this point of view was stressed again in 1958 in an article entitled "Making Better Use of History Teaching for the Development of a Philosophy of Life."

The struggle against the idealistic philosophy of life, the discussion of unscientific theories, such as religion for example, must become a principle of instruction.

It is necessary to contend for every young person. The century-old structure of religious ties will not collapse within each person from one day to another.

In dealing with the evolution of man from the animal world, the false church doctrines of creation of man by a higher power must be dealt with, and the pupil must be shown the harm which this story of creation has wrought in the minds of people.

When lecturing on the incipient state of religion, we deal with the very roots of religion in detail and demonstrate that God did not create man, but that man "created"--invented--God.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Colleges and Universities

East German institutions of higher learning have directly been controlled by the Ministry of People's Education. In addition, on February

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<sup>1</sup>Grothe, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>H. Pollin, "Den Geschichtsunterricht besser fuer die Weltanschauliche Bildung nutzen," Geschichte in der Schule, Heft 10 (1958).

22, 1951, the government established a State Secretariat of Higher Education to accelerate the pace of the Socialization of colleges and universities.

The aim of the process of Socialization was to create and "to educate an intelligentsia which has a deep respect for the working class, a profound love of science, and which feels closely bound to the Socialist community."<sup>1</sup> Of course, this goal entailed the political indoctrination of students. Therefore, starting in 1951 students were required to take rigid social science courses for three years which consisted primarily of studies of dialectical materialism and political economics. Some institutions of higher learning also required marksmanship at the rifle range as a compulsory subject. For instance, medical students at the university in East Berlin have been permitted to take their final examinations only after they had proved their competence at the rifle range.<sup>2</sup> In order to accelerate the Socialization processes even more, admission of new students to universities and colleges since 1958 has been made contingent upon a pledge of loyalty to the East German state.

My studies are a distinction [bestowed upon me] by our Workers' and Peasants' state. I promise to pursue my studies in the light of Socialism, actively to support the policies of the government of the German Democratic Republic, and on the basis of dialectical and historical materialism to gain a comprehensive education for myself, which I will use to help in the maintenance and strengthening of peace after the completion of my studies.

During my studies I will actively participate in the Socialist development of industry and agriculture, and I am prepared to defend the Socialist achievements of the Workers' and Peasants' state

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<sup>1</sup>GDR, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Grothe, p. 175.

against all attacks (and to contribute to the preparedness of defense of the German Democratic Republic).

I promise to work for a period of three years after my studies . . . at the post assigned to me by organs of the Workers' and Peasants' state.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with this pledge, all male students since 1958 have been compelled during their school vacation to take part in military training supervised by officers of the National People's Army; only students of theology were exempted from this requirement.

Every East German citizen with the necessary academic background under the age of thirty-five could apply for admission to college or university, but only a small portion of the applicants have been permitted to enter the academic world each year. The selection of students has been carried out by members of the Teachers' Union, representatives of university faculties, and leaders of the Free German Youth. The applicant's scholastic record, his attitude towards the Communist state, and participation in political activities have been decisive factors in his gaining admittance. Preference has been given to those who had worked in industrial plants for several years or who had honorably been discharged from the National People's Army.<sup>2</sup> Only a certain number of students from the various strata of the population have been permitted to enter institutions of higher learning each year. In 1958 the quota for the children of factory and farm workers was set at 80 per cent, for those of professional people and of the old intelligentsia at 14 per cent, for those of independent farmers and craftsmen

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>"Hochschulbestimmungen," Das Hochschulwesen, Heft 6 (1959), p. 13.

at 5 per cent, and for those of private businessmen and large farmers at 1 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming quota earmarked for children from families of factory and farm workers indicated that they received preferential treatment. Even though they had made up only 10 per cent of the total number of students in 1945, their quota was set at 56 per cent in 1957<sup>2</sup> and at 80 per cent in 1958. This was done in order to approximate a "fair" representation of the various social strata at institutions of higher learning. Since the bulk of the population was composed of working people, they were also allotted a high quota of students. East German authorities believed that these children, "as members of the leading class, should be particularly well educated and prepared early in life for their responsible job as the future bearers of the economical, political, and cultural life of the country."<sup>3</sup> In order to qualify as a child of a worker, the student's parents had to be employed as manual laborers before January 1, 1942.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, children of the old intelligentsia were discriminated against; it was only natural that a large percentage of young people from that social stratum desired to pursue academic studies, because their parents--many of whom were graduates of colleges and universities themselves--had instilled in them a deep appreciation for higher education. Yet the annual quota appropriated for them was decidedly low, barring many intelligent young people including children of the clergy from the academic world. This

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<sup>1</sup>GDR. p. 196.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A-Z. p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>GDR. p. 187.

<sup>4</sup>Die Neue Schule. Nr. 6, (February 8, 1951), pp. 11-12.

policy violated article 35 of the constitution, which stated that "every citizen has the same right for an education and for a free choice of occupation . . . ."<sup>1</sup> Under the quota arrangement, children of the old intelligentsia were certainly not given the same rights as those of factory and farm workers.<sup>2</sup> To aggravate their predicament even more, a directive of the Ministry of People's Education specified that children of the "progressive" intelligentsia should receive preferential treatment over those of the old intelligentsia. This measure was defended on grounds that certain groups in the "progressive" intelligentsia such as medical doctors, "heroes of labor," devoted teachers, skilled specialists, and individuals who had received certain national awards, render such valuable service to their country that as a token of appreciation their children should receive priority consideration in admission to institutions of higher education.<sup>3</sup> The number of full-time students in 1951 was 27,833 and in 1956 it increased to 63,911 students. In 1951 there were 21 colleges and universities in East Germany and in 1956 that number rose to 46 institutions of higher learning.<sup>4</sup>

Jointly with the SED cadre the State Secretariat of Higher Education supervised all staff appointments to the faculties of colleges and

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<sup>1</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung der DDR, vol. I, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard Moebus, Bolschewistische Parteilichkeit als Leitmotiv der sowjetzonalen Kulturpolitik (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1951), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>"Richtlinien fuer Oberschuelern und Zehnjahresschuelern," Anweisung, by Ministerium fuer Volksbildung, Nr. 83/II.

<sup>4</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, 1956, vol. II, p. 119.

universities. This enabled the government to realize its goal of forming a group of intellectual leaders who had a deep commitment to the Communist state. The many teaching posts which became vacant since 1945 have been filled with loyal party people, who would gladly educate students in the spirit of Marxism. Numerous new positions for professors were created through the establishment of 25 new institutions of learning since 1945. The number of full professors increased from 1,395 in 1951 to 2,690 in 1956.<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that between 1949 and 1959 more than 68,000 people with an academic training, including 22,347 teachers and 1,264 professors, fled from East to West Germany.<sup>2</sup> Their vacant posts were largely filled with loyal Communist teachers. In an endeavor to halt the unceasing flight of teachers and professors, the government raised their salaries considerably in 1952. Even this incentive was for many not strong enough to keep them at their academic posts. On account of defections and the creation of new professorships, the quality of scholarship suffered at East German universities. However, this decline did not reach catastrophic proportions, because many of the new instructors were placed in the field of social science which dealt primarily with dialectical and historical materialism. The teaching personnel for this field could be trained in a relatively short time in comparison to the arduous academic preparation required for similar positions in other fields. The presence of a loyal teaching staff at the academic institutions facilitated the realization of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., vol. II, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>The Flight from the Soviet Zone, ed. the Federal Minister for Exiles, Refugees, and War Victims (Bonn, 1959), p.

the Communist goal in higher education to form a nucleus of young intellectuals with a deep sense of commitment to Communism, who would be responsible for the socialization of the German Democratic Republic.

As regards the Christian faith, the attitude of university authorities has been one of open hostility or mute indifference. References to religion in most textbooks and lectures were similar to those found in the textbooks for the primary and secondary schools. The prevailing attitude at institutions of higher education has best been summarized by Walter Ulbricht himself when in 1956 he stated before a group of scientists in Halle that "theism cannot be presented at all in lectures at universities. Nobody has a right to do so. Theism does not comply with science and has nothing to do with science. The university must not be mistaken for a church."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Adult Education

Not only the youth but also the adult population was at least to some degree to be steeped in Marxist thought. It was partly for that purpose that a considerable number of people's colleges were established throughout the country. Courses based on the regular curricula of secondary schools were offered to adults in these colleges. After the participants had successfully passed their examinations in a prescribed number of courses, they were permitted to enter institutions of higher learning. To make it easier for working people to pursue studies, many courses were given directly in factories and industrial plants. The cost of adult education was carried almost entirely by the state.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, a number of highly

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland, April 29, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>GDR, p. 195.

profitable courses such as stenography, typing, foreign languages, and fine arts were offered by the people's colleges, but they were interspersed with compulsory lectures and courses of an ideological nature.<sup>1</sup> If a person wished to acquire specialized skills or knowledge, he was at the same time forced to study dialectical materialism. Especially after 1949, East German politics and Communist tenets were given a predominant position in the curricula.<sup>2</sup> The official task of the people's colleges was to prepare working people for an active participation in economics, administration, the party and mass organizations, and to educate them for responsible positions in society.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of People's Education was in charge of the administration of the people's colleges and supervised the preparation of their curricula.

In 1951 there existed 202 people's colleges with 157 full-time faculty members and 774,561 registered participants. In 1955 the number of the institutions had risen to 226 with 774 faculty members and 921,321 participants.<sup>4</sup> This was the highest enrollment and since 1955 a decline in the number of adult students has taken place. Beginning in 1957 the program of the people's colleges was changed from day to evening classes.

Another agency influential in the Marxist education of the adult population was the aforementioned Society for the Dissemination of

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<sup>1</sup>Heinz Gutschke, Die Erwachsenenbildung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1958), vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>H. Kaiser, Die Technische Betriebschule--ihre Entwicklung, Aufgabe und Problematik (Berlin, 1955), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, 1955, vol. I, p. 69.

Scientific Knowledge. The objective of the Society was "to overcome the remnants . . . of reactionary ideology . . . in the heads of our people," and through an imparting of "social sciences taught on the basis of Marxism-Leninism to cause people to take an active part in changing their environment."<sup>1</sup> Each member of the Society pledged to give annually at least two lectures on some popular Marxist topic. In 1956 members of the Society held 117,000 lectures.<sup>2</sup> SED functionaries considered the creation of the Society an important step in furthering the ideological education of the East German people. They hailed its creation in laudatory terms, "Our party attaches utmost significance to the establishment of the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge. There exists no doubt that the cadres of the party will fervently support the activities of the Society."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the energetic efforts by the state to educate East Germans in dialectical materialism through people's colleges and the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge, its endeavors did not always meet with unmitigated enthusiasm. At the twenty-fifth plenum of the SED's central committee, political functionaries complained that "stifling boredom" prevailed at some lectures on Marxism and the ideological-political education of people was plagued by "torpid routinism."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Einheit, July, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A-Z, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>"Das Licht des Wissens dem ganzen Volke," Neues Deutschland, June 18, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Neues Deutschland, November 22, 1955.

The church's reaction to the education program fostered by the state was one of utter dismay. Bishop Dibelius protested repeatedly against the materialistic education that was forced upon the population in East Germany. In a letter to the government dated April 20, 1950, he demanded an immediate withdrawal from schools of Mischulin's History of Antiquity, a textbook that maliciously impugned the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim of Thuringia made a similar request of the Erfurt municipal government in 1953; he asked the municipality to ban the use in local schools of Kolonizki's rabidly anti-Christian booklet, Communist and Christian Morality.<sup>2</sup> Both Dibelius and Mitzenheim argued that since Christian parents had helplessly to watch their children being subjugated to an impudently anti-Christian education the use of these books and the materialistic education in public schools violated the freedom of conscience granted to citizens in article 41 of the constitution. In conclusion the two bishops wished the government to take note of the fact that more than 90 per cent of the East German people embraced the Christian faith and abhorred the materialistic education of their children. Numerous other resolutions and petitions drawn up by the church expressed similar sentiments and called on the government either to discontinue Marxist education or to permit the church to establish her own parochial schools.<sup>3</sup> These letters and resolutions made no apparent impact upon the government:

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<sup>1</sup>Kirche im Kampf der Zeit, ed. Guenter Heidtmann (Berlin: Lettner Verlag, 1954), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 178, 180, 181, 184.

indeed, the Socialization of schools was not abandoned but was actually accelerated in 1957.

## B. Religious Instruction and Theological Education

Religious instruction of children in public schools and theological education of students at state universities had been anchored in German tradition and constitutional law as early as the 1850's. Regardless, whether a school was confessional or communal in character, two hours of religious instruction per week were considered a normal part of the curriculum and were given in the school building during regular school hours. In communal schools, which were attended by both Protestant and Catholic children, teachers from the two denominations met with their respective students in separate classes for religious instruction. Except for upper classes which were taught by pastors or priests, the personnel consisted of regular school teachers, but no one could be compelled to teach religion.

### 1. Religious Instruction

The right to give religious instruction to children in public schools had already been extended to the church by the National Assembly at Frankfurt in 1849.<sup>1</sup> The Weimar constitution of 1919 reinstated the church in that privilege, and also granted to the church the right to train her theological students at state universities.<sup>2</sup> The Vatican's concordat with

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Liermann, Kirchen und Staat (Muenchen: Isar Verlag, 1955), vol. I, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vol. I, p. 13.

Hitler in 1933 assured the Roman Catholic church in Germany of a continuation of that benign privilege for her people,<sup>1</sup> but religious instruction of Protestant children continued under the Nazi regime only on a haphazard basis propelled by the force of tradition. After World War II the states of the West German Federal Republic extended these old provisions once more to the church, granting her the right either to operate confessional schools supported by state funds or to render religious instruction in communal schools. The East German state denied the church the right to maintain confessional schools, but permitted her to carry on with religious instruction.

As soon as World War II had come to an end, churchmen were deeply concerned that the church be permitted to continue with her program of religious instruction in public schools. At a church conference at Treysa in August, 1945, church leaders petitioned political authorities for a pledge that this old-established tradition would not be discontinued. Rumors spread at that time that neither the teaching of religion nor the establishment of confessional schools would be allowed by the temporal powers in East Germany. Finally, a decree issued by the Province of Saxony on October 10, 1945, bore out the validity of this persistent talk; the church in that region was no longer to be permitted to give religious instruction in public schools. In the event that no other facilities were available, the local political officials might possibly make temporary provision for the use of schoolrooms. Participation in religious instruction was to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid... vol. I, p. 77.

be entirely on a voluntary basis, and parents who wished their children to take part were to notify the school administration of their desire. If a regular schoolteacher felt inclined to teach religion, he could do so under regulations governing the "supplementary employment" of faculty members.<sup>1</sup> Upon hearing the details of this decree, both Protestant and Catholic bishops raised strenuous objections. Even though a formal separation between church and state had existed in Germany since 1918, a close cooperation had prevailed in the field of education so that this new regulation was looked upon with suspicion and even open hostility. Church officials took public opinion-polls which indicated that in thirteen of the twenty boroughs in Berlin 85 to 100 per cent of the parents emphatically wished to have religious instruction in schools.

Apparently under the pressure of various petitions and the public opinion-polls, the Central Administration of People's Education reversed some particulars of the decree by the Province of Saxony and through a 1946 law on "The Democratization of German Schools" permitted the church to teach religion in schools. The Central Administration's law was reinforced in 1949 by article 44 of the East German constitution:

The right of the church to administer religious instruction in the rooms of schools is guaranteed. The religious instruction will be administered by persons selected by the church. No person may be forced or be prevented from administering religious instruction. The legal guardians of the pupils shall decide as to participation in religious instruction.<sup>2</sup>

The spirit of this constitutional provision was soon violated by both

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, pp. 387-388.

<sup>2</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung der DDR, vol. II, p. 431.

school administrators and government officials. As a rule, school principals worked diametrically against the interests of the church by obstructing the teaching of the Christian faith in school buildings. Some principals set a very unfavorable time and day for religious instruction; thus they kept many children from attending classes in religion and still were following the letter of the law. Discipline during religious instruction often broke down completely, because teachers were not allowed to discipline students on their own even though this was a normal practice in all other classes. Since attendance was on a voluntary basis, children could enter and leave the classroom during instruction as they wished. Teachers had no authority to enforce discipline over this obstreperous conduct in class, and some were even publicly called by such names as "Jesus Christ," "the old one," "the holy Susan," and "the holy aunt"<sup>1</sup> without being allowed to reprimand them. Nevertheless, considering all difficulties and impediments, religious instruction was carried on rather effectively by the church until the promulgation of a new decree on February 12, 1958, by Fritz Lange, the Minister of People's Education. The so-called Lange decree required that an interval of at least two hours elapse between the close of school and any outside instruction. The reason given was that children should have time to recover their physical and mental powers after school before partaking in other activities. The main thrust against religious instruction was contained in the following excerpts from the Lange decree.

The organs of education are charged with taking measures to abolish the immoderate extra-school demands on pupils.

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1954, p. 116.

Any extra-school demands on the pupil may be made only after the completion of curricular instruction and other obligatory activities of the school; a suitable interval must occur during which the children can recover their physical and mental powers. Any extra-curricular activities may only take place if an interval of at least two hours occurs between them and the end of curricular instruction.

All persons instructing or educating the pupils outside the curriculum or outside the school must be suitable for this responsible task. They must have a positive attitude to the Workers' and Peasants' state. Decision as to admission of such persons--insofar as they are not state-employed teachers or educators--is the responsibility of the school head. Only nationals of the German Democratic Republic are to be admitted.

Persons admitted receive a certificate, the validity of which is renewable quarterly by the school head. Admittance may be revoked at any time.

Recruiting with a view to participation in religious instruction is prohibited in schools and their institutions . . . .

The school head is responsible for strict adherence to this ordinance and to this end shall examine all extra-school and other extra-curricular activities as to form and content and check the activity of the persons entrusted with the activities.<sup>1</sup>

This ordinance nullified almost completely the effectiveness of religious instruction in public school. Children who lived far away from school could not be expected to wait two hours in classrooms for the beginning of the religious instruction period nor to return from their homes after the specified period of time. It also occurred that if a religious instructor per chance talked to children on school premises, the principal might accuse him of trying to induce them to participate in religious instruction. Some catechists were said to have displayed a negative attitude towards the state and thus were not accepted as religious instructors by school principals.

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<sup>1</sup>"Anordnung zur Sicherung von Ordnung und Stetigkeit im Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozess der allgemeinbildenden Schulen," Gesetzblatt der DDR, Nr. 18 (March 19, 1958), p. 236.

In order to alleviate this grave situation, Bishop Mitzenheim, as the church's representative, met on October 10, 1958, with Otto Grotewohl. At this meeting, Grotewohl opined that the two-hour interval should not be counted from the time when the school closed, but from the time of the dismissal of each class. Since various classes were dismissed at different hours of the day, it would be quite possible for catechists to instruct pupils of one class after a two-hour interval while pupils of other classes were still in regular school session, but the requirement of the two-hour interval could not be abolished.<sup>1</sup> Grotewohl further stated that the quarterly issuance of certificates to religious instructors was only a formality by which school principals would be enabled to arrange for a better utilization of classrooms and a more effective scheduling of activities. The certificates did not signify political surveillance of catechists by principals nor a subtle selection of religious instructors by the state. The principals' authority to examine the content of religious instruction should not be misconstrued as interference with the theological content of the subject matter. Bishop Mitzenheim was somewhat puzzled by Grotewohl's interpretation of the Lange decree and, unable to effect its withdrawal, he concluded that "we must fear that out of these contradictions permanent confusion and hindrance to church life"<sup>2</sup> will result.

The stringency of the Lange decree forced the church to leave schoolrooms and to use parish halls and church buildings for the propagation of the Christian faith. The government did not permit the use of private

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<sup>1</sup>Kundgebungen. p. 303.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.. p. 304.

homes for that purpose. Under the direction of Walter Zimmerman, the Chairman of the church's Department of Education, teaching materials were prepared, and a long-range program was initiated to help every congregation in East Germany to establish its own facilities for religious instruction. Supported by the church in West Germany and by the Lutheran World Federation, this endeavor met with remarkable success. In 1950 the church held 60 per cent of her instruction in schoolrooms,<sup>1</sup> but by 1960 virtually all teaching took place in church-owned facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Another great problem facing the church in the field of religious education was a shortage of school teachers who were willing to give religious instructions. Christian doctrine had traditionally been taught by regular teachers, who were elected to that position by the Protestant or Catholic church. The East German constitution ostensibly perpetuated this custom, because article 44 declared that no person should be forced to or be prevented from teaching religion. In reality if a regular teacher indicated his willingness to give religious instruction in school, he soon noticed that his chances for a promotion were gone and frequently he was conveniently transferred to another locality.<sup>3</sup> As has been noted previously, as early as 1950 about 48 per cent of all teachers were members of the SED,<sup>4</sup> and thus on account of their presumed convictions they would be unlikely to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950. p. 391.

<sup>2</sup>Personal Information (Interview with Heinz Brunotte, Chancellery President of the Evangelical church in Germany, at Hanover on May 27, 1960).

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950. p. 388.

<sup>4</sup>Die rote Flut. p. 6.

have volunteered to teach the Christian faith in school. The core of teachers who were willing to accept an appointment from the church, quite small in 1945, had by 1960 dwindled to an insignificant number.

In view of this predicament, the church established catechetical seminars where dedicated laymen prepared for the teaching vocation by participating in either a short training course or in a more exacting program of two-years' duration. By 1950 the church had set up forty seminars and her catechetical force consisted of about 12,000 lay people;<sup>1</sup> the numerical strength of the catechists has since become much larger than that of East German clergymen.<sup>2</sup> In 1950 the catechists were able to reach 70 per cent of all baptized Protestant children attending school and to instruct them in the Christian faith, even though one half of these children could be given only one hour of instruction per week.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, until 1958 the church was able to effectively use the catechists in the promulgation of the Christian faith among children in East Germany.

The Lange decree of 1958 caused a decided decline in the number of children attending religious instruction in schoolrooms. The decrease was particularly noticeable among children in lower grades, who on account of their age were physically not strong enough to return to distant schoolrooms or to walk to remote parish halls. When the new school year opened in 1958, school authorities tried also to discourage parents from registering their

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950. p. 391.

<sup>2</sup>"Lutherische Kirche hinter dem eisernen Vorhang," Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung. XI, Nr. 16 (August 15, 1957), p. 295.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950. p. 391.

children for religious instruction by telling them "not to expose their children to the harmful influence of the church."<sup>1</sup> Church leaders observed that "the fact that once 75 to 80 per cent of all children were reached by the church seems now in retrospect like a fairy tale of olden times."<sup>2</sup> Although no statistical data have been made available, this statement suggests that a startling decrease in the number of children in classes of religious instruction occurred in 1958.

Statistics about the number of participants in Sunday school have regularly been furnished by two of the eight territorial churches in East Germany, namely, the Lutheran church in Saxony and the Evangelical church in Silesia. The steady decline in the number of children attending Sunday school probably is illustrative of a similar development in the attendance of weekday religious classes.

<u>The Lutheran church in Saxony</u>		<u>The Evangelical church in Silesia</u>	
<u>Children in Sunday School</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Children in Sunday School</u>	
70,707	1953	3,868	
64,107	1954	4,688	
62,221	1955	4,420	
57,454	1956	3,183	
52,855	1957	2,856	
45,362	1958	2,461	
39,076	1959	2,198	
35,486	1960	386 <sub>3</sub>	

## 2. Theological Education

Most of the Protestant students of theology in Germany had traditionally

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1958, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1955, p. 443; KJ 1956, p. 368; KJ 1957, p. 274; KJ 1958, p. 402; KJ 1959, p. 374; KJ 1960, p. 340; KJ 1961, pp. 426, 427.

received their training at state universities. Theological schools of both the Protestant and Catholic church had been for centuries an integral part of German institutions of higher learning; Protestant schools of theology were founded at fifteen German universities, six of which were located in East Germany. Some students also took their training at the five theological colleges owned and operated by the church in West Germany.

The East German government did not dissolve the Protestant schools of theology at its universities; but in 1952 Prime Minister Grotewohl suggested to Bishop Dibelius that perhaps they should be eliminated and replaced by one single and independent Protestant theological college and the state would supply the financial means for its establishment and maintenance. Dibelius replied that for a period of four hundred years these schools had been a part of the universities and their service had been of inestimable value to the life of the church and to that of German Protestantism. Therefore, the church would greatly appreciate it if the government would not terminate their existence.<sup>1</sup> In his answer to the state, Dibelius may have been somewhat influenced by the fact that the close proximity of theological students to the Marxist environment at the universities gave them an excellent opportunity to gain practical experience for their future encounter with Communism on a parish-level. They would never have been able to obtain this first-hand experience at an isolated theological college.<sup>2</sup> No further attempts were made by the state to dissolve the Protestant schools of theology at its universities.

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1952, pp. 229-236; also Kirche im Kampf der Zeit, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Juergen Behm, "Der theologische Nachwuchs in der DDR, "Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, XI, Nr. 16 (August 15, 1957), p. 276.

In keeping with German custom and tradition, the government even financed part of the education of theological students at East German universities. Like most other students, almost 80 per cent of the theological students received grants in aid from the state. This scholarship arrangement was superior to that in West Germany, but it had also its disadvantages because students became overly dependent on the state. In addition, the state appropriated approximately 4 million marks a year in its budget for the needs of the six schools of theology at its universities.<sup>1</sup>

Besides their major field of concentration, university students in the German Democratic Republic were required to specialize in studies of Marxism. Theological students were no exception to this rule; they were compelled to pass an examination on ideological and socio-economic subjects before they were given permission to pursue theological studies.

This policy apparently did not fully satisfy the government, because at a meeting between professors of theology and representatives of the State Secretariat of Higher Education in 1956, Franz Wohlgemut, Deputy State Secretary of Higher Education, chided theological students and their professors for their overt apathy and passivity in the struggle between the East and the West--in many ways it was incongruous that he should have expected a different attitude. He insinuated that if students and professors would not adopt a more positive attitude toward the state, the scholarship program for students might be terminated; in spite of this threat, government stipends have so far been given with great regularity to theological students. Wohlgemut urged professors in the future to display loyalty toward the

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<sup>1</sup>GDR, p. 41.

state in word and in deed. By such action they would set a worthy example for their students. In conclusion Wohlgenut summarized the demands of the state in a communique that he presented to assembled professors of theology.

We respect and esteem the theological and religious views of our professors and theological students, but we realize that they are also citizens whose attitude should be positive.

We expect them consciously to encounter our Socialist society and thoroughly to discuss it.

We expect them not just to display passive neutrality but rather to take an unambiguous stand.

We expect the theological schools to imbue theological students with a sense of active loyalty toward the state.

We expect them to display a frankly critical attitude toward their church leadership [Dibelius] and to take concrete steps against negative influences such as, for example, the Student Congregation.<sup>1</sup>

In order to give concrete basis to these demands, theological students have been compelled since 1958 to sign a solemn pledge of loyalty to the German Democratic Republic. Permission to study theology at East German universities was henceforth granted only to those students who promised not to deviate from the political line of the government and who pledged to support the policies of the state. The content of the loyalty pledge for theological students was very similar to that for all other students, except that the former were not required to promise that they would "pursue studies in the light of Socialism."

My studies are a distinction [bestowed upon me] by our Workers' and Peasants' state. I promise actively to support the policies of the government of the German Democratic Republic, and to gain a comprehensive education for myself, which I will use to help in the maintenance and strengthening of peace after the completion of my studies.

During my studies I will actively participate in the Socialist development of industry and agriculture, and I am prepared to defend the Socialist achievements of the Workers' and Peasants' state against

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956. pp. 190-191.

all attacks. I will diligently keep the constitution, statutes and ordinances of the state, the laws of my college and its regulations, and will faithfully fulfill my duties arising from them.<sup>1</sup>

Through petitions to the government, church leaders attempted to bring about a change in the content of this pledge.<sup>2</sup> Some theological students apparently had experienced some pangs of conscience when they were asked to sign it. However, no heed was given to these petitions by the government, and the wording of the pledge remained unchanged. In an endeavor to help the students in their predicament, theological schools provided them with guidelines which advised them what their attitude toward the state ought to be. The guidelines were frequently turned in to university authorities along with the loyalty pledges signed by theological students.

The difficulties, dangers and temptations, which have come about through the division of our country into two realms of power, as well as the special problems which the Christian faces in a decision between his Christian faith and an atheistic world view, have caused us as instructors of theology to give our students some guidelines, which are to help them to maintain such conduct in their studies as is becoming for a Christian bound to the Word of God.

The theological student will in grateful responsibility be conscious of the privilege of study made possible for him by people laboring in various occupations.

He will uphold the constitution and regulations of the university and display an attitude of esteem and trust to his instructors in order to be aided by them in his studies.

He will engage in research, steeping himself in knowledge, and allow truth alone to lord over it.

Through faith in God's Word, he will look upon the authority of the state, the government of the German Democratic Republic, as a merciful institution of God, respect its laws, and in moral responsibility as a Christian aid the government in all areas where the true welfare of the people is involved.

As a Christian he will stand for the maintenance of peace in the world, the unequivocal ban and elimination of all means of mass destruction, and he will support efforts aimed at a reunification of our people.

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958. p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>Kundgebungen. p. 304.

He will respect ordinances of the state concerning the national economy and he will refrain from actions which in any way could impair the prosperity of his country.

Bound to the Word of God, the student of theology will in all these things attempt to render unto the state that which belongs to the state and unto God that which belongs to God.<sup>1</sup>

The merits of the loyalty pledge were neither sanctioned nor refuted in these guidelines, for they were primarily designed to clarify in more detail the position of the theological students so that they would be enabled to sign the pledge without compromising their faith and convictions. Since the issuance of these guidelines in 1958, all theological students have signed the required pledge of loyalty.

Enrollment of students at the theological schools of the six East German universities (Berlin, Greifswald, Halle, Jena, Leipzig, and Rostock) had declined alarmingly during World War II and has not come near to reaching pre-war levels since. While the enrollment of students at West German schools of theology in 1950 shattered all previous records, that at East German schools after an initial gain has declined in recent years. In 1930 the number of Protestant students of theology at East German universities was 1,922 and by 1946 it had shrunk to merely 239 students. That number increased to a post-war peak of 931 students in 1954,<sup>2</sup> and since then it has gradually decreased, so that in 1957 there were only 882 theological students (Protestant and Catholic combined) left.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958. pp. 167-168.

<sup>2</sup>Zahlen aus dem kirchlichen Leben. ed. Das Kirchenstatistische Amt der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (Hannover: Schluetersche Verlagsanstalt und Buchdruckerei, 1955), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR. 1957. vol. III, p. 130.

government has annually admitted just a fixed contingent of students may partially account for this decline. Each year more young people had wished to study theology than were admitted to this program by the government.<sup>1</sup> By 1956 several teaching posts in theology had been vacant for some time, because the government had consistently refused to appoint new professors to those positions.<sup>2</sup>

Even though by far not enough clergymen were supplied by the East German schools of theology, the shortage was acute but had not reached catastrophic proportions in the 1950's. About 75 per cent of the 6,875 Protestant preaching stations and congregations in East Germany were still filled by well-trained pastors in 1957. This was partly due to the fact that a few pastoral vacancies had been filled through a supply of indigenous West German clergymen, whom the East German government had permitted to take charge of vacant parishes immediately after the inauguration of the new course in 1953.<sup>3</sup> A group of young East German vicars and pastors, who had studied at West German schools of theology for a while and had not been permitted to return home, were also now permitted to take up permanent residence in the German Democratic Republic and were allowed to assume charge of vacant congregations. As a rule clergymen faithfully stayed with their people and withstood the temptation to seek an easier life through escape to West Germany so that only an insignificantly small number of

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<sup>1</sup>Behm, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Evangelische Welt. July 16, 1956, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup>Behm, p. 276.

parishes was left without leadership through the flight of pastors. To be exact, only 1.5 per cent of all East German clergymen escaped to the West between 1945 and August 13, 1961 (the day the Berlin wall was erected), in comparison to a flight of 70 per cent of other intellectual and professional elements.<sup>1</sup> If pastors had left their posts at the same rate as other professional people, the overwhelming majority of the parishes in East Germany would have been vacant by 1961. It also happened occasionally that clergymen, who had left the East, decided to return voluntarily with their families to their old parishes when upon their arrival in West Berlin church authorities pointed out to them the serious effect of their action on the welfare of the church.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, despite the temporary supply of clergymen from West Germany and despite the admirable devotion of ministers who stayed in their parishes, far from enough pastors were available for the congregations.

The shortage of clergymen had become more crucial by 1961. Although no comprehensive data have been made available, some of the eight East German territorial churches reported that between one-third to one-half of their parishes were without pastors in 1962. The Lutheran church in Thuringia had 800 of her 1,500 congregations vacant,<sup>3</sup> and the Evangelical church in the Province of Saxony recorded 600 pastoral vacancies in her

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<sup>1</sup>"They Remain--Under Fire," Sonntagsblatt (Special Edition), October, 1961, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Otto Dibelius, In the Service of the Lord: The Autobiography of Bishop Otto Dibelius, trans. by Mary Ilford (New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 204-207; also: Sonntagsblatt, October, 1961, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, ed. Julius Bodensick (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), vol. III, p. 2397.

1,750 parishes.<sup>1</sup> To forestall a possible collapse of these parishes, the church has recently sought to fill these vacant posts with qualified and dedicated lay people.

To recapitulate: One of the Communists' objectives, which they hope will contribute to the extirpation of religion, is the elimination of the church's influence in the public sector of life. Means of education such as public schools and institutions of higher learning are of cardinal importance in influencing society and in shaping its character. Therefore, the East German government claimed public education solely as its own prerogative, using public schools in an attempt to reshape the East German people in the Marxist mold. The content of education was blatantly Marxist and anti-Christian in nature. Through the promulgation of the Lange decree in 1958, the church was for all practical purposes stripped of her traditional privilege of giving religious instruction in public schools, and was forced to carry on her education program in parish halls and church buildings. Thus the church was successfully ousted from taking part in public education. The education of theological students has continued without too much interference by the East German government, but students have been forced to sign a loyalty pledge prior to being admitted to theological studies. The quota system barred some prospective students from theological studies, and the crucial shortage of clergymen may partly be attributed to it.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., vol. III, p. 1962.

#### IV. ELIMINATE THE CHURCH'S INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC LIFE: YOUTH

By establishing a monopoly over education, the government of the German Democratic Republic has sought to instill Marxist thought in children and to expel the church from that important sphere of public influence. Certainly a large number of children thoroughly imbued with Marxism in school and without the benefit of a Christian education would later decide to withdraw from the church. This would constitute a concrete step in the direction of realizing the ultimate goal of the Communist church policy, the eradication of religion.

A second facet of the government's attempt to destroy the influence of the church in society has consisted in its attempt to win the youth of the church for the Marxist cause either by physical force or by subtle encroachments. With this in mind, the government initiated in 1952 a vicious campaign against the church's youth organizations, the Young Congregation and the Student Congregation.<sup>1</sup> Its climax was reached in June, 1953, when the state was forced to retreat from its malevolent course for a short period of time. In 1954 efforts were again made to win the allegiance of the youth, only this time not through violent measures but rather through such subtle means as pseudo-sacred rites and atheistic ceremonies.

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<sup>1</sup>Die Junge Gemeinde and die Studentengemeinde.

The new approach for reaching the youth which the government initiated in 1954 has been highly successful. As a matter of fact, the conflict between church and state since 1954 has focussed primarily on the issue of youth dedication and from all indications it is apparent that the government has won the upper hand in this issue. By 1961 approximately 90 per cent of the East German youth participated in youth dedication and only 10 per cent were still confirmed by the church. The success of the dedication rite coupled with Marxist education in schools has extensively eliminated the public influence of the church in the East German society.

#### A. The Young Congregation and Student Congregation

Many of the young people in local church parishes were loosely united in a youth organization called the Young Congregation. A surprisingly large number of young folk in towns and villages were attracted to this organization and actively participated in its programs. This became a thorn in the eyes of the Free German Youth,<sup>1</sup> the Communist youth group. It appeared that not only was its growth impaired through the Young Congregation but also that it lost to the church a conspicuous number of youths with good leadership potential.<sup>2</sup> The Student Congregation existed primarily at institutions of higher learning and its leaders were unusually gifted clergymen. Its programs were composed of searching lectures and discussions and appealed to many students at colleges and universities. To be sure, the membership of the Student Congregation was relatively small because most

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<sup>1</sup>Die Frei Deutsche Jugend.

<sup>2</sup>Schrey, p. 295.

students who received scholarships from the government realized that an official affiliation with that church organization could easily antagonize the government and cause them to lose their financial aid.<sup>1</sup> Even so, the programs and sessions of the Student Congregation were usually well attended by students.

In its endeavor to disrupt the influence of the church's two youth organizations, the Free German Youth initiated in the summer of 1952 a drive against the Young Congregation. Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker were among the state dignitaries and party leaders who not only condoned that drive but openly lent their support to it. The state conspired with the Free German Youth in making it virtually impossible for the church youth to meet at large rallies or at Bible camp retreats in 1952.

The case of a large rally scheduled by the Young Congregation for June 14-15, 1952, at Luebbenau, clearly revealed the intention of the state to hinder the youth work of the church in every way possible. Since 1947 this rally had been held annually in that town without state interference. An added feature of the 1952 rally was supposed to be an outdoor concert by church bands and choirs. About 4,600 young people were expected at the rally and overnight accommodations had been secured in private homes and barns on adjacent farms. With housing, food, and transportation secured, the Young Congregation had not forgotten to obtain special permission for the rally from political authorities. However, on June 10, four days before the event was to take place, the police at Luebbenau notified church leaders that permission for the rally had been withdrawn because the Young Congregation

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 138.

was an "illegal" organization. Church leaders personally appeared the following day at government offices and explained that the Young Congregation was not an independent organization requiring a state license for operation but that it was an integral part of the congregations' life--to declare this to be illegal was tantamount to declare congregations themselves to be illegal. The church leaders made it clear that they would not cancel the rally but if necessary would confine all activities inside the church building; the police at Luebbenau were also notified by the church about this decision. On June 12 all posters for the rally, printed with government permission, were destroyed by the police and they confiscated 1,100 pounds of meat. The police forbade hotel proprietors and farmers to house any youth and stipulated that no more than five would be permitted to stay in any given private home. Church leaders retorted that if housing facilities were made unavailable by the police, the youth would sleep in the sanctuary of the church building. The police then proceeded to confiscate all bulletins and materials which had been printed for the rally, including the lists of participants and the room reservations. During the days preceding the rally, pastors in the surrounding towns were told by the government that the scheduled event was illegal and that they should keep their youth from attending; the mayors in these localities announced at the same time that the rally was cancelled. On June 13 church leaders received word that the special trains, which had been secured to transport the youth to the rally, would not run because of "mechanical difficulties." Despite all these obstructions the rally was held as scheduled. Many of the young people came on regular trains, bicycles, and cars even though many vehicles moving in the direction of

Luebbenau were stopped by police to be searched for youths. The use of loudspeakers was prohibited at the rally and the church bands were forbidden to present a concert in public, so instead they played inside the church building and trumpeted their hymns through open doors. So many private homes were ready to accommodate the youth overnight that no housing shortage occurred, but some families were awakened by the police at night who then counted the number of youths sleeping there. Shortly after the worship service was begun on Sunday morning about 150 members of the Free German Youth approached the church building in three trucks. With loud shouting they jumped from the trucks and sought to force their way into the sanctuary, but the church youth formed a solid cordon by interlocking their arms which prevented their entrance. A total of 4,200 young people attended the rally and 500 more were stranded without transportation in Cottbus, twenty miles from Luebbenau. All meetings were held in church buildings at Luebbenau and neighboring villages, and at every meeting the youth were admonished by pastors to preserve strict discipline and to treat the police with utmost respect. The rally ended without violence.<sup>1</sup>

Almost identical procedures were used by the government in an attempt to obstruct youth rallies scheduled by the Young Congregation on June 22, 1952, at Loeknitz and Goerlitz;<sup>2</sup> in the same year the youth organization was forbidden to hold Bible camp retreats during the summer season, and the state withdrew its license for the publication of the only youth organ of the church, Die Stafette, asserting that this action was necessitated

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1952. p. 197 ff.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1952. pp. 201-202.

by a paper shortage. Even though the church made arrangements for the procurement of the necessary paper from other countries, the license for its publication was never renewed by the government. All these measures painfully hampered the youth work of the church and the operation of the Young Congregation.

Agitation against the Young Congregation was intensified in January, 1953, by a systematic defamation campaign, conducted by the indefatigable editors of leading Communist newspapers. Foremost among the newspaper agitators was the editor of the Junge Welt, the organ of the Free German Youth; his invidious denunciations of the church's two youth organizations were unsurpassed even by those of his colleagues. The scurrilous campaign was undertaken with the hope that the defamation of the church's youth would psychologically prepare people for actions against the Young Congregation<sup>1</sup> planned by the government. With this in mind newspaper editors wrote articles creating the impression that the Young Congregation was an illegal organization whose existence should be prohibited by law. Many articles depicted it as an American espionage agency whose treasonable activities should be immediately curtailed. A few excerpts will reveal the general tenor of the defamation.

**Young Congregation--A camouflaged organization of war, agitation, sabotage, and espionage serving the United States of America.**

**Disgraceful abuse of the Christian faith--Young Congregation is directed by West German and American imperialists--Revelations about the connections of the Young Congregation with the West--Former Gestapo agent, a spy for the United States, disguised as a deacon.**

It has been proved that the Young Congregation hypocritically disguised with a Christian appearance is led directly by the central

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, pp. 132, 137.

American agents and espionage officers stationed in West Germany, and particularly in West Berlin. The Christian belief of many young people has been misused by this cleverly-constructed religious organization under the pretension of alleged church activities by agitating them to hostile actions against the German Democratic Republic, actions which are subject to severe punishment. The Young Congregation is nothing but an extended arm of former Nazi youth groups.

Their leaders are the same who, on behalf of Adenauer and his American backers in West Germany, organize a chase on the youth who fight gallantly for peace and unity, and who then arrest, abduct, and mistreat sincere young patriots . . . The backers and leaders wish--as facts prove--to establish a similar system of terror in our republic as they did in West Germany; they represent the filthy interests of Adenauer, the mortal enemy of the German youth.<sup>1</sup>

Instigators and agitators under a religious mask! It has become evident to everybody that on behalf of central terror and espionage agencies located in West Berlin, the Young Congregation under the mask of religion has attempted to cause a schism in the unity of the youth.<sup>2</sup>

They wish to eradicate all traces of their crimes! Through its intrigues the illegal Young Congregation under the cover of the church incites people to war and engages in sabotage and espionage in our republic.<sup>3</sup>

The Student Congregations at the universities is an illegal political organization and a center of movements directed against peace and the people.

By early spring, 1953, the government apparently felt that the East German people had psychologically been prepared and that it could therefore attack the church's youth organizations. The government directed the brunt of its assault against members of the Student Congregation at high schools and universities. On account of their affiliation with that organization,

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<sup>1</sup>"Junge Gemeinde--Tarnorganisation fuer Kriegshetze, Sabotage und Spionage in USA-Auftrag," Junge Welt, April 1, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>Junge Welt, April 10, 1953.

<sup>3</sup>Junge Welt, April 27, 1953.

<sup>4</sup>Neue Zeit, April 16, 1953.

about 3,000 students were expelled from secondary schools and institutions of higher learning by June 1, 1953.<sup>1</sup>

At a conference on April 15, 1953, leaders of the Free German Youth agreed that the Young Congregation was an "imperialist" agency hostile to the state, which hindered the development of dialectical materialism and political life in the East German academic world. An agreement was reached by them concerning the methods and techniques which were to be used in systematically excluding all unrepenting members of the youth organization from institutions of higher learning.<sup>2</sup> A special procedure was now followed in securing the removal of undesirable Christian students.<sup>3</sup> At student meetings the Free German Youth sponsored lectures which dealt with internal political affairs of the state; in the lectures the Young Congregation was denounced as a camouflaged West German agency whose aim was to sabotage the peaceful work of the German Democratic Republic. The members of the Student Congregation were then called by name and asked individually whether, after having heard the charges, they would sever their relations with it at once. When a negative answer was given, the student was immediately expelled and would not be enrolled at any other academic institution in East Germany. Many students were compelled to make painful decisions. The same method was also frequently used in factories where young Christian workers were confronted by the choice of repudiating the Young

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von 1945 bis 1954. pp. 239-240.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1953. p. 138.

Congregation or of losing their position in an industrial plant. Through these measures the government was striving to break the moral fiber of the youth.

Coupled with its drive against the church youth, the government started to arrest, indict, and prosecute several pastors who were closely associated with the youth work of the church. The trial of Pastor Kurt Schumann on January 21, 1953, at the District Court of Chemnitz and the sentence on January 23 condemning him to six years of imprisonment marked the opening of a large number of arraignments and prosecutions of lay people and clergymen alike. Pastor Schumann's sentence was passed on basis of the "Law for the Defense of Peace" and of article 6 of the constitution, which made the act of inciting people against the state punishable with at least six years imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> In November, 1952, Pastor Schumann had delivered a speech to the Young Congregation at Zwickau, relating cases where young Christians had mockingly been called "Jesus," and where students had been discouraged by their professors from discussing religious questions with pastors. Even though he was urged to do so, Pastor Schumann declined to discuss problems which concerned the armed forces of the state on the grounds that such discussion could not properly be held in a church building. The District Court of Chemnitz interpreted Schumann's statements as if he had said that the Christian youth in East Germany were persecuted because of their faith, that students had no freedom at the universities, and that the armed forces should be rejected by Christians.<sup>2</sup> On strength of this interpretation and

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1953, p. 151-152.

on the basis of the testimony by two members of the Free German Youth who were present at the meeting in Zwickau, Pastor Schumann was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Similar legal proceedings were initiated against Pastors Gestrich, Brandt-Lohmen, Weidenkaff, Drechsler, and Bohnke. On May 16, 1953, the District Court of Rostock sentenced Herbert Bluetge, a noted leader of the Young Congregation, to eight years imprisonment because of "false interpretation of Christian tenets."<sup>1</sup>

Also among those arrested in 1953 was Pastor Johannes Hamel, a well-known student minister at the University of Halle; he was imprisoned because, among other charges, he was said to have caused members of the Student Congregation at Halle to campaign against the East German election of 1950 and the plebiscite of 1951.<sup>2</sup> By June, 1953, a total of seventy-two pastors, youth leaders, church staff workers, and students had been imprisoned and their sentences ranged from two months to eight years.<sup>3</sup> The government apparently hoped that these statutory examples of "justice" would cause the clergy to assume a more cooperative deportment and that it would contribute to a debilitation in the leadership of church youth.

During this period of trial church leaders endeavored through all

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von 1945-1954, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Junge Welt, April 1, 1953.

<sup>3</sup>The Evangelical Church in Berlin and the Soviet Zone of Germany, trans. by Patrick Lynch (Berlin: Eckart Verlag, 1959), p. 31.

available means to reinforce the morale of the youth. On April 30 Bishop Dibelius submitted a formal request to Ernst Melsheimer, the States Attorney of the German Democratic Republic, to initiate legal proceedings against the editors of the Junge Welt for their flagrant violation of the country's laws and constitution by the spreading of vicious slander and irresponsible allegations. Melsheimer retorted that since he could find no official registration of the Young Congregation in the Ministry of the Interior, it must be an illegal organization and charges in its behalf could therefore not be heard. Pastor Kurt Scharf then pointed out that on the basis of an agreement between the church and the Russian Colonel Tytpanov in 1946, the Young Congregation and Student Congregation were not to be considered as formal organizations, but rather as the free gathering of the youth in congregations. The fact that the Young Congregation had never been asked to register until 1953 served as evidence of the validity of the 1946 agreement. "It would be difficult," observed Scharf, "to make a plausible case for the fact that an illegal organization had existed in the German Democratic Republic for so many years and done its work in public without being registered."<sup>1</sup> In behalf of the church and of Bishop Dibelius, Scharf repeated the request that legal actions be taken against the Junge Welt. This time Melsheimer did not even bother to answer the petition. By appealing to the constitutional rights of the East German citizen, church leaders had hoped, to no avail, that the government might be induced to lessen the severity of the attack upon the youth of the church.

Church councils and leaders issued pronouncements which were supposed

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 143.

to buttress the morale of the church youth during their severe trial. It was repeatedly stated by them that the Young Congregation as an integral part of church life could never rightfully be branded as an "illegal organization." An attack on the Young Congregation was tantamount to an assault upon the church at large. Confronted by excruciating decisions, the youth was admonished by their bishops to remain faithful to the church and her organizations, and was assured of the intercession and concern of the whole Evangelical church in Germany. Bishop Dibelius called attention to the fact that the Young Congregation exerted a significant spiritual influence in East Germany; if the youth groups had been inconsequential they would not have been attacked by the state. He stated that members of the organizations should be grateful to have been given the strength and opportunity to serve as living witnesses for Christ in crucial times.<sup>1</sup> Leading clergymen expressed their consternation about the decisions reached by East German courts whereby pastors and students were sentenced to many years imprisonment. They believed that Pastor Schumann, for instance, had not engaged in acts of treasonable agitation inciting people against the state, but "as servant of God had spoken from a Biblical point of view. The sentence thus condemned the entire church and all those who in her name proclaimed the Word of God."<sup>2</sup> Although the ecclesiastical pronouncements tended to fortify young people in their loyalty to the church,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1953, p. 171.

they did not alter the state's determination to destroy the influence of the Young Congregation.

That many of the youth were able to successfully withstand the temptation to surrender was partially due to the example set by their shepherds during that critical time. One of those unwavering men was Guenter Jacob. During the spring of 1953 he lectured at several Student Congregation meetings, elaborating upon the meaning and implication of the Christian faith in modern times.<sup>1</sup> He pointed out that Christian responsibility in society did not imply a defense of Occidental culture or Western politics in the face of Communism since the essence of the Christian faith did not consist in culture and politics. It was the responsibility of the Christian to propagate the word of God--a message which has intrinsic value for all times and which was above mundane politics, cultures, and ideologies. In a Communist society the Christian should neither withdraw into a pious shall, nor engage in orthodox polemics, nor prostrate himself before political authorities--rather he should penetrate society with the Christian faith in an unostentatious and unambiguous manner. The Christian derives the strength for the fulfillment of his responsibilities from his conviction that God, and not politicians in the East or the West, is the ultimate ruler of this universe. Pastor Martin Fischer presented similar views to those of Jacob's when the government attack on the youth of the church reached its climax in spring, 1953,<sup>2</sup> saying that the men and women

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<sup>1</sup>Guenter Jacob, Das Licht scheint in der Finsterniss: Zeugnisse aus dem zweiten Kirchenkampf (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1954).

<sup>2</sup>Martin Fischer, Das Zeugnis der Verhafteten (Berlin, 1953).

imprisoned by the state because of their Christian faith were living witnesses to the eternal validity of the Word of God. Their faith was not based on political calculation or cultural orientation, but on an inner and permanent communion with God through a life of prayer. Just as the imprisoned witnesses, Christian young people should base their trust solely on God and propagate the Christian faith even to the point of arrest by the state and prosecution. On March 2, 1953, Karl Barth, the celebrated Swiss theologian and famed opponent of the former Nazi regime in Germany, wrote a letter to the East German ministry of security expounding his views on the status of the church situation in East Germany.<sup>1</sup> Barth confessed that he had had a profound respect for the German Democratic Republic because the church had been permitted to practice her beliefs and to propagate her faith in apparent freedom, but the recent attacks no longer justified his former high regard for the state. If the government--like the Nazi regime before--was bent on pursuing its course, the church would be compelled to retreat into catacombs and the state would have to bear the consequences. Barth's letter became a source of inspiration and hope to many East German Christians and its contents were read by many people throughout the world.

As has been noted before, in June, 1953, the stringent measures of the *Kirchenkampf* were suddenly relaxed by the state; the acrid persecutions by the government had come to an end and had given way to a new course. An agreement was reached by representatives of church and state whereby questions pertaining to the church's youth organizations were seemingly clarified. All students suspended from school were immediately permitted to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 139-140.

resume their studies. They were even to be given the opportunity to catch up with their studies and tests which they had been forced to miss. Court decisions involving pastors and church workers were to be reviewed with the purpose of determining whether the sentences were unjust. Grotewohl publicly acknowledged that the Young Congregation was not an illegal or criminal organization, but a necessary part of church life.<sup>1</sup> Leaders of the Free German Youth agreed to stop their agitation in the press. Erich Honecker tacitly acknowledged on June 11 that he was fully aware of the fact that over 90 per cent of the East German people were associated with the Christian faith and that the creation of an anti-Christian front through the Free German Youth was unjustified.<sup>2</sup>

The promises made at that time were tentatively kept by the government--almost all of the 3,000 expelled students resumed their studies again, and approximately thirty clergymen and lay people were released from incarcerations.<sup>3</sup> Only a part of the punishment, which prevented them from holding public office and divested them of their property, was not lifted by the state. Agitation against the church's youth groups was halted and they were no longer stigmatized as "illegal organizations." This did not mean, however, that the difficulties of these two youth organizations had ceased once and for all, because in subsequent years they were again sporadically harassed by the state. A recurrence of the government's

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1954, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1953, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1953, p. 188.

attack on the Young Congregation seemed quite likely in 1954 when attempts were made once again by the government to confine the activities of each local youth group within the parish church building and to once again outlaw the large youth rallies. The Student Congregation, too, encountered difficulties in later years, which were illustrated in 1955 when the state secretary of higher education forbid its use of classrooms for meetings, a privilege which was accorded without question to Communist student groups. In the same year the Student Congregation was prohibited from publicizing its programs and meetings through placards and notices on school premises.<sup>1</sup> In 1958 approximately sixty-eight retreats planned by the Young Congregation were cancelled outright by the state and in Mecklenburg some twenty retreat homes and Bible camps were arbitrarily closed. The city councils of Karl Marx Stadt, Leipzig, and Rostock passed ordinances in 1958 which dissolved all Bible camps in their districts in order "to ensure the Socialist education of children and youth."<sup>2</sup> In 1958 youth rallies by the church were again outlawed by political authorities even though they were planned as only small rallies on a county-wide basis. The church protested against most of these interferences and in some cases the restrictions were withdrawn because the government apparently realized the futility of using force to win the church youth over to Marxism. In the fall of 1954 the state initiated new efforts to gain the youth for its cause, only this time through a more subtle and effective approach, the Communist rite of youth dedication.

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1955, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1958, pp. 159-162.

## B. The Youth Dedication Rite

The antagonism between church and state in East Germany has not been more dramatically reflected in any issue than in that over the youth dedication rite. Both sides were keenly interested in either gaining or keeping the allegiance of the youth. The struggle over this issue has continued since 1954 with increasing intensity, although at the present it appears that the government has won the upper hand in the struggle.

### 1. The Antecedents of Youth Dedication

The seeds for the inception of the youth dedication rite in the German Democratic Republic had already been implanted in German society in the nineteenth century. In the 1850's Bruno Wille, a German poet and leader of a Free-Religious congregation at Berlin, developed the idea of holding a sacred dedication rite for children in his congregation. He patterned his ceremony on the church's traditional rite of confirmation. Thereafter, it became customary to hold each year dedication ceremonies for the Free-Religious youth, who after graduation from elementary school entered the world of the adolescent. Only those children who had received instruction and accepted the tenets of the Free-Religious movement<sup>1</sup> were permitted to partake in these ceremonies. In 1905 the German Association of Free-Thinkers, which was composed mainly of people with leftist leanings, developed a similar dedication rite in order to bind its youth more effectively to its cause. It is of interest to note that Walter Ulbricht in 1906 also attended the instruction

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Weiss, Feier- und Weihstunden der freien Religionen, 2nd ed. (Mannheim: Verlag der freireligiösen Freimaurer der Landesgemeinde Baden, 1929), p. 10.

sessions of the Free-Thinkers and at a ceremony in 1907 was dedicated to the "socialist way of life."<sup>1</sup> At the turn of this century the Social Democrats in Austria also began to hold youth dedications to welcome each year the graduating school children into the ranks of the working class.<sup>2</sup> The church refused to confirm any child in the Christian faith who had participated either in the Socialist or the Free-Religious dedication ceremony. Conversely, the Free-Religious congregations and associations of Free-Thinkers discouraged their youth from participation in the Protestant rite of confirmation. The latter organizations and the church had at no time reached an agreement whereby the youth could, on a reciprocal basis, be confirmed in the Christian faith and be dedicated to the Free-Religious ideals;<sup>3</sup> after 1933 Hitler prohibited these dedication ceremonies altogether and replaced them with Nazi rites. The concept of a youth dedication, nonetheless, was on balance not entirely foreign to the German people when in 1954 they witnessed its renaissance under the auspices of East German Communists.

## 2. The Inception of Youth Dedication

After its fiasco in 1953, the government resolved to capture the church's youth through a new approach, the youth dedication program. Early in 1950 Stefan Heymann, who later became ambassador to Poland, warned that it would be unwise to attempt to introduce the old Socialist ceremonies in East Germany;

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland, October 1, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Der Grosse Brockhaus, 16th ed. (Wiesbaden: F. U. Brockhaus, 1955), vol. VI, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup>U. Jeremias, Die Jugendweihe in der Sowjetzone, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1958), p. 19.

their purpose before 1933 had been to fight the church as a vested tool of capitalism and to welcome young people into the ranks of the working class, but present conditions did not warrant their renaissance--the capitalist system was destroyed, liberating the church from bourgeois manipulation, and working people were educated by the National Front, rendering unneedful a special program for the Socialist instruction and dedication of the young people. Heymann further declared that youth dedication would unnecessarily tend to accentuate the existing schism between Christianity and Communism, spreading seeds of potential disunity among the East German people.<sup>1</sup> But four years later Heymann's candid words of warning were seemingly forgotten by his SED compatriots. In its determination to call back to life the old Socialist rite, the government was undoubtedly encouraged by Khrushchev's directive of November 11, 1954, which--as will be remembered--advised Communist leaders against employing violent means in the attempt to overcome "religious superstition", but rather to adopt enlightened measures.<sup>2</sup>

On November 12, 1954, a newly-formed central committee for youth dedication invited all parents to register their children for the new program at local branch offices.<sup>3</sup> The invitation was signed by a number of prominent East German citizens, such as Hans-Joachim Laabs, Minister of People's Education, and Johannes R. Becher, Minister of Culture. In contrast to the

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<sup>1</sup>Landeszeitung (Schwerin), April 6, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremias, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Aufruf des Zentralen Ausschusses fuer Jugendweihe. November 12, 1954.

dedication programs of bygone years, which had concentrated primarily on polemics against certain "antiquated and reactionary views," the avowed purpose of the new program was to equip children with scientific knowledge, germane to a full realization of life in modern society.<sup>1</sup> It was hoped that the "unpolemical" nature of the proposed instruction would persuade parents, irrespective of their ideological background, to permit their children to attend the sessions preparatory to the administration of the rite itself.

In 1954 the central committee for youth dedication claimed that its organization had been formed on a purely voluntary basis through the joint efforts of numerous progressive East German parents, devoted teachers and professors, eminent scientists, and prominent persons in public life. The committee also stated that its program was neither connected with the government nor with the SED.<sup>2</sup> By November 30 branch offices of the central committee had been established in all counties and by December 15 local committees responsible for the inception of youth dedication in their towns and villages had been created throughout the country. Each county committee was composed of approximately twelve members, and each local committee of seven members. Their task was to initiate local propaganda campaigns on behalf of youth dedication, to secure teachers for the instruction sessions, and to supervise dedication ceremonies themselves; the services rendered by committee members were not remunerative.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Schneller, "Kraftquell fuer den weiteren Lebensweg--Zur Durchfuehrung der Jugendweihen in der DDR," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, November 24, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>"Jugendweihe--Eintritt ins Leben," Berliner Zeitung, December 9, 1954.

Contrary to the claims of the central committee, its program was unmistakably undergirded by the SED and the government.<sup>1</sup> The SED's directives issued on December 20, 1954, for its members in the county of Bernau clearly reveal the close cooperation and identity of purpose that existed from the very outset between the SED and the central committee. The SED members of Bernau were obliged to campaign actively on behalf of the youth dedication, to register their own children in the preparatory sessions, to contribute of time and talent to the maintenance of a high level of instruction, to recruit able men and women as members of local and county committees, and to support the activities of these committees in every way possible.<sup>2</sup> Not only at Bernau, but SED members elsewhere throughout the country also faithfully carried out the directives of their political cadres. In the summer of 1955 agreements were made between the central committee, leaders of political organizations and managers of industrial plants by which the members of political parties and workers of factories were compelled to engage in propaganda work for the dedication program.<sup>3</sup> The close affiliation between the central committee and the political machinery of the state was also openly demonstrated in 1956. On January 8, the Anti-Fascist Democratic organization of Leipzig, consisting of eight political "parties" (SED, FDJ, NDFD, CDU, DED, DFD, LDFD, FDGB), issued a communiqué whereby it pledged its support to the program of youth

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1954. p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1954. pp. 143-146.

<sup>3</sup>Jugendweihe (Mitteilungsblatt Nr. 3), August 5, 1955.

dedication;<sup>1</sup> the political bloc organization of other towns and cities followed suit. Through the participation of all political "parties" and organizations, the campaign for youth dedication in the ensuing years was carried out on a broad basis.

The government furthered the interests of the central committee on many occasions. The public schools, for instance, provided the government with an excellent opportunity inconspicuously to take part in the dedication program. In 1955 state officials, in charge of the country's educational system, had already begun to exert enormous pressure on teachers and educators to secure their services for the cause of youth dedication. They were advised to publicize widely the program or "otherwise they would be regarded as saboteurs of the Workers' and Peasants' state."<sup>2</sup> This pressure was reinforced by the SED and the Teachers' Union. Paul Wandel, the SED Secretary of Culture and Education, in 1955 urged all school principals and teachers to support this program because it facilitated the youth in entering the world of adults.<sup>3</sup> In the same year the Teachers' Union stated that all teachers were pledged to promulgate the program and ideas of youth dedication among school children and to solicit the good will of their parents.<sup>4</sup> The official identification of the government with this program came in 1957

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<sup>1</sup>Leipziger Volkszeitung, January 8, 1956.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremias, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Wandel, "Wie soll sich der Lehrer zur Jugendweihe verhalten?," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, November 5, 1955.

<sup>4</sup>"Jugendweihe--Aufgabe des Lehrers," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, October 1, 1955.

when, after an apparent slackening of interest, all organizations involved made one more all-out effort to win the interest of the youth. On September 29, 1957, Walter Ulbricht noted that not only the central committee, but also the political organizations, labor unions, industrial plants, and government departments should be keenly interested in youth dedication and further its cause by all available means.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with these guidelines, the government late in the fall of 1957 began strikingly to increase its pressure on teachers and educators. In 1958 "several thousand Protestant teachers were forced to resign from their teaching positions because they recoiled from participating in a propaganda campaign for youth dedication";<sup>2</sup> another six thousand teachers were in danger of losing their positions because they refused to relinquish their church membership.<sup>3</sup> School buildings, although property of the state, were used as a matter-of-fact by local committees for the instruction sessions. The government furthered the program through yet other means: clergymen who openly dared to express opposition to youth dedication were invariably defamed in newspapers as "enemies of the state" and were at times arrested and prosecuted.<sup>4</sup> This ingenious participation by the state made a farce of the central committee's avowal of 1954 that "youth dedication . . . is neither the

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland. October 1, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremias, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>"Die Gewissensnot der Christen in der DDR," Herder Korrespondenz. XII, Heft 9 (June, 1958), p. 223.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1957. p. 158.

affairs of the state nor the affair of individual organizations."<sup>1</sup>

The central committee stated in 1954 that participation in youth dedication was an entirely voluntary matter and children would not be forced to participate. However, by 1957 enormous pressure was exerted on young people to force them to register for the youth dedication program.<sup>2</sup> Those refusing had to reckon with the possibility that they would neither be able to secure an apprenticeship in specialized professions nor be enrolled at institutions of higher learning. The fact of participation in youth dedication was certified in school records; if such certification was missing on transcripts they were often not permitted to pursue advanced studies. Parents were also often threatened with the loss of their job when they failed to register their children.<sup>3</sup> Pupils in elementary schools were sometimes taken by their teachers during regular school hours to the preparatory sessions and some even took the dedication pledge without parental knowledge or consent.<sup>4</sup> Even window displays in large stores advertised on behalf of the central committee by featuring special children's clothing to be worn on the occasion of the dedication ceremony.

One method of recruitment for the dedication program is particularly interesting. It has been customary in Germany that, with parental consent,

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<sup>1</sup>"Jugendweihe - Eintritt ins Leben," Berliner Zeitung, December 9, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>"Jugendweihe gegen Konfirmation," Kirchenblatt fuer die reformierte Schweiz, CXIII, Nr. 21 (October 24, 1957), p. 329.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1957, p. 158.

<sup>4</sup>"Aus der evangelischen Kirche in der Ostzone Deutschlands," Kirchenblatt fuer die reformierte Schweiz, CXIII, Nr. 3 (February 7, 1957), p. 37.

the head of the state assumed the baptismal sponsorship for children born into prominent families. In one instance, a woman whose husband had died shortly before the birth of her sixth child accepted the sponsorship extended to her by the president of the state. She was then told that the president had assumed the "sponsorship" with the understanding that her child would not receive Christian baptism but rather that the child would attend youth dedication when he became an adolescent. As a gift for the child the woman was given a savings certificate valued at one hundred marks, but the money could not be withdrawn from the bank until after her child had participated in the dedication ceremony. Later she stated that her confused mental state due to her husband's death, as well as her financial plight, had skillfully been exploited by the state in maneuvering her into such agreement; under normal circumstances she would not have given her consent. Other families in adverse circumstance received similar offers of "baptismal sponsorships" but most of them declined to accept.<sup>1</sup>

A rumor circulated in 1955 that the youth dedication program was officially sanctioned by "the clergy" was also skillfully used in the recruitment of children. To be sure, statements which favored this program had indeed been made by four "clergymen" and had been published by the central committee in a special brochure.<sup>2</sup> Apparently it was anticipated that through this publication people would become confused about the stand of the church on this issue and follow the advice of the four "pastors"

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<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Church, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Jugendweihe, (Berlin: Zentraler Ausschuss fuer Jugendweihe, June, 1955).

in registering their children. The church reacted to this at once and issued a clear statement explaining the character and background of the four "pastors": the gist was that, with the exception of one, none of the four individuals was a pastor--one of them was a glib impostor who never had been entrusted with an ecclesiastical office; the second had some time ago resigned from his ecclesiastical office and no longer was a member of the ministerial body; the third was a self-styled apostle of a foreign sect who was known throughout Germany because of his frequent newspaper articles and advertisements; the fourth was a retired pastor who, unfamiliar with the issues involved, had written an article favorable to the youth dedication program--as soon as he became acquainted with the particulars he withdrew his earlier statements.<sup>1</sup> This lucid explanation of facts, which the central committee was unable to refute, rendered this particular method of recruitment abortive. Therefore the future enlistment of youth was carried out on the basis of psychological pressure.

### 3. The Nature and Content of Youth Dedication

The goal of the central committee for youth dedication was to steep the East German youth in Marxism and to bind them to the government through a solemn pledge of loyalty. This objective was plainly manifested by the literature used in preparatory instruction and by the speeches

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, p. 29.

given by leading state officials and members of the central committee.

In 1957 several prominent political leaders in unmistakably plain language delineated the avowed purpose of youth dedication. Robert Alt, a leading SED functionary, declared during a lecture before the central committee in November, 1957, that the primary goal of the program was to "educate new men for Socialism."<sup>1</sup> He said that he realized that the rite was merely one link in a chain of educational media such as the school, the theater, literature, extracurricular work, youth organizations, radio programs, and the home, but all links were interconnected by a common goal, the Socialist education of the East German youth. The realization of this goal would be assured through the efforts of all these educational agencies, averred Alt.

On September 29, 1957, Walter Ulbricht opened a new youth dedication year with a speech at Sonneberg, Thuringia. He noted that "progressive" people should not be surprised about the church's stubborn opposition to the dedication program, because religious leaders did not wish to have young people acquire solid knowledge and truth. Three points made by Ulbricht in his address were particularly noteworthy. First, he established a direct connection between the new youth dedication program and the old atheistic rite of the German Association of Free-Thinkers, pointing out with obvious pride that he himself had participated in such a ceremony

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Alt, "Ueber den Sinn unserer Jugendweihe," Neues Deutschland, December 21, 1957.

in 1907; the anti-religious nature of youth dedication was thereby clearly revealed. Secondly, Ulbricht called on all East German children to enlist in the dedication program "regardless of what outlook on life their parents might have, or in what outlook they had thus far been raised."<sup>1</sup> This statement clearly indicated that there was pending a recruitment campaign, in which religious convictions and objections would no longer be taken into consideration. Finally, Ulbricht outlined the duties of every organization in the country, including state agencies, fully to support this program. All pretense that the youth dedication program was privately sponsored was thus discarded. Ulbricht admonished the youth of the country to make good use of the opportunity for growth and learning offered them in the youth dedication program, because later in life they would be required to implement their knowledge for the establishment of Socialism in East Germany. In the sessions they would be taught unadulterated and unequivocal truths, which were "easier to comprehend than some other unimaginable nonsense [religious teachings]." <sup>2</sup> It would be cogently proved to them that no supernatural forces were active in the universe, but that everything had its natural causes. Ulbricht concluded his speech by once more inviting all children to attend youth dedication sessions in order that they might learn solid truths about the universe and receive a well-rounded education, appropriate to a life in modern society.

Similar ideas were presented by Professor Hermann Dunker in his address to the central committee on November 4, 1957. Without reservations

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland. October 1, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

he told the members of the committee that youth dedication was in fact a beachhead for Socialism coupled with a blow for atheism:

All materialism which desires to be honest and logical must be atheistic. However, we ought to remember that the word "atheistic" is a purely negative term. It declares that we reject the idea of God, but it does not indicate what we offer in its place. I believe that one can speak wonderfully about atheism without ever mentioning that word at all. It is possible to make it clear to young people that we believe in humanity . . . and that mankind can achieve everything that is necessary for the development of society. This faith in man is the thing that we offer in place of faith in God.<sup>1</sup>

These statements uttered by prominent political leaders patently revealed the real goal pursued in youth dedication, namely, the unequivocal impregnation of the East German youth with Marxist beliefs. If the public still had any doubts about the committee's aim, the content of the literature used in the instruction sessions should have sufficed to convince them otherwise.

The basis for all instruction was the book, Universe-World-Man.<sup>2</sup> Its publication began in 1954, the year when the youth dedication program itself was initiated. Each child received a copy of that book as a free gift when he came to the instruction sessions. Whenever religion was mentioned in that text, it was decried as an unscientific and superstitious world view; Christianity in particular was branded as a religion whose derivation lay in dubious legends and myths. By the same token, dialectical materialism was consistently represented as an unconquerable force that held the promise of creating a human race free from material want and

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<sup>1</sup>Hermann Dunker, "Das Menschheitsbewusstsein stark und lebendig machen," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, November 23, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Weltall-Erde-Mensch. 8th ed., eds. Gisela Buschendorf-Otto, Horst Wolfgramm, and Irmgard Radandt (Berlin: Neues Leben Verlag, 1959).

religious prejudice. According to the essayists of the text, one of the important tasks of progressive men is the conquest of Christianity with its "superstition and mysticism." The book was sumptuously illustrated and was prefaced with glowing words by Ulbricht; the text was supposed to provide the East German youth with guidelines for thought and conduct. A few passages will best illustrate what thoughts about the Christian faith were presented to children in that text. Ulbricht's preface read:

This book, based on the most progressive science, Soviet science, depicts the development of nature and society according to empirical-scientific knowledge and shows that through our battle we are able to accelerate the development of human society to a higher and more perfect state of existence.

Simultaneously, a battle is fought against superstition, mysticism, idealism, and all other unscientific views. Therefore, the youth as well as all working people must study the laws governing nature and the development of human society and must apply this knowledge . . . for the victory of Socialism in the German Democratic Republic and for the reunification of Germany on a peaceful and democratic basis.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Robert Havemann wrote a section captioned "The Uniformity of Nature and Society."

With the growing insight of human beings in the correlation of all natural phenomena governed by laws, one deity of nature after another was dethroned. For a few thousand years there remained only the one deity of monotheistic religions, which represents nothing else but the very naive personification of the totality of man's own social life.<sup>2</sup>

The formerly-revolutionary bourgeoisie has today degenerated into a class which is perishing. Nothing has remained of its battle against the fantastic belief of the church. The lofty ideals of the bourgeois revolution were cast overboard.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. iii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

The exploiters were always interested in keeping the exploited class in a state of stupidity and mental sleep. The magician, the medicine man, and the high priest represented the incarnation of the exploiter's power over the exploited.<sup>1</sup>

Wolfgang Fadberg penned these words about religion in a chapter entitled "What We Know about the Creation of Man":

For a long time men attempted to shed light on the darkness surrounding the creation of man . . . thus myths and fairy tales, sagas and legends came into being, wherein attempts were made to show in manifold ways how the world, heaven, earth, and finally man came into existence.<sup>2</sup>

Juergen Kuczynski depicted the "evil collaboration" between the church and the bourgeoisie in a chapter called "The Last Social Class (Capitalism)":

Whoever does not speak, write and paint about teachers and pastors . . . as the monopolists wish, is fired or even thrown into prison, a penitentiary, or concentration camp.<sup>3</sup>

Ludwick Einicke, Vice-Director of the Marx-Lenin-Stalin Institutes and a member of the central committee for youth dedication, wrote in one of the essays:

In the capitalist countries the leading reactionary powers have always used mysticism, superstition, and religion for the purpose of suppressing the masses of people. The nature of dialectical materialism permits no fairy tales about a creator, a world spirit, or a director of the world. It operates on the theory that the world has developed out of material which is governed by eternal laws of movement and change.<sup>4</sup>

In order to make the idea of youth dedication more palpable to the church, Paul Wandel, in his capacity as SED Secretary of Culture and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

Education, decided in 1957 to withdraw Universe-World-Man as the textbook for youth dedication and to replace it by a book called Our Germany.<sup>1</sup> The new textbook was in reality little more than a compilation of indigenous German poems and essays. It stressed German culture, and Marx's dialectical interpretation of history was almost entirely missing. Wandel also eliminated Ulbricht's "preface" in the copies of Universe-World-Man which were still coming off the press; he apparently felt that this "preface" was too offensive to the church. These changes had been made without Ulbricht's knowledge and when they were discovered by him, he at once restored Universe-World-Man as the official textbook for youth dedication and fired Wandel from his important post on the central committee. Ulbricht then observed that it was quite natural that this particular book should not be liked by the church, for scientific truth was always offensive to "superstitious falsehood." "One could not expect anything else from these gentlemen, the church leaders, but it would be wrong to yield to their protests." "When I have time," concluded Ulbricht with reference to Our Germany. "I also enjoy walking in the woods, but I do not approve treating education and youth dedication as a lark through forest and meadow."<sup>2</sup>

In 1957 the youth dedication program increasingly assumed the character of a religious cult, replacing the old rite of confirmation. Those attending the instruction sessions were even now taught ten new commandments formulated by Walter Ulbricht.

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<sup>1</sup>Unser Deutschland, ed. Walther Victor (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Das Parlament (1957), p. 846.

The moral face of the new Socialist man disclosed in the noble struggle for the victory of Socialism is determined by the observance of a basic moral law:

1. Thou shalt ever take thy stand for the international solidarity of the working class and of all workers, as well as for the indissoluble alliance of all Socialist countries.
2. Thou shalt love thy fatherland and be ever ready to devote all thy energy and ability to the defense of the Workers' and Peasants' power.
3. Thou shalt aid in the removal of the exploitation of men by men.
4. Thou shalt do good deeds for Socialism, for Socialism leads to a better life for all workers.
5. Thou shalt build up Socialism in the spirit of mutual help and comradely cooperation, honor the collective, and take to heart its criticism.
6. Thou shalt guard and increase the people's property.
7. Thou shalt ever strive for the increase of thine output, be frugal, and establish Socialist workers' discipline.
8. Thou shalt educate thy children in the spirit of peace and of Socialism, to become broadly cultured men, sound in body and mind.
9. Thou shalt live a clean and decent life and honor thy family.
10. Thou shalt practice solidarity with those struggling for their national freedom and with those defending their national independence.<sup>1</sup>

All young people regardless of their ideological and religious background were urged to register for the youth dedication program. After registration they attended ten sessions of instruction. Each session was of a two-hour duration and dealt with the following subjects: (1) our world in the universe, (2) the inception of life on earth, (3) the beginning and development of the human race, (4) the subjugation of nature by man,

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<sup>1</sup>Fuenf Jahre Jugendweihe in der DDR. (Berlin: Zentraler Ausschuss fuer Jugendweihe in der DDR), pp. 5-6.

(5) the advancement of human society, (6) the creative forces of the working people and their battle for social progress, (7) the Socialist era in the history of society, (8) the interrelation between people, and the position of women in society, (9) the significance of the graphic arts in the life of people, and (10) preparation for the rite of youth dedication.<sup>1</sup> After 1957 the program was enlarged from ten to twenty-four preparatory sessions. The teaching staff was made up of doctors, lawyers, scientists, and teachers; staff members lectured on subjects related to their fields. The central committee furnished its branch offices with study outlines for the instruction sessions along with some funds for the initiation of the program in their localities. The committee bombarded the youth with ample propaganda material to awaken their interest for the program of youth dedication. Some of the juvenile literature published in the form of short stories was quite appealing.<sup>2</sup>

The dedication rite itself was held just before the Easter season, a time when confirmation traditionally took place in Germany. Political officials recorded the event through a befitting inscription in the participants' ancestral album which contained the family tree--a cherished and proud possession of many German families. This privilege was not extended to pastors and their confirmands because officials ruled that confirmation was not important enough to have it recorded in the ancestral album.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>"Themenplan der Jugendstunden," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, January 1, 1955.

<sup>2</sup>For instance: Martin Haackenthal, Drei Freunde: Eine Erzählung ueber die Jugendweihe (Berlin: Zentraler Ausschuss fuer Jugendweihe, n.d.); Helmut Pfohl, Was das Leben fordert (Berlin: Zentraler Ausschuss fuer Jugendweihe, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup>"Aus der evangelischen Kirche in der Ostzone Deutschlands," Kirchenblatt fuer die reformierte Schweiz, CXIII, Nr. 3 (February 7, 1957), p. 37.

order to heighten the felicitous feelings of participants it became customary in certain localities to present monetary gifts to the youth on their dedication day; for instance, in the county of Parchim all participants received from local authorities a savings certificate in the amount of one hundred marks and in other counties they were given substantial monetary gifts by industrial managers.<sup>1</sup>

The central committee issued guidelines to its local branch offices suggesting to them the form and content which should be followed in the dedication rite.<sup>2</sup> The local offices were advised to render the occasion as festive as possible: Beethoven's music should be played as a prelude; a choir should sing suitable hymns praising the accomplishments of the working class; appropriate political speeches and poems should be delivered; and as the climax of the event, the youth should solemnly pledge their allegiance to Marxism and the German Democratic Republic. A tasteful adornment of the dedication hall with flowers and red flags was also thought to be helpful in heightening the festive spirit of the rite. The committee further suggested that just as each youth at confirmation received from his pastor a Bible verse for his future life, so each participant at youth dedication should receive from his political functionary a statement containing some personal guidance for his life in Socialist society. This advice was followed by the leaders of local branch offices; some typical injunctions used by them were the following phrases coined by well-known Marxists:

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<sup>1</sup>Jugendweihe. August-September, 1959, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Vorschlaege fuer die Ausgestaltung von Jugendweihe-Feiern (Berlin: Zentralhaus fuer Volkskunst, 1959).

"Only he who works actively in behalf of Socialism, acts truly morally and humanely" (Walter Ulbricht); "Only that life is meaningful, which is ready to sacrifice itself, to sacrifice itself for common humanity" (Karl Liebknecht); "The highest being for man is man himself" (Karl Marx); "True and firm, strong in character and victorious in action, thus and only thus will we master our fate" (Ernst Thaelmann); and "You shall protect and increase the property of the people" (Walter Ulbricht).<sup>1</sup>

To give the rite of dedication as much of a sacred appearance as possible, special hymns were composed for that occasion. Some of these hymns ascribe to the Communist party such attributes of omnipresence and omniscience as in religious thought have always been reserved for God alone. This is particularly true of "Praise of the Party" which was written by K. Schwaen and B. Brecht:

The individual has two eyes,  
 The Party a thousand eyes.  
 The Party sees seven states,  
 The individual sees only one city.  
 The individual has his hour,  
 But the Party many hours.  
 The individual can be destroyed,  
 The Party can never be destroyed.  
 For it is the vanguard of the masses  
 And pursues its battle with classic methods,  
 Which grow from the knowledge of reality.<sup>2</sup>

In a hymn written for the observance of the dedication rite, Louis Fuernberg attributes divine qualities of goodness and abundance to the Communist party.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-11.

<sup>2</sup>Ulrich Thomas, Staatsmacht und Ersatzreligion (Munich: Schaefer Verlag, 1961), p. 41.

She has given us everything,  
 The sun and the wind--never is she stingy.  
 Wherever she was, there was life.  
 Whatever we are we owe to her.  
 Never has she forsaken us.  
 When the world froze, we were warm,  
 Protected by the mother of the masses,  
 Borne up by her mighty arm.

Refrain:

The Party, the Party is always right,  
 And, comrades, so shall it ever be.  
 Whoever fights for right is always right,  
 Against lies and exploitation.  
 Whoever outrages life is wicked or dumb.  
 Whoever defends humanity is always right.  
 So, nourished in the spirit of Lenin, and  
 welded together by Stalin,  
 The Party, the Party, the Party.

Never have we had her cajole us.  
 Though our courage sank in the strife,  
 She has only gently caressed us:  
 "Fear not"--and suddenly things were all right.  
 Should we count up our sorrows and troubles,  
 When we succeed in gaining all good?  
 When for the poorest on earth  
 We achieve freedom and peace?

Refrain.

She has given us everything:  
 Bricks for buildings and our great plan.  
 "Master your life!" she says to us.  
 "Forward, comrades, grab hold!"  
 Though hyenas incite men to war,  
 What you build will break their power!  
 So build house and build cradle!  
 Workers, be on your guard!

Refrain.<sup>1</sup>

Through instruction sessions the central committee sought to engender youth with Marxist beliefs and through a dedication pledge it attempted

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

to bind them firmly to the Communist state. The original pledge of 1954 was apparently too non-committal in the eyes of politicians, because it was changed in 1958 and given a definite Marxist content. The pledge of 1954 read:

Dear young friends!

Are you prepared to apply all of your power in order to fight for peace with all peace-loving people and to defend it to the utmost?

Yes, this we pledge!

Are you prepared to apply all of your power in order to fight jointly with all patriots for a unified, peace-loving, and democratic Germany?

Yes, this we pledge!

Are you prepared to apply all of your power for the establishment of a happy life, for progress in economy, science, and the arts?

Yes, this we pledge!<sup>1</sup>

The new pledge of 1958 no longer called upon the youth merely to work for "progress in economy, science, and the arts," but demanded that they dedicate their "entire strength for the great and noble cause of Socialism." Starting in 1958 the dedication rite required also the kissing of the red flag by the youth, symbolizing their pledge of unreserved devotion and loyalty to Marxism. The new pledge read:

Dear young friends!

Are you prepared as true sons and daughters of our Workers' and Peasants' state to work and fight for a happy life for all German people?

Yes, this we pledge!

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<sup>1</sup>Das Volk, February 17, 1955.

Are you prepared to dedicate your entire strength with us for the great and noble cause of Socialism?

Yes, this we pledge!

Are you prepared to support the friendship of all nations and with the Soviet Union and all peace-loving people in the world to secure and defend peace?

Yes, this we pledge!

We have heard your pledge. You have set for yourselves a high and noble goal. You have taken your place in the ranks of millions of men who work and fight for peace and Socialism. Solemnly we take you into the community of workers of the German Democratic Republic and promise you our support, protection, and help.

With united forces--forward, forward, forward!<sup>1</sup>

Those in charge of the instruction sessions were admonished by the central committee to explain to the young participants the precise implications of the pledge. Not just a memorization of its words, but a true comprehension of its meaning was the desired goal. The committee thought it important for the Socialist development of East Germany that the pledge's text become a genuine confession of allegiance to Marxism on the part of the participants.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. The Church's Reaction

From the time of its inception in 1954 the program of youth dedication was bitterly opposed by the church. On November 30, only two weeks after the youth dedication drive had been launched, church leaders in a "Word to Evangelical Congregations" stated that since Christian faith and Marxist

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<sup>1</sup>Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, January 11, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Otto Haeuser, "Das Geloebniss zur Jugendweihe," Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, January 11, 1958.

ideology were implacably opposed to each other, a participation of church youth in both confirmation and youth dedication was out of question.<sup>1</sup>

The dedication rite had always been an affair of those who rejected Christ-- the church would not challenge the central committee's recruitment of children who were not affiliated with the Christian faith, but she would unequivocally oppose the enlistment of her youth for the dedication rite. To lend more force to the pronouncement, the church leaders ruled that no young person taking part in the Communist rite would be confirmed in the Christian faith. They based this decision on an old ecclesiastical statute which decreed that "children who participated in acts opposed to confirmation would not be confirmed."<sup>2</sup>

Numerous ecclesiastical pronouncements after 1954 tended to reinforce this uncompromising position taken by church leaders. Bishop Dibelius insisted in 1955 that the Christian faith would become a mockery if at one hour of the day a young person were solemnly to avow "I believe in God as my Creator" and at another hour "I support those who laugh at such foolishness."<sup>3</sup> On this issue, he stated, "no compromise with atheism could be made." Confronted by this stand, young people were compelled to make a choice: they could either be confirmed in the Christian faith or be dedicated to the Communist cause. In order to fortify her position even more, the church initiated disciplinary action against all church members who

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1954. p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1954. p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1955. p. 112.

served on youth dedication committees or who recruited young people for the dedication program. They were denied the privilege of sponsoring infants for baptism, of voting in church elections, and of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

The reaction of the central committee to these measures came swiftly in the form of an accusation against the church. The committee complained that the disciplinary actions violated articles 41 and 42 of the constitution which guaranteed freedom of conscience and belief to all citizens. The full and free exercise of this liberty was painfully impaired by the church measures, because those who wished to serve on youth dedication committees and young people who intended to register for this program were now prevented from doing so.<sup>1</sup> On October 19, 1957, the government officially supported the committee's charges against the church. Karl Maron, the Minister of the Interior, declared in a letter to Dibelius that "pronouncements from the pulpit ordered by Protestant bishops constituted not only a coercion of conscience on the part of the clergy, but were also directed against freedom of conscience in general."<sup>2</sup>

Several pastors were prosecuted and sentenced to prison terms. The District Court of Schwerin on December 19, 1957, sentenced Pastor Otto Maercker to two and a half years in a penitentiary because he had denied Christian burial to a nineteen year old girl who, instead of being confirmed by the church, had accepted the Communist dedication rite.<sup>3</sup> He was also

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<sup>1</sup>Jugendweihe (Berlin: Zentraler Ausschuss fuer Jugendweihe in der DDR, June, 1955).

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957. p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>"Kirche auf der Anklagebank," Kirche in der Zeit. VIII, Heft 2 (February, 1958), pp. 60-61.

accused of having ridiculed youth dedication in his confirmation classes and of having exerted pressure on young people to prevent them from participating in that program. The number of clergymen in East German jails rose from seven at the beginning of January, 1957, to twenty-two at the end of that year.<sup>1</sup>

The most sensational trial centering on the issue of youth dedication involved Siegfried Schmutzler, spiritual leader for students at the University of Leipzig. Because of his Bible studies and personal contact with students, Schmutzler had become an extremely popular figure in Leipzig. He was suddenly arrested at his home on April 5, 1957; his office and library were thoroughly searched by police and certain books and files were confiscated, and later introduced as evidence of guilt at his trial. During his long period of detention, Schmutzler was not permitted to confer with anyone. His haggard and exhausted appearance at the trial in November suggested the strong possibility that his plea of guilty to the government's charge of "agitation to boycott the republic" was the result of extreme mental and physical exhaustion. Schmutzler was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Schmutzler's arrest and trial were apparently caused by his evangelization efforts in the industrial area of Boehlen. In his lectures and discussions there Schmutzler criticized the practice of forcing people to work on Sundays to the detriment of rest and worship. He expressed his conviction that it was the Christian's duty to love all men, including war criminals. Finally, he thought that the needs of the aged and the invalids

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957. p. 165.

were not adequately met by the state. On the basis of these remarks, Schmutzler was accused of having caused dissension among the people and of having undermined the government's five-year plan. Certain Western books, supposedly filled with prejudice and hate toward Communism, had been confiscated in his library; he was said to have cleverly used these books in confusing university students at discussion groups in Leipzig. Three books singled out at the trial for their "questionable contents" were Wolfgang Leonhart's Child of the Revolution, George Orwell's 1984, and Erich Wendland's The Church in Modern Society.

During the trial a witness was produced who charged Schmutzler with having made a statement to the effect that "all who sought to enlist young people for youth dedication should have a millstone placed around their necks and be drowned in the depth of the sea."<sup>1</sup> Even though this statement was inaccurately quoted and taken out of context, the state prosecutor accused Schmutzler of inciting people to murder. He was also said to have created illegal cell groups among his students with the aim of causing unrest in the university and of disseminating treasonable information supposedly received from espionage agencies in West Berlin. Another accusation brought against him was that of having supported the chaplaincy agreement between the church and the West German government and of having expressed open sympathies with the Hungarian freedom fighters.

Since Schmutzler was kept under close surveillance from the time of his arrest in April to his trial seven months later, it was impossible to find out whether his confession of guilt was the direct result of physical and

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, p. 169.

mental fatigue and psychological pressure. After the trial the church issued a statement declaring that she did not wish to create the role of a martyr for one of her clergymen, but that she was keenly interested in keeping the record straight. If Schmutzler had not conducted himself correctly in socio-political affairs, this was a matter of profound regret. On the other hand, it was quite clear that Schmutzler had also frequently stressed in public the responsibility of obedience which Christian people must have in relation to the existing temporal powers--on the basis of her conviction the church would feel compelled to continue to discharge this responsibility even if it meant persecution and suffering.<sup>1</sup>

The East German government was apparently not too eager to have the factual record set straight. Schmutzler's trial, coupled with a series of personal attacks upon several clergymen, served to discredit the church and her ministers as a "subversive and unpatriotic institution." The substance of this observation was published in Der Morgen and was repeated in almost every East German newspaper:

The trial [of Schmutzler] is a clear warning to those within the church who maintain close connections with the Adenauer regime, and who seek to carry out their NATO politics to the detriment of our republic. By the same token it is an admonition for the church circles within the German Democratic Republic to maintain strict loyalty. Enemies of our state will be met with the full<sup>2</sup> force of the law. Schmutzlers will always suffer shipwreck here.

In answer to these charges against the church preferred at court trials, repeated in the press, and reiterated by Walter Ulbricht in his afore-

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<sup>1</sup> KJ 1957, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Der Morgen, November 30, 1957.

mentioned speech of 1957 at Sonneberg, the bishops in East Germany issued an encyclical letter which was read in their congregations:

Once again thousands of children in our congregations are preparing to make confession of our Lord Jesus Christ through confirmation. At the same time the attempt is being made to win these baptized children of ours for the atheistic youth dedication program. In such a situation our families are called to a decision and a confession. For by necessity it is simply a matter of either-or; it is impossible to combine the two.

Herr Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the SED central committee and First Deputy Chairman of the presidium of the Council of Ministers, has once again made this clear in a speech on September 29, 1957, at the opening of the youth dedication year in Sonneberg, Thuringia. Previously it was always said: the dedication of youth in the German Democratic Republic in no way signifies a confession to atheism; it is something altogether different from the Free Thinkers' youth dedication of former years. Now Herr Ulbricht has said--and we quote from Neues Deutschland--that the dedication of youth is a fine old custom: in West Germany, too, children go to youth dedication ceremonies. And then he tells of his own youth dedication ceremony in 1907. So it actually is the old institution of the Free Thinkers which is supposed to supplant the church's confirmation.

The other statements, too, in Herr Ulbricht's speech make this very clear. He says we should not permit ourselves to be prevented from "throwing overboard old, outworn dogmas."

Finally, Herr Ulbricht not only called upon the factories, the Machine and Tractor Stations, the People's Own Department, the Agricultural Production Communities, and the Women's Committees to support the youth dedication program. He also required the Popular Education Departments of the Councils, i.e., organs of state administration, to cooperate in the preparations for the youth dedication ceremonies. This is in contradiction to the declaration given the bishops on December 3, 1956, at the highest state level, namely, that the dedication of youth is not a matter for the state, but simply for those who desire the dedication of youth, and that organs of the state are not given the task of putting themselves unreservedly in the service of the youth dedication program.

We, your bishops, declare: The choice between confirmation and the rite of dedication is a matter involving the souls of your children and the salvation of your own souls. Our answer to the new propaganda for the dedication of youth and to all attacks against our faith can only be that we take confirmation instruction much more seriously and that we, together with our children, will keep faith the more firmly with God and the church of Jesus Christ.

Threats will not terrify us. During the years of the church's great struggle under National Socialism we learned again and again that God will help his people through all temptations. He will not leave us without his help.

It is written "We ought to obey God rather than men." And our Savior Jesus Christ has said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Despite this firm stand by the bishops and despite the church's disciplinary measures, an increasingly number of young people registered for the youth dedication rite with the passing of each year. The pressure on the youth and their parents had become almost unbearable, particularly when some of the youth who had not taken part in the dedication rite were not permitted to pursue studies at either high schools or universities.<sup>2</sup> The atheistic indoctrination of children in the public schools also increased in intensity each year, touching every congregation and practically every family. Starting in 1958 then, the vast majority of the youth enrolled in the youth dedication sessions, and a corresponding decline of attendance was noticed in the confirmation classes. Statistics on participation in youth dedication have been confusing and conflicting ever since the inception of the rite in 1954 and there is evidence to indicate that both the government's boast of triumph and the church's concession of failure have been inaccurate. At any rate, the fact that almost all territorial churches in East Germany in recent years have refused to submit any statistical data on confirmation may reflect their unwillingness to let the government know how well the numbers of confirmands are holding up. It has been estimated that in 1961 at best a maximum of 10 per cent of the East German youth was still confirmed in the Christian faith. The

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, pp. 153-154.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957, p. 158.

central committee claimed that the following percentages of students in the eighth grade participating in the youth dedication program:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
1957 . . . . .	25.0
1958 . . . . .	44.1
1959 . . . . .	80.4
1960 . . . . .	88.0
1961 . . . . .	90.0 <sub>1</sub>

The rapidly declining number of children confirmed in two territorial churches which continued to submit statistical data appears to support the claims made by the central committee:

<u>Number Confirmed</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number Confirmed</u>
<u>The Lutheran church in Saxony</u>		<u>The Evangelical church in Silesia</u>
70,376 . . . . .	1953 . . . . .	4,307
60,422 . . . . .	1954 . . . . .	3,746
59,965 . . . . .	1955 . . . . .	3,606
50,269 . . . . .	1956 . . . . .	3,097
47,132 . . . . .	1957 . . . . .	2,764
46,004 . . . . .	1958 . . . . .	2,544
17,160 . . . . .	1959 . . . . .	957
12,829 . . . . .	1960 . . . . .	754 <sub>2</sub>

This stunning decrease of young people in confirmation classes caused the church to reappraise her position on the dedication of youth and compelled her to reevaluate confirmation itself. This problem loomed large at the synod of the Evangelical church in Germany which convened in Berlin in April, 1958. In view of the critical conflict between confirmation and youth dedication, the synod suggested that its member churches give special

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest B. Koenker, Secular Salvations (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1955, p. 412; KJ 1956, p. 350; KJ 1957, p. 261; KJ 1958, p. 392; KJ 1959, p. 364; KJ 1960, p. 331; KJ 1961, pp. 404-405.

attention to the creation of new forms and methods of confirmation. The synod also appointed a special committee which would coordinate all work and effort in setting forth new and uniform guidelines for confirmation.

Out of the discussions following the 1958 synod came a great variety of ideas and suggestions about confirmation. One group of clergymen suggested the complete elimination of that rite, since it had never been considered a sacrament among Protestants and, in their opinion, had no Biblical basis as a church rite. Traditionally confirmation had only been a ceremony signifying the completion of formal instruction in the church's teachings, and the reception of the confirmand into full membership of the congregation with the privilege of receiving the sacrament of holy communion. Although the rite itself required the young confirmand to make a personal confession of faith in the Triune God and to give a promise that he would lead a devoted Christian life within the church, confirmation was popularly regarded by many people as a traditional formality and a time for family celebration and festivity. After confirmation the vast majority of young people became indifferent to the church and Christian life. It was with this in mind that a group of pastors seriously suggested a complete repudiation of that rite.

Another group of concerned churchmen suggested the admittance of children to the Lord's Table at the age of nine or ten, and the postponement of confirmation until they reached the more mature age of seventeen or eighteen.

The views of yet a third group of clergymen were finally adopted in 1959 as tentative confirmation guidelines in East Germany, pending the

completion of a permanent and unified pattern.<sup>1</sup> According to the new guidelines, the dedication of youth was still firmly rejected by the church, but greater cognizance was taken of the extreme duress under which children and parents labored. The pledge at the dedication rite was still regarded as a form of denial of the Christian faith and was therefore looked upon as a sin, but the clergy was directed to accept those youth who repented of their participation in the Communist rite and wished to be confirmed in the Christian faith. The lapse of time allowed between the youth dedication rite and confirmation was to be a pastoral matter, each clergyman using his own judgment. Regarding confirmation instruction, all children were permitted to attend classes even though at the same time they partook in the youth dedication sessions. At the end of confirmation instruction a period of preparation for holy communion followed for those who wished to be confirmed in the Christian faith. Those who wished to be confirmed after participation in the dedication rite could, at the pastor's discretion, take a preparatory course for holy communion and be confirmed the following year.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, these guidelines were a compromise designed to retain the youth in the church, but even this measure of 1959--just like the church pronouncements and disciplinary actions of 1955--has failed to accomplish its purpose; statistics indicate that the decline in the number of confirmands has continued.

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<sup>1</sup>"Beschluss der Provinzialsynode Berlin-Brandenburg zur Konfirmation 1959," Kirche in der Zeit. IX, Heft 2 (February, 1959), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1959. p. 7 ff.

By way of review, it should be noted that a goal of Communism is the obliteration of religion. In order to reach this goal, Communist governments pursue four objectives, one of which is the elimination of the church's influence from society. The German Democratic Republic has to a large extent been able to achieve this objective; the state has succeeded in virtually establishing a monopoly over all means of education and in expelling the church from that important sphere of public influence. In 1953 the government sought also to capture the church's hold on youth by fiercely attacking the church's youth organizations, but this attempt met with utter failure. In 1954 the state then inaugurated the rite of youth dedication in order to compete with the church for the devotion and loyalty of her youth. This approach proved to be strikingly successful; a steadily growing number of young people have participated in the Communist rite rather than in Christian confirmation, fortifying the influence of the Communist state on the East German youth.

## V. SECURE CHURCH SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST CAUSE: POLITICAL IMBROGLIO

Another of the Communist tactics, which can lead to a weakening of religion, consists of the attempt to force the church into the subservient position of supporting the political aims of the Soviet regime. This strategy was first effectively employed in World War II when Stalin wished to gain the sanction of Russian Orthodoxy for his political programs and military operations so as to strengthen the morale of the Soviet peoples during the period of occupation of Eastern Europe by the German army. A number of prominent church leaders lent their support to his political and military moves not only during World War II but during the post-war period as well.<sup>1</sup> Stalin's new approach to religion was later adopted by the governments of countries within the Soviet orbit, including the government of East Germany.

Despite Stalin's friendly overtures to the church, the final obliteration of religion remained an unchanged and fixed goal of the Communist movement. Even though some church leaders--possibly under duress--collaborated with the Soviet regime,<sup>2</sup> this action did not cause Communist leaders

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<sup>1</sup>Schrey, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Koch, Zur politischen Predigt (Muenchen: Carl Gerber Verlag, 1952), p. 119.

to give up their designs at religion.<sup>1</sup> They continued their efforts to circumscribe religious activities by stringent regulations and to strike at religion by the militant propagation of atheism; however, the overt use of ruthless terror as a means of stamping out religion, which was common during the 1920's in Soviet Russia, was not revived after World War II. In any case, since her ultimate fate seemed to be sealed, the church was now openly tolerated in society. However, in order to reap some benefits from their policy of toleration, Communist leaders sought to gain the church's support for their political programs. Like all other organizations and institutions in society, the religious community was to be reduced to an agency serving Communist interests. Religious sanction certainly would persuade some believers to accept Soviet politics without much ado. The church's collaboration would also be of great propaganda value in the power struggle between the East and the West. Moreover, by becoming subservient to the state, the church would compromise her integrity and impair the effectiveness of her message. Communist governments thus had everything to gain by such an arrangement, especially since the church's collaboration should tend to accelerate the pace of her anticipated disintegration.

In their attempt to procure the allegiance of the religious community, Communist governments probably anticipated some resistance on the part of certain churchmen. If incumbent hierarchical leaders proved unusually obstinate in frustrating governmental schemes, efforts were made to replace

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<sup>1</sup>"Die Christen hinter dem eisernen Vorhang," Fuer Arbeit und Besinng. XV, Nr. 20 (October 15, 1952), p. 233.

them with a more cooperative leadership, most strikingly illustrated by the fate of some spiritual leaders in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Obstreperous shepherds in both countries who refused to support the political aspirations of their governments were put under house arrest and later replaced by less obdurate clergymen.<sup>1</sup>

Until 1958 demands by the East German government for an ecclesiastical endorsement of political programs met with the church's stubborn opposition. Pastors and bishops were repeatedly called upon to enlist in the Communist-inspired National Front and to give a pledge of allegiance to the state, but this request struck no responsive chord in most clergymen. On the contrary, the church concluded in 1957 the aforementioned military chaplaincy agreement with the West German government, a step in direct conflict with the East German government's expressed wishes. Interpreting this step as political treason and as treacherous acclaim of West Germany's membership in NATO, the government initiated various measures of reprisal in order to cripple the work of the church. Some officials such as Bishop Dibelius were no longer at all permitted to enter East Germany. They were banned from their bishoprics on the grounds that as "American agents they engaged in subversive activities and that they sought to instigate another world war." At the same time strenuous efforts were made to muster a group of loyal clergymen, who would unreservedly support East German politics and eventually be in a position to supplant the church leadership distasteful to Grotewohl and Ulbricht. The government scored some success in this

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<sup>1</sup>O. K. Armstrong, Religion Can Conquer Communism (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), pp. 108-117.

endeavor with the creation in 1958 of the League of Evangelical Clergymen. The church was also forced in 1958 to give a long-sought declaration of support on behalf of the "peace efforts" of the Communist state. While under considerable duress, East German bishops issued a communique in which they stated that the church . . . agrees fundamentally with the peace efforts of the German Democratic Republic and its government."<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as this was appraised as an ecclesiastical acclaim of the East German regime, some of the most restrictive measures strangling religious life were relaxed. Beyond this declaration the state has been unable to secure any other significant concession from the church.

Article 41 of the East German constitution provided the legal basis for all attempts to extract from the church at least some token support for the political aspirations of the state. As noted earlier, this article seemed to invest the church with great privileges; the religious community was endowed with the express right of taking a public stand on every important issue confronting the nation and of forming her convictions in line with her tradition and confession. By the same token, article 41 also specified that the church's institutions and actions must not be misused for "partisan or unconstitutional" purposes,<sup>2</sup> and the government claimed the authority to decide what religious activities and teachings were "unconstitutional." With this in mind the Catholic News Service called this article a "death sentence" for every religious community which dared to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung der DDR, vol. I, p. 430.

disagree with the state.<sup>1</sup> This observation proved to be quite accurate. If public utterances were made concerning national issues which displeased the state, steps were usually taken to muffle the church's voice by denouncing it as partisan in nature. It became patently clear that the government deemed constitutional only those public statements which favored the political line of Communism, judging all contrary declarations unconstitutional.

#### A. The National Front and Public Referenda

It will be remembered that during the period of Soviet Military Administration, Russian officials approached clergymen with requests that they lend their support to certain administrative and political actions in East Germany. This action by Soviet officials apparently served as precedent to indigenous East German leaders who late in 1949 began to call on the church to support the political program of the new government. Leading bishops as well as parish pastors were repeatedly urged to enlist in the National Front and to endorse national referenda.

The drive to gain the clergy for the National Front began in earnest in October, 1949, when the government demanded that the clergy enlist in the National Front. High-ranking church leaders were as a rule the first to be approached and, when no receptive ear was found among them, strenuous efforts were made to reach the grass-root clergy in local congregations. Parish pastors were sought out individually through governmental communiqués, party resolutions, labor memoranda, newspaper articles, and radio broadcasts.

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<sup>1</sup>Solberg, p. 85.

The National Front, which evolved out of an earlier Communist-dominated organization, the People's Committees for Unity and a Just Peace, was officially given life on January 7, 1950.<sup>1</sup> Under the direction of a national committee composed of three hundred members from East Germany and one hundred from West Germany, the National Front professed to be an organization of peace-loving people whose aim was to bring unity to Germany and the conclusion of a peace treaty. It sought to rally around its banner people from both parts of divided Germany by holding out to them the hope of a reunification of the country. Thus the National Front contended to be an all-German movement, uniting "in its ranks citizens from East and West Germany, people from all walks of life and of all beliefs, members of all political parties and organizations whose aim was the reunification of Germany as a peaceful and democratic state."<sup>2</sup> East German newspapers proudly proclaimed that "the National Front of Democratic Germany embraced all forces of the German people, those with and without party affiliation, those in East and in West Germany."<sup>3</sup> Pieck stated that no other demands would be made of people working with this organization except that they should "fight American imperialism and strive for the national independence of the German people."<sup>4</sup> The National Front made its first public appeal in Berlin on February 15, 1950, calling for a reunified Germany, a peace treaty, and withdrawal of

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<sup>1</sup>GDR. p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>GDR. p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Neue Zeit. February 19, 1950.

<sup>4</sup>Pieck, vol. II, p. 256.

all occupation troops in both parts of the country. All parties, organizations and institutions, including the church, were urged to associate themselves with this political program.

The National Front's stated aim of national reunification appealed to many German people. Almost all of them wished to see their country reunited again, and would have gladly supported a program such as this. Throughout the course of events leading to the creation of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, Soviet leaders and German Communists had sought to convey the impression that they were the real supporters of the German quest for peace and unity--the Western allies were described as villains who kept Germany willfully divided. A manifesto issued by the People's Council on October 7, 1949, was typical of the subtle enticement through reference to the possibility of the reunification of Germany, if people would support the program of the National Front:

Germany has been partitioned through the imperialist policy of Western powers . . . the German people have been refused a peace treaty. Instead of this there has been forced upon them in the Western zones an occupation statute, intended to extend the occupation period indefinitely . . . The foremost endeavor of the constitutionally formed provisional German government will be to fight for the peace, unity and sovereignty of Germany . . . We call upon all German people to take the salvation of the nation in their own hands and to clear the road for peace, reconstruction, and the national independence of a united German Democratic Republic by supporting the battle of the National Front.<sup>1</sup>

It was difficult to raise objections against the professed aspirations of the National Front unless its true political aim was recognized. The

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<sup>1</sup>White Book on the American and British Policy of Intervention in West Germany and the Revival of German Imperialism (Berlin: National Council of the National Front of Democratic Germany, 1951), p. 170.

reunification of Germany and ratification of a peace treaty were in reality to take place under the auspices of an "all-German provisional government" without the benefit of free elections.<sup>1</sup> This provision, coupled with the demand for a neutralized status of Germany, constituted one of the basic features of all peace treaty proposals of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> But the phenomenon of a "provisional government" functioning as supreme authority without free elections was already a familiar method perfected in several Soviet satellite countries. This technique had enabled a relatively small band of dedicated Communists to seize the reigns of government through a coup d'etat in several lands.<sup>3</sup> This was the true design of the National Front for Germany when it called upon people to support its program of national reunification and its demands for the withdrawal of occupation troops. Apparently with this in mind Khrushchev advised East German political leaders in 1955 to stress the program of the National Front more vigorously than ever before.<sup>4</sup> Ulbricht took this advice to heart by demanding once more that all "democratic people" join forces with the National Front in order to bring about the "reunification of Germany as a peace-loving and democratic nation."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the Western allies consistently took the position

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<sup>1</sup>Erfurt, p. 39 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 129; also Fuer einen Friedensvertrag mit Deutschland. ed. Ausschuss fuer Auswaertige Angelegenheiten der Volkskammer der DDR (Berlin: Ruetten and Loening, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Erfurt, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>Adolph, pp. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup>Neues Deutschland. September 28, 1955.

that free elections held throughout Germany were mandatory as a first step leading to the ratification of a peace treaty. As long as the people had not freely elected a government there existed no legitimate signatory for a peace treaty.<sup>1</sup> This difference in approach was vividly revealed in diplomatic negotiations carried on during the latter part of 1951. The East German parliament sent a note to the West German Bundestag on September 15 urging consultations between representatives from both parts of the divided country on the subject of free elections and the ratification of a peace treaty. The West German government replied two weeks later with a fourteen-point program for the free election of an all-German constitutional assembly and declared its intention to submit these proposals to the United Nations for approval. The East German authorities then drafted a somewhat similar program, but it lacked provisions for the international supervision of the proposed free election. In the meantime, a committee of the United Nations received the statements from both the East and the West German governments on this matter and finally recommended to the General Assembly the appointment of a special commission which would investigate the conditions for free elections. Member nations of the commission were Brazil, Iceland, Pakistan, Poland, and the Netherlands. It was assured full cooperation and free movement in the West German Federal Republic, but the East German government refused this commission permission to even cross its boundaries. Therefore, the commission was forced to report to the United Nations on April 30, 1952, that there was no possibility of carrying

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<sup>1</sup>Erfurt, p. 36.

out its assignment. If the support of the German Democratic Republic actually rested on a 99.72 per cent popular majority, as claimed by the National Front after the election in 1950,<sup>1</sup> there need not have been any hesitancy by the East German state to admit an impartial international commission for the purpose of preparing for another free election.

Besides rallying people around its proposed plan of reunification, the second important aim of the National Front was to secure participation of the population in all East German elections and public referenda.<sup>2</sup> The National Front functioned "as the main driving force in elections" and prepared a list with a single slate of candidates in consultation with the Communist-dominated parties and mass organizations. By means of ballots with a single slate drawn up by the National Front it was possible to distribute "elective offices" in advance of actual elections. No election was held in October, 1949, when the "provisional government" of the German Democratic Republic was launched, but preparations were made for an election to be held in the fall of the following year. This election was to provide a popular ratification of the constitution and to place in political office a hand-picked group of men. During the intervening twelve months, the National Front was invested with the responsibility of mustering support for the "provisional government" and its policy of German unity and peace. In order to win ecclesiastical support for the fall election, hundreds of personal letters were sent to pastors inviting them to attend conferences especially planned for them by the National Front. These invitations,

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<sup>1</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR. 1955. vol. I, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>GDR, p. 34.

signed by high-ranking government leaders, promised free transportation and a reimbursement of all expenses incurred at the conferences.<sup>1</sup> The response must have been disappointing to the National Front. For instance, of the fifteen hundred clergymen in Brandenburg, a total of only twenty attended the conference held for their region on August 15, 1950. At that time they were presented with resolutions endorsing candidates sponsored by Communists; only nine of the twenty pastors present signed them. Nevertheless, East German newspapers proclaimed that the clergy of Brandenburg had enthusiastically approved the National Front's program and candidates.<sup>2</sup> Similar conferences for pastors were held in other provinces of the German Democratic Republic.

The election on October 15, 1950, returned the expected overwhelming endorsement of the National Front's ballot. No secret vote was permitted and the only possible way of casting a negative vote was to deface the ballot, which was likely to result in post-election reprisals. The official reports thus indicated a 99.72 per cent majority approval of the National Front and of its program. The open vote and ballots with a single slate were used during all subsequent elections.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, if a person failed to cast his vote at later elections, he was invariably denounced as a traitor to the cause of the German Democratic Republic. It was not surprising then that the National Front was able to announce again in 1954

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, p. 125 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Volkstimme, October 16, 1950.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1957, p. 174.

that 99.46 per cent of all votes in that year's national election were cast in favor of its program.<sup>1</sup>

Another important task of the National Front was to initiate public referenda regarding vital national events and particularly as they involved West Germany. The attention of the National Front was especially focused on a possible rearmament of the Federal Republic. As tension between the East and the West continued to increase, highlighted in 1949 by the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the withdrawal of Chiang Kai-shek from the China mainland, the threat of a third world war loomed large. This precarious political situation was aggravated even more in 1950 by the outbreak of the Korean War. In view of these grave world developments, the question of the future relationship of West Germany to NATO and to European defense was passionately discussed by people in both parts of the divided Germany. When the rearmament of the Federal Republic became a reality late in 1951, the country was reverberating from a convulsive debate on this subject. Of course, the East German government opposed the rearmament of the Federal Republic in no uncertain terms. In order to strengthen the stand of the East German regime on this issue, the National Front was given the task of holding a popular referendum on this question throughout Germany.

The referendum was forbidden in West Germany by the government of the Federal Republic, but it was held on June 6, 1951, in East Germany. People were to vote on the question, "Are you opposed to the remilitarization of Germany and in favor of a peace treaty with Germany in 1951?" The

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<sup>1</sup>Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR. 1955, vol. I, p. 87.

phraseology was such that a negative vote would have hardly been possible. An affirmative vote on a peace treaty meant simultaneously a negative vote on the rearmament issue. These were really two distinct questions but they were placed before the people as one. Voters were urged to cast their ballots openly as an indication of their wholehearted endorsement of peace. In spite of this travesty of democratic procedures, the National Front reported triumphantly that 96.31 per cent of the voters had declared their support for the peaceful aims of Soviet Russia.<sup>1</sup> Another much-publicized referendum was held in June, 1954, when it became obvious that the Western allies would terminate the occupation status and accept the Federal Republic into NATO. People were to vote on the question, "Are you in favor of a peace treaty and the withdrawal of all occupation troops, or the European Defense Community and the retention of occupation troops for fifty years?" The already familiar voting procedures prevailed again at this referendum. Moreover, no rules had been established this time to determine what constituted a valid ballot. Local election boards could even count blank or spoiled ballots if they wished. Nevertheless, it was announced that the people at the polls had favored a peace treaty by a majority of 93.5 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Even though the results of these referenda did not prevent West Germany from joining NATO, it provided the regime in East Germany with an abundance of propaganda material. On the other hand, the facts that the Democratic Republic had already mustered an impressive army under the guise of the People's Police before the actual remilitarization of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., vol. I, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vol. I, p. 88.

Federal Republic, and that later it became a partner in the Warsaw Pact were explained by the National Front as purely defensive measures against the "revenge-seeking forces in West Germany."<sup>1</sup>

The rejection of the National Front by the church was made plain in numerous official pronouncements issued by leading bishops and synodical conventions. Many of these statements elucidating the church's position were read to congregations at their Sunday worship services. The Berlin Consistory reminded all its pastors of the basic position on political action taken by the church in the letter of 1948 to Marshal Sokolovski.<sup>2</sup> The church leadership of Saxony recalled the Barmen Declaration during the Nazi period, in which any intimation that the state might use the church for political purposes had been emphatically rejected as "false doctrine."<sup>3</sup> The contribution of the church to peace and unity could not be made within the political framework of the National Front; it could be made only on the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Protests were also voiced by church leaders against the flagrant misrepresentation of democratic election procedures at the polls. They requested that the government issue a clear statement defining a valid ballot and make the use of booths obligatory by all voters so that those who wished to use them would not be looked upon with suspicion by party officials. Referring particularly to the duplicity of phraseology in the referendum questions, they pleaded for a preservation of freedom of conscience:

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<sup>1</sup>GDR, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1950, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950. p. 131.

The "yes" to peace should not be misused as a "yes" to other objectives which have nothing to do with the question of peace and which, properly understood, are a hindrance to it. The Christian, whose natural inclination would be to vote for peace, finds it very difficult to understand how a campaign for peace can be dominated by a propaganda for hate. Wherever hate is at work, peace is destroyed. For the sake of peace itself, which needs no propaganda, we plead that Christian men, who are obliged to love even their enemies, may not be forced to violate their consciences.<sup>1</sup>

One of the important principles determining the church's relationship with the National Front was formulated by the synod of the Evangelical church in Germany at Berlin-Weissensee in April, 1950.<sup>2</sup> The declaration issued by the synod contained earnest statements about the critical political situation in the world and the ardent desire of the German people that war should be prevented. Instead of laying the blame for the threat of peace upon one nation or another, it was pointed out in the declaration that wars came about because of a disregard for the laws of God. Therefore, the only way to an abiding peace was through repentance and acceptance of the will of God. The task of the church was to declare this message as the basis of world peace, even though men and nations might ignore it. The declaration further contained a statement about the church's responsibility to warn men and governments against forces which produce wars: hatred and injustice, terror and discrimination, and the creation of a climate of deceit and falsehood. These forces must be removed or all talk of peace among nations would be empty and futile. The occupation powers were urged quickly to conclude a peace treaty, to reunite the divided

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, pp. 128-129.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1950, p. 7 ff.

country, and to grant amnesty to the remaining prisoners of war. If the leaders of the National Front had hoped that the synod would issue a statement which could be used in support of their political designs, they were doomed to disappointment. The Weissensee declaration contained nothing which even remotely suggested an alignment of the church with the aspirations of that organization. On the contrary, the appeal of the synod to the individual members of the church not to allow themselves to become instruments of a peace propaganda, "which in reality is sowing hatred and promoting war," constituted a plain rejection of the National Front.

A negative reception was also given by the church to the World Peace Movement, an organization whose aims were similar to those of the National Front. The preservation of peace was its avowed aim and it therefore had an emotional appeal to people who had experienced the horrors of World War II. The program of the World Peace Movement was dressed in a quasi-religious appearance inasmuch as its leaders copiously quoted Biblical statements dealing with "peace on earth." It was argued that since religious people were interested in establishing "good will among men" they should eagerly welcome the opportunity of supporting the program of the Peace Movement. Clergymen were importuned to sign various peace resolutions and prominent church leaders were invited to attend peace congresses held periodically at Paris, Prague, and Stockholm. In reality, the program of the World Peace Movement coincided with the political ambitions of the Soviet Union and the policies of the Western powers were denounced as war schemes. Thus the so-called peace literature and petitions blanketing East Germany invariably proved to be propaganda material reflecting hatred of the United States. Day after day people were told that there existed two

dominant camps in the world today, the camp of peace and the camp of war.

"The glorious camp of world peace, which increased consistently in strength, stood under the leadership of the Soviet Union. The camp of war was led by the United States . . . whose aim was to gain world domination by means of war waged against peace-loving people and countries."<sup>1</sup> The church advised her clergy and laity not to sign resolutions of this kind on the grounds that there existed a great difference between the peace promised by Christ and that proclaimed by the World Peace Movement. The peace of God was spiritual in nature and compelled a person to love his neighbor while the peace professed by that organization was political in nature and filled a person with hatred for his fellowmen.<sup>2</sup> This position was clearly enunciated by the Weissensee synod in 1950.

Nevertheless, not all churchmen remained aloof to the stated aim of the World Peace Movement. Several extremely influential leaders like Pastor Martin Niemöller of Hesse, Heinrich Grueber of Berlin, and the Swiss theologian Karl Barth were sympathetic to its professed goal of preserving world peace.<sup>3</sup> Having observed the ravages of World War II, they were vehemently opposed to the armament race between the East and the West and specifically to the then impending remilitarization of Germany. They feared the outbreak of another devastating war and wished to do everything within their power to prevent such a calamity from befalling mankind, even if it meant the endorsement of the aspirations of the World Peace Movement.

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<sup>1</sup>Lehrbuch fuer den Geschichtsunterricht (8. Schuljahr), p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1950, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950, pp. 174, 214-220.

Apparently motivated by these considerations, they attended a number of peace congresses.

The declaration of the Weissensee synod demonstrated conclusively that the church as a corporate body was not open to any blandishment from the National Front. Consequently, leaders of the government resorted to the tactic of approaching individual pastors, urging them not to be misled by their "reactionary" leadership but independently to support the National Front. It was asserted that most clergymen were ready to cooperate in local committees with the National Front, but that they had been hindered in their action by unconstitutional pressure and pronouncements from the church headquarters located in West Berlin. Grotewohl averred that it would be a mistake "to throw all pastors in one pot with Bishop Dibelius. The Bishop does not represent the church."<sup>1</sup> However, only a very few clergymen termed "progressives" responded to this appeal.<sup>2</sup> The state assured them of its special benevolence by a promise to pay their salaries out of church funds in case the ecclesiastical administration should cut off their income in reprisal for their political activities.<sup>3</sup>

Agitated by her obdurate resistance to the National Front's political courtship, the government promulgated three measures late in 1950 designed to force the church into a state of submission. First, state subsidies would be paid to the church after January 1, 1951, only if her headquarters were moved from West Berlin and established within the German Democratic

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1950, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950, p. 154.

Republic.<sup>1</sup> These subsidies were contractual obligations dating back to the nineteenth century when church properties had been turned over to the state in exchange for perpetual annual payments. They constituted about fifteen per cent of the church's total income. Secondly, West German church officials were for the first time denied entry permits for the purpose of attending meetings in the German Democratic Republic. The meeting place had to be rescheduled for West Berlin. Thirdly, the East German parliament passed on December 15, 1950, a Law for the Defense of Peace. According to this new statute, any agitation or negative expression against the Democratic Republic or the Soviet bloc could be punished by imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> It provided the basis for the later arrest and imprisonment of a number of clergymen and church workers, who dared to disagree openly with government policies. In addition to these restrictive measures, Bishop Dibelius was singled out for a bitter attack by Grotewohl, who said Dibelius was the ringleader of reactionary forces in the church which sought to disturb the peace in Germany. Grotewohl accused him of having visited President Harry Truman for the expressed purpose of securing advice on how best to assist in subversive American policies in East Germany. He pointed to Dibelius' longstanding opposition to Communism and charged him with having given the blessings of the church to the Nazis in 1933.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Dibelius' reply to these charges by Grotewohl was not long in coming. Concerning his visit to the United States, he pointed out that

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950. pp. 146, 152.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von 1945 bis 1954. p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1950. p. 120.

this was simply a brief transit visit en route to a meeting of the World Council of Churches in Toronto, Canada. The idea of an American president giving counsel to a German bishop on political activities of his church seemed to Dibelius simply preposterous, worthy perhaps of a detective novel. As regards the accusation that the church leaders of 1950 were the same ones who had blessed the weapons of Hitler, Dibelius defied Grotewohl to find a single leading churchman in Germany who had not been a bitter opponent of the Nazi regime. Such irresponsible allegations by government officials were "monstrous propaganda lies and nothing else." Asking pardon for using such bitter language, Dibelius declared it was difficult to "remain quiet when one watches the battle against the church being carried on with such means." "Who of us," he asked, "has forgotten what went through our souls when the war began on September 1, 1939? In the face of this--will someone say that we blessed the weapons for Hitler's war of plunder? A lie has been spoken, and deliberately at that! No prime minister ought to be party to such an open falsehood as this."<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Dibelius also denied that the location of the church headquarters in West Berlin reflected an attachment to the Western powers. He stated that the headquarters had been located in West Berlin for more than one hundred years and this fact had been accepted by the East German authorities in 1948 when the church put her new constitution in effect. Any attempt to revise this situation would be regarded by the church as an infringement of her rights. The church headquarters thus remained in West Berlin.

In reaction to the church's stand, the state made good a threat to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1950, pp. 121-123.

withhold subsidies. In 1952 all payments to the church were reduced by 30 per cent and starting January 1, 1953, they were cut off entirely.<sup>1</sup> With the adoption of the new course in June, 1953, the government made amends and paid back in full all subsidies in arrears. At this time West German church leaders also again received permission to enter the Democratic Republic. The new course did not imply that demands would cease for an ecclesiastical acclaim of East German politics. On the contrary, requests were made with increasing frequency that the church demonstrate her loyalty to the Democratic Republic in some concrete way.

#### B. The Loyalty Declaration

After the failure to gain ecclesiastical support for the National Front, the government resorted to the strategy of assiduously repeating the charge that the church was a tool of NATO. It stressed simultaneously its own good will to the church and its desire to honor the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. As a prerequisite for honest and genuine cooperation, political leaders demanded that the church give an official pledge of loyalty to the state. Such a declaration would remove all suspicions about ecclesiastical disloyalty and would reassure the government that the all-German character of the church was not being misused by the West as a cloak for secret power politics.<sup>2</sup> This request was placed before the church with great importunity in 1955, after the Federal Republic had been admitted to NATO and the Democratic Republic had become a signatory of the Warsaw Pact.

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1952. p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956. pp. 146, 169.

While the bishops of East Germany consistently expressed their readiness to seek ways of easing tensions between church and state through discussions and agreements, they refused to make any pledge that would compromise the conscience and the witness of the church. They also vigorously rejected the insinuation that their unwillingness to make such a pledge suggested in any way that they were endorsing the political views of the West German government; it was not the mission of the church to lend her official support to the political position of either the East or the West. The church was obliged to fulfill the role of a watchman and, on the basis of the Word of God, to voice words of admonition and warning to her people and, if necessary, to the state as well.<sup>1</sup> Typical of this spirit was the forthright resolution of the synod of Saxony which stated that the church can never become the tool of any political system. To render a pledge of loyalty to a government, which has "forcibly stopped the work of approximately one hundred railway missions of the church in East Germany and still holds pastors and church workers in prison, would be impossible."<sup>2</sup> While taking this stand, church leaders sought to arrange for a meeting with Grotewohl in order to redress some of their own grievances.

A final concentrated attempt to secure a pledge of loyalty from the church was made in 1956 by Deputy Prime Minister Otto Nuschke, leader of the Christian Democratic Union of East Germany. Nuschke was also in charge of the government's Department of Church Affairs. Being a member of the church himself, he sincerely believed that a declaration of loyalty would

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956. p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956. p. 177.

greatly mitigate friction between church and state. His characteristic approach to church leaders was one of friendly persuasion. In this vein he pleaded for a promulgation of the desired declaration, assuring them that such an act would not necessarily imply an endorsement of specific governmental policies but would serve primarily as a guarantee of the church's readiness to obey the laws of the country.<sup>1</sup> Nuschke also alluded that if this pledge were given, a meeting could be arranged between Grotewohl and church representatives. This idea was reiterated by the editors of the Neue Zeit, the organ of the CDU, "In the light of Germany's division into two separate states, it is unbearable that the loyalty of the church should constantly be questioned. It would be a proper move for church leaders to declare that they respect our laws and that they separate themselves from the NATO policies which seek to involve the church in the cold war."<sup>2</sup>

The discussion of the proposal of "coexistence based on loyalty" was carried on during the first part of 1956 while the frustration of church leaders increased. The personal meeting with Grotewohl for which they had petitioned failed to materialize. Accusations of NATO subservience were regularly printed in newspapers along with demands for a loyalty declaration. Church authorities finally agreed among themselves to force a solution to this issue and decided to call for a special synod of the Evangelical church in Germany to be held in June, 1956, at East Berlin.

The major address at the synod was given by Superintendent Guenter Jacob of Cottbus, East Germany. He stated that while patently the church

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, pp. 170-174.

<sup>2</sup>Neue Zeit, May 17, 1956.

was Scripturally bound to recognize the institution of the government as a public safeguard against chaos, no special declaration of loyalty which might assuage the pangs of the state's bad conscience would be forthcoming. Jacob conceded that the attitude of Marxism towards religion and the church was to a certain extent justified. The church had often defended an obsolete way of living and discouraged the attainment of practical and material goals which underprivileged people had set for themselves. Regardless whether Marxists were right or wrong in their radical rejection of the whole of the Christian Gospel together with the structure of the organized church, Christians in the twentieth century must rediscover the mission of witness. As in the primitive Christian era, when the dominant social and political order was openly anti-Christian, the church must depend solely upon the witness of the individual believer and the congregation. Naturally every Christian would be expected to respect the political power under which he lived, whether in East Germany or in the Rome of St. Paul's time, but his first obedience is to the law of God. To this law, Guenter Jacob concluded, the Christian must adhere even if the state should violate it and demand that the individual citizen do likewise.<sup>1</sup>

After Jacob's keynote address, the synod discussed candidly and thoroughly the ramifications of a loyalty declaration. The delegates finally adopted a theological declaration based on the thirteenth chapter of Romans, recognizing the state as a part of the divine order in the mundane world regardless of the manner in which it came to power or the form of its

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, pp. 9-17.

political structure.<sup>1</sup> This was the traditional position of the church and the restatement of it could not be interpreted by Communist authorities as an endorsement of their policies.

Otto Nuschke was overtly disappointed in the synod's decision. He understood that the church could not sanction any particular political order, but he felt that the pronouncement of the synod had carefully avoided a disassociation from Western propaganda and politics.<sup>2</sup> Unsatisfactory though the theological declaration was to the state, the policy of "peaceful coexistence" was maintained towards the church until a political impasse was reached by the military chaplaincy issue of 1957. Charges of disloyalty were still reiterated during the remaining months of 1956, but the government continued to profess its readiness to live on friendly terms with the church if only she would renounce NATO leadership and proclaim publicly her patriotic loyalty to the German Democratic Republic.

### C. The Military Chaplaincy Issue

An intensification of the conflict between church and state was apparent early in 1957. It was partly caused by the Hungarian revolt and also partly by the frustration of the government in failing to win either a loyalty pledge or any substantial support for the National Front. However, the crisis was directly precipitated by the church's announcement of the agenda for the 1957 synod of the Evangelical church in Germany scheduled to be held in March at Halle, East Germany. The merging of the church's welfare

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956. pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>Neue Zeit, July 19, 1956.

organizations was supposed to be the most important work of the synod. Before the synod actually met, another item of more controversial nature was added, namely, a proposed agreement between the church and the West German government to establish a military chaplaincy service for the West German army.

The government of the German Democratic Republic announced at once that the discussion of such a theme by the church within its territory was simply out of the question. The signing of a military chaplaincy agreement would be regarded as evidence that the church had become a collaborator with the NATO politicians of West Germany. Unless this item was withdrawn from the synodical agenda, no delegates from West Germany would be permitted to enter the Democratic Republic. Unwilling to be intimidated by the government and refusing to admit that the signing of a chaplaincy agreement implied either approval or disapproval of Western policies, the church rescheduled the meeting place of the synod from Halle to West Berlin.<sup>1</sup> The signing of the chaplaincy agreement on February 22, 1957, by Otto Dibelius and Konrad Adenauer, prior to its discussion and actual ratification by the synod, touched off one of the most lurid attacks upon Dibelius ever to appear in the East German press.

When the synod convened on March 3, 1957, the chaplaincy agreement was ratified by a vote of 91 to 19; well above the mandatory two-thirds majority.<sup>2</sup> Some dissenting voices were raised, such as that of Pastor Martin Niemöller, who felt that an open discussion of that subject by the synod should have

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957, p. 40.

preceded the actual signing by Dibelius and Adenauer. However, most delegates looked upon the agreement simply as a confirmation of the church's right to carry out her spiritual ministry among those of her members who happened to be serving in the armed forces. The unequivocal independence of chaplains from governmental politics or intervention was clearly spelled out in the agreement. Article 4 specified that "the duty of the military chaplain was to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and to engage in pastoral care. The military chaplain will be left completely free in the performance of this service . . . bound only to his church in confession and doctrine." Article 16 of the agreement further stated that "military chaplains have a spiritual responsibility to discharge unimpeded by any state interference."<sup>1</sup> These articles made it quite clear that the chaplain could not arbitrarily be misused as a political pawn in the hands of the government.

Negotiations for the ratification of this agreement had been carried on since 1954 when the West German government established its army and turned to the church with the request that she assume her pastoral responsibility to the young men in the armed forces. Ever since the beginning of these negotiations in 1954, the church had sought to hold parallel discussions with the government of the German Democratic Republic. The church had repeatedly offered an identical treaty to the respective governments of East and West Germany, dramatically demonstrating thereby her independence from both political powers. By approaching the East German state about a chaplaincy agreement, the church was even prepared to take some

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, pp. 41-42.

risks in straining her relations with West Germany; heretofore, the ratification of any treaty with the German Democratic Republic had always been answered by the Federal Republic with a unilateral break of its diplomatic relations with the signatory country. In her negotiations with the East German government the church took pains to point to the example of Poland where a military chaplaincy was organized by the Roman Catholic Church in a Communist-governed country. The citation of this precedent was of no avail.

While not accepting chaplains in the army, the Communist indoctrination by the SED was nowhere carried out as intensively as among the men in the People's Army.<sup>1</sup> As early as in 1950 the SED related to the commanding officers of the People's Police that the enlisted men were expected to sever their relations with the church. This objective was to be achieved in a subtle way without giving the impression that this was a directive from higher echelons. The men in the People's Army were forbidden to own a Bible or a hymnal. They were not allowed to attend any religious services. Officers were obliged to rescind their church membership. Those who married in a church were punished by being discharged from service.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the military oath sworn by recruits of the People's Army enlisted their total physical energies as well as their unconditional ideological loyalty to the East German government and the cause of Communism:

I swear: at all times faithfully to serve the German Democratic Republic, my fatherland, and to defend it against every enemy upon orders of the Workers' and Peasants' government.

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<sup>1</sup>GDR, pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>Dibelius, In the Service of the Lord, p. 243.

I swear: by the side of the Soviet Army and the armies of the Socialist countries allied with us to be ready at all times to serve as a soldier of the National People's Army, to defend Socialism against all enemies, and to stake my life for the winning of victory.

I swear: to be an honorable, brave, disciplined, and alert soldier, to give unconditional obedience to military superiors, to obey orders with all decisiveness, and always carefully to preserve military and state secrets.

I swear: conscientiously to gain military knowledge, to abide by military regulations, and in every way to defend the honor of our Republic and its National People's Army. Should I at any time violate this my sacred oath, let me encounter the severe punishment of the laws of our Republic and the contempt of the working people.<sup>1</sup>

To demonstrate once more that the proposed chaplaincy agreement with the West German government was not just a clever political move, Dibelius wrote on February 8, 1957, a final letter to Willi Stoph, Minister of Defense of the German Democratic Republic, indicating the ardent desire of the church to reach a similar understanding with his government. Stoph replied brusquely that his government had no intention of even further discussing this subject with the church. In a cynical vein he then informed Dibelius that to the best of his knowledge not a single member of the National People's Army had ever expressed a desire for the spiritual counsel of a military chaplain.<sup>2</sup>

The East German government sought once more through political leverage in 1958 to compel the church to revoke the military chaplaincy treaty. In view of the concentrated indoctrination of children with Marxist doctrines in public schools and youth dedication sessions, the church first and

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<sup>1</sup>"Zum sowjetzonalen Wehrpflichtgesetz," Herder-Korrespondenz, XVI, Nr. 8 (May, 1962), p. 380.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957, pp. 47-48.

foremost wished to deal with the problem of education at the 1958 synod of the Evangelical church in Germany scheduled for April in East Berlin. As soon as this was made public, a campaign organized by the SED was set in motion to force a change in the synod's agenda. It was asserted that education was the monopoly of the state and was therefore outside of the jurisdiction of the church. Much more appropriate would be a synodical discussion of the issue of atomic rearmament in West Germany and a reevaluation of the chaplaincy agreement. The question of atomic rearmament in West Germany had become a burning issue in the early months of 1958 when the parliament of the Federal Republic debated the merits and demerits of permitting NATO to establish atomic installations within its territory. Very articulate groups within the church in West Germany voiced bitter opposition to such a step, providing strong support for the SED's insistence that the coming synod place the question of atomic rearmament on its agenda.<sup>1</sup> Ulbricht added the oft-repeated demand that the church demonstrate her independence from NATO by repealing the chaplaincy treaty of the previous year.

Immediately before the opening of the synod, the East German press launched a massive attack against the church and her leaders. The allegation was reiterated daily in media of mass communication that the "NATO wing of the church," consisting of the Bishops Dibelius and Lilje, had forced the education issue upon the synod and had thereby committed a clear provocation against the educational endeavors of the German Democratic Republic. Any East German delegate to the synod who accepted this provocation

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958. pp. 21 ff.

in silence would have to reckon with serious repercussions after the convention.<sup>1</sup> Threats of this nature were often repeated in an attempt to intimidate synodical representatives from East Germany.

At the opening day of the synod on April 26, 1958, delegates were threatened with physical violence if education was retained as a topic of discussion on the agenda. Upon arrival at the convention site in East Berlin, they were greeted by a mob of about two hundred ruffians. Delegates were warned not to take their seats in the convention hall. Chanting choruses and uttering threats of "knocking the delegates' brains out," the demonstrators marched around the convention hall and then through its corridors. In the ensuing uproar the synod was unable to convene in an orderly fashion. Not until a spokesman for the mob was permitted to present a demand for a change in the synod's agenda was it possible to resume normal parliamentary procedures. The synod received his remarks as "information" and then turned to its original agenda.<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of this confusion Dibelius gave his official report as the council president of the Evangelical church in Germany. Although he discussed at length the issue of atomic power and left no doubt that the church heartily endorsed the outlawing of atomic weapons by all nations, he strongly opposed the use of the church's synod as a platform for political debate and as a means of governmental leverage. He noted that atheistic education in schools sponsored by the state was the most trying problem for the church in East Germany and therefore ought to be given primary attention

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1958, p. 15.

by the synod. In conclusion, Dibelius observed that it would be necessary to make a fresh beginning in the area of Christian education, reevaluating the nature of confirmation and stressing more the personal Christian guidance of children and youth.

After the stormy opening sessions, the synod settled down to a careful consideration of its agenda. Apparently as a gesture of good will to the East German government, two major committees were appointed. One was to deal with the problem of education and the other with the issue of atomic rearmament and the chaplaincy treaty. Debates on the latter issue were lengthy and passionate. A common ground of agreement was finally reached by the synod in a reaffirmation of the World Council resolution against atomic warfare and in a plea to all great powers to undertake programs of disarmament both of atomic and conventional weapons.<sup>1</sup> This synodical declaration certainly could be interpreted neither as a political endorsement nor as a condemnation of a given nation and therefore fell far short of the Communists' anticipation. Regarding the military chaplaincy agreement, the synod refused to revoke it and merely sought anew to allay all suspicions of the German Democratic Republic. It was pointed out again that the military chaplaincy was purely spiritual in character and could not be misused for political gain by the West. The synod further stated that the treaty was binding only for the individual territorial churches in West Germany and affected neither the corporate Evangelical church in Germany nor the eight territorial churches in East Germany.<sup>2</sup> Through this subterfuge an

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1958, p. 93.

attempt was made to protect the territorial churches in East Germany and the church as a corporate body from the wrath of the Communist government. This line of reasoning was really neither cogent nor valid, inasmuch as the treaty was signed by Dibelius as head of the corporate church in Germany and it was ratified by an all-German synod representing the church in East and West Germany. If the church in East Germany was to be protected from adverse repercussions and reprisals, it would have been wiser if the territorial churches in West Germany had signed the treaty separately without involving the eight churches in the Eastern part of the country. The synod of 1958 apparently realized too late its mistake of the previous year and sought in vain to rectify it, for the East German government continued its attack with unmitigated force.

An intolerable deadlock in the relations between church and state was reached as a result of coercive measures undertaken by the East German government. Even though the synod of 1958 had sought to change this exigent situation by explaining the purpose of the treaty in detail, no noticeable amelioration took place. While the synod was still in session in 1957, the Democratic Republic announced the creation of a State Secretariat for Church Affairs. Werner Eggerath, an uncompromising Communist, was appointed to fill the new position. Liaison between church and state had previously been maintained through Nuschke's now-dissolved Office of Church Relations. The establishment of Eggerath's office was an ominous omen foreshadowing a painful hardening of the government's policy towards the church.

As the first in a series of reprisals, the government outlawed Dibelius from the territory of the Democratic Republic. At no time since the synod convention in 1957 has Dibelius been allowed to visit his diocese lying

outside Berlin. Other leading churchmen too were soon denied entry permits. As a matter of fact, an increasing number of church leaders from the West were now kept out of East Germany. The ultimate use of this weapon was made in February, 1961, when the entire synod representing the whole Evangelical church in Germany was kept from meeting in East Berlin. The government opined cynically that the logical meeting place for "NATO bishops" should be Bonn and not East German territory;<sup>2</sup> the synod was therefore held in West Berlin. Since East Berlin stood under joint Allied and Soviet control, any person was theoretically allowed to enter that sector without a permit. Yet when a number of leading churchmen from West Germany sought to gain access in order to participate in a worship service in East Berlin on February 12, 1961, they were bodily restrained from doing so.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the erection of the wall in Berlin on August 13, 1961, prevented any further contact between East and West German churchmen.

As a second measure of reprisal, the government announced in 1957 that it would have no further dealings with any church representative who was not a resident of the Democratic Republic. It took the position that by adopting the chaplaincy treaty the leadership of the church had chosen to side with NATO and thereby had disqualified itself as spokesman for the church located within East German jurisdiction. Shortly after his appointment to office, Werner Eggerath extended an invitation to all East German bishops calling for an open meeting "without fronts or demands." Neither

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<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Church, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1961, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1961, p. 17.

Dibelius nor Grueber, the church's able plenipotentiary to the government, as residents of West Berlin received an invitation.<sup>1</sup> Since these two churchmen were left out, the other bishops declined to accept the invitation. In order to overcome the ensuing deadlock, Mitzenheim was appointed spokesman for the church in the Democratic Republic. As an indigenous East German he proved to be persona grata to the government.

A number of leading churchmen were arrested and sentenced to prison terms in 1957 as still another expression of retaliation for the chaplaincy treaty. Only seven pastors were in East German penal institutions at the beginning of the year, but their number rose to twenty-two within a few months after the ratification of the treaty.<sup>2</sup> This was the largest number of clergymen imprisoned at one given time since the termination of the Kirchenkampf. Their prosecution and sentencing was usually based on the Law for the Defense of Peace, which made it a crime to agitate or express negative sentiments against the Democratic Republic and the Soviet Russian bloc. "Agitation to boycott democratic institutions" became a familiar phrase in the indictments of church leaders and others who dared to disagree with government policies."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957. p. 137.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957. p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Injustice the Regime. Documentary Evidence of the Systematic Violation of Legal Rights in the Soviet Zone of Germany, 1954-1958. eds. Friedrich Heller, and et al. (Berlin-Zehlendorf-West: Verlag fuer Internationalen Kulturaustausch, n.d.), pp. 125-131.

As an additional means of facilitating the prosecution of dissenting people, the East German parliament promulgated on December 11, 1957, an "Act Amending the Penal Code." Regardless of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution, the provisions of this new statute made not only the utterance of statements critical of the Communist regime a crime punishable by imprisonment but also the mere possession of literature and newspapers depreciative of the state. Section 19 of the Penal Code read in part that "whoever instigates against the Workers' and Peasants' power . . . shall be punished by imprisonment with not less than three months. The same penalty shall be inflicted upon anybody who produces writings with provocative contents or who imports and circulates them with the intention of instigation."<sup>1</sup> In keeping with this statute, some Roman Catholic priests were sentenced to prison terms in 1958 because church periodicals forbidden in East Germany were found in their homes by the police.<sup>2</sup>

The government's utter detestation for the chaplaincy treaty was also manifested in an intensification of the ideological onslaught upon religion and in an even closer surveillance of the suspected "NATO clergy" in East Germany. An avalanche of anti-religious literature unprecedented in German history began to cover the country in 1957 while the voice of the church's press was at the same time muffled through restrictive regulations and stringent censorship. The mail of most pastors was censored too and their telephone conversations were tapped.<sup>3</sup> In this vexed situation the government

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<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>MacEoin, p. 239.

endeavored once more to exploit the church for political purposes. A message was related to church leaders that the Kirchentag of 1957 scheduled to take place on East German territory could be held there only if government representatives were given an opportunity to expatiate at that occasion upon the "peace policy" of the Democratic Republic.<sup>1</sup> This request was denounced by bishops as an intrusion of the secular power in the spiritual domain of the church. This then was another reason why the meeting place of the Kirchentag was changed from Thuringia to Berlin. An already-familiar means of securing the services of the clergy for Communist gain was also tried out again at that time--secret police approached individual pastors with the request that they report regularly on activities of fellow ministers and on proceedings at church conventions.<sup>2</sup> These solicitations were either coupled with threats of personal privation or with promises of material reward. Ecclesiastical authorities registered strong protests against this malignant practice and urged all pastors to bring such incidents at once to their attention. For obvious reasons it has not been made public exactly what number of clergymen actually consented to engage in espionage activities, which could constitute one of the most effective Communist means of surveillance over the church in East Germany.

In order somehow to overcome the deadlock, a series of seven conferences was held in the summer of 1958 between church and state representatives. Since both Dibelius and Grueber were excluded, the church's committee was headed by Mitzenheim. The government was represented by Grotewohl and an

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, p. 165.

entourage of lesser officials. The final conference was held on July 21, 1958, and lasted from eleven o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. Grotewohl presented the government's proposals first and Mitzenheim followed with a statement prepared by the church committee. Noting that there were opposite views expressed in the two documents, Grotewohl suggested that the government's paper be used as a basis for negotiation and that the ecclesiastical delegation make whatever changes it felt necessary. Instead of requesting another conference which he was afraid might not be granted, Mitzenheim agreed to a one-hour recess during which the church committee prepared suggested modifications. The document was then brought back to the conference and issued as a joint communique by church and state.

The church delegation agreed in the communique to withdraw the charges that the government had violated the constitution, and the state reiterated its adherence to the constitutional guarantees of complete freedom of faith and conscience for every citizen. The government further consented to review complaints made by the church about the "unconstitutional" nature of education rendered in public schools. The communique also included the following statement:

The church serves the cause of peace among the nations with the particular means at her disposal and, therefore, agrees fundamentally with the peace efforts of the German Democratic Republic and its government. Christians faithfully fulfill their responsibility as citizens in obedience to the law. They respect the evolution toward socialism and make their contribution to the establishment of a peaceful way of life for the people.<sup>1</sup>

The true significance of this communique was by no means clear. The

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<sup>1</sup>Die Kirche. August 3, 1958.

church had won from the state a reaffirmation of constitutional guarantees which the state insisted it had never broken in the first place. The state had obtained a statement that the church would "respect" the development of Socialism. Inasmuch as this was interpreted by the East German regime as an ecclesiastical acclaim of its policies, some of the most restrictive measures strangling religious life were relaxed but no concrete and lasting concessions were made by the government. The communique had at best established an uncertain truce between church and state. The majority of the bishops later felt that the church had been maneuvered into an extremely embarrassing position.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, they were henceforth very careful to avoid issuing any statement that could have been interpreted as an alignment of the church with Communism.

#### D. Religious Forces Supporting Communism

The East German government had in vain sought to gain ecclesiastical support for its political program and the pledge of loyalty. In order to have at least one official religious group which would in behalf of the church endorse its political aspirations, the government established in 1958 the League of Evangelical Clergymen. In reality though, the state already possessed a religious front organization in one of its political bloc parties, the Christian Democratic Union.

##### 1. The Christian Democratic Union

Founded on June 26, 1945, as one of the political parties approved by the Soviet Military Administration, the Christian Democratic Union declared

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958. pp. 146-147.

in its original statement of purpose that "democratic freedom in the new Germany could be achieved only if the moral and spiritual forces of the Christian faith shaping society were taken into account."<sup>1</sup> Its apparent goal at that time was to carry on the traditional platform of the old Catholic Center party which was prominent during the Weimar Republic. From the very beginning the leadership of the Christian Democratic Union found it difficult to maintain its independence within the bloc politics of the Soviet Military Administration. Less than six months after the Democratic Union was called into life, its two chairmen, Andreas Hermes and Walter Schreiber, were forced by the Soviet authorities to resign from their post because they opposed the arbitrary methods of land reform.<sup>2</sup> The second pair of chairmen, Jacob Kaiser and Ernst Lemmer, stayed in office two years but were then compelled to resign because they favored East Germany's participation in the Marshall Plan and refused to take part in the Soviet-sponsored People's Congress of December, 1947.<sup>3</sup> More pliable than the early leadership of the Democratic Union was Nuschke, who ardently embraced the People's Congress and was promptly rewarded by the government by being elected as one of its deputy prime ministers. He retained this position until his death in December, 1957. Nuschke placed the full support of his political organization behind the National Front, urging all Christians to become "fighters for peace" on the side of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> The last vocal

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von 1945 bis 1954, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Neue Zeit, October 21, 1951.

resistance in the Democratic Union was quenched through a thorough purge of its leadership in 1950. At a party rally two years later Muschke proclaimed that his organization was an "unconditionally Socialist party," and from that time on he played the undistinguished role of mouthing the propaganda line of the government.

Most revealing of the ideological structure of the Christian Democratic Union were the "Meissen Theses on Christian Realism," a series of twenty-two propositions prepared in 1951 as a basis for its political program.<sup>1</sup> The propositions were written in order to justify the participation of the Union in political programs which had been initiated by forces committed to dialectical materialism. It was asserted in the "Meissen Theses" that cooperation between Christians and Communists in social and political affairs by no means involved a denial of the Christian faith. Special care was taken in the statement to reaffirm the church's cardinal doctrines of man's sinful nature and God's redemptive work in Christ. On the other hand, great emphasis was placed upon the responsibility of the Christian in society, a responsibility which, according to the "Meissen Theses," the church had too often ignored. If Christians had truly copied Christ's genuine concern for social justice, the church would have retained the "progressive" impetus of her Founder. Jesus had repeatedly warned of the danger of riches and had opposed the exploitation of the helpless by the ruling social stratum. In spite of this warning the church failed miserably in her social obligations and especially so during the nineteenth century. While wealth

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<sup>1</sup>Wir diskutieren die Meissener Thesen. ed. Ost-CDU, 1951; also KJ 1951. pp. 139-147.

accumulated in the hands of a few and masses of people were reduced to mere cogs in the machine of the industrial revolution, the church joined forces with the rich and powerful. The real hero of that time was Karl Marx, who analyzed with astute insight the socio-economic ills of the nineteenth century. He realized that there was no other way of eliminating the evils of capitalistic exploitation of man except through the destruction of the bourgeois system itself. To this thesis, which called for an utter extirpation of capitalism as exemplified in the Soviet Union, the "progressive" Christians in East Germany were urged to commit themselves. The Christian Democratic Union concluded the "Meissen Theses" with a final appeal for a "continued fight for peace" as the "most urgent task of the present day."

Two world wars, which have been caused by crises in the capitalistic economic system, have destroyed the well-being of nations and the lives of many millions of people. The preparations now being undertaken by the government of the United States for a third world war force us to a clear decision. Whoever is not in favor of an imperialistic war must align himself with the World Peace Movement . . . There can be no true Christian who is not a fighter for peace, steeped in the conviction that peace can be secured when peoples of the world take their fate in their own hands.<sup>1</sup>

The "Meissen Theses" constituted an attempt by the Christian Democratic Union to provide a theological matrix for the political-economic system of the Communist regime in East Germany. Although its theology found only a very few supporters among the clergy, it was nevertheless the best example of the creed adopted by the "progressive" clergy. Their attempt to provide a theological justification for Marxism was somewhat analogous to that of the German Christians in relation to National Socialism.

Nuschke spelled out in detail the role which he expected the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1951, p. 147.

Democratic Union to play in East Germany. He avowed that its special task was "to win the cooperation of all Christians for the democratization and economic reconstruction" of the country.<sup>1</sup> He committed the Union deliberately to this task, being convinced that "the peaceful work of the German Democratic Republic was in keeping with the will to peace proclaimed in Christian teachings" and that "Socialism offered far better opportunities than earlier economic systems for the fulfillment of many Christian concerns." Thus the East German government possessed in Muschke's organization an instrument with great potential in soliciting under religious cover the support of Christian people for the political ambitions of the Communist movement.

In keeping with its assigned task, the Democratic Union avidly sought to win the support of church people for the government's policies. Special campaign pamphlets were published in an attempt to interpret Bible stories and the Ten Commandments in a manner favorable to the National Front.<sup>2</sup> In one of the pamphlets, God's Law and State Law,<sup>3</sup> the story was related of King Zedekiah of Judah who had a pact with Nebuchadnezzar of Chaldea. Zedekiah wished to terminate this agreement and enter into a secret treaty with other nations in order to make war against his Chaldean friend. Nebuchadnezzar discovered this treachery in time and intended to destroy Judah completely. Thereupon Zedekiah turned for help to the Prophet Jeremiah,

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, pp. 174-175.

<sup>2</sup>Die Christen waehlen den Frieden und die Freiheit (Flugblatt der Nationalen Front), Magdeburg, 1954.

<sup>3</sup>Gottesgebot und Staatsgesetz, ed. Ost-CDU, 1954; also KJ 1954, pp. 126-130.

who replied "I have placed before thee a way of life and a way of death. If the people do not want to be destroyed by the sword, by hunger and pestilence, they must give up their deceitful plans and fulfill their agreement with the Chaldeans. Then there will be life for them." The exegete of the story saw a "similarity between the position of Zedekiah and the men in Bonn." Just as Nebuchadnezzar was once threatened by the sinister plot of Zedekiah, the Soviet Union was now threatened by "the secret military alliance between West German and American imperialists." The conclusion was drawn that the German people, too, were confronted "with a way of life and a way of death" and that they must decide which "way they would go--either the way of war or the way of understanding with the Chaldeans."

In close collaboration with the East German state, the leaders of the Christian Democratic Union sought to lend a semblance of religious support to many of the government's actions. Even the Communist youth dedication rite appeared to them reconcilable with the Christian faith. They encouraged church members to send their children to youth dedication sessions. Moreover, all the defamatory charges brought by the government against Dibelius were repeated by them without any apparent hesitation. The Union's official organ, the Neue Zeit, branded Dibelius as a "renegade churchman and sinister NATO agent."<sup>1</sup>

With the passing of time the prestige and membership of Nuschke's party declined greatly. In 1947 it boasted a membership of 218,000 people. In 1953 the number of its members had decreased to 155,000 and in 1955 to

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<sup>1</sup>Neue Zeit, November 17, 1957; December 19, 1957.

a mere 100,000.<sup>1</sup> Its leadership apparently also fell in disfavor with the government when it failed to make headway in obtaining any significant church support for the state's political program. The dissolution of Nuschke's influential Office of Church Affairs in 1957 was a concrete indication that his political organization had officially fallen into disgrace. Nuschke's untimely death in December, 1957, complicated matters still more. The new chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, August Bach, was not as able a politician as his predecessor. In any case, the zenith of its "effectiveness" as a religious front organization had long been past by 1958; the government's loss, however, was partly offset by the founding of the League of Evangelical Clergymen in that year.

## 2. The League of Evangelical Clergymen

Throughout the postwar years there had always existed a small band of "progressive" clergymen in East Germany, whose leftist political proclivity made them sympathetic to Soviet policies. Their most influential leaders were found among the newer professors appointed by the government to the theological faculties at state universities; men like Professor Hansfried Mueller at the Humboldt University of East Berlin, Professor Kehnscherper at Greifswald, Professors Christoph Haufe and Dedo Mueller at Leipzig, and the old mentors of that group, Professors Emil Fuchs and Johann Herz, both at the University of Leipzig. The most energetic "progressives" on the parish level were Pastor Karl Kleinschmidt of Schwerin and Pastor Wolfgang Caffier of Leipzig.

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 67.

Even though they had met intermittently over a period of years for consultation, it was not until July 1, 1958, that the "progressive" pastors banded together in a formal organization. On that day Pastor Caffier gathered about sixty clergymen from all sections of East Germany in a hotel in Leipzig and called the League of Evangelical Clergymen into life. Claiming that the past failure of the church to speak to the socio-economic ills of society was responsible for the atheistic character of the Communist movement, Caffier proposed that the church should make amends and join the state in an honest effort to build a society in which working people would no longer be poor and oppressed.<sup>1</sup> Their ideological creed and political platform had already found succinct expression in the "Meissen Theses" of 1951.

The government had openly encouraged the "progressive" pastors to establish an official organization. Their meetings and activities were heavily subsidized by the state a long time prior to 1958. Frequently they had been called upon to make speeches over the state-owned broadcasting systems. Newspapers had given favorable and extensive publicity about their meetings and resolutions. As early as 1954 the government had licensed them to publish an attractive religious magazine entitled Glauben und Gewissen which appeared on a monthly basis and was luxuriously printed on expensive paper. This occurred at a time when the government sharply curtailed the publications of the church on account of alleged paper shortage. After its formation in 1958 the League of Evangelical Clergymen was favored with a license for an additional paper called Das Evangelisches Pfarrerblatt.

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<sup>1</sup>Neue Zeit, July 7, 1958. .

which also was liberally subsidized by the state.

Through the columns of their two religious periodicals the "progressives" called upon their fellow ministers to join them in the League, and to pledge with them loyalty to the state and to its program of "peace" and socialization. Pastors were repeatedly implored by them to affiliate with the National Front and the World Peace Movement and to maintain watchful vigilance against the "NATO-influenced" leadership of the church. As solid indication of its own unreserved commitment to the East German government, the League of Evangelical Clergymen enlisted as a corporate body in the National Front and sent its chairman, Pastor Caffier, as a delegate to the various congresses of the National Front and the World Peace Movement. As regards the conflict between confirmation and youth dedication, the "progressive" pastors insisted that there was nothing in the Communist youth pledge which in any way violated the Christian's confession of faith. They asserted that the pledge was merely a solemn promise to take part in the fulfillment of intrinsic socio-economic goals and therefore was not a confession of Communist beliefs.<sup>1</sup> With a similar lack of logic they argued that there existed no conflict between the Christian sacrament of baptism and the Communist rite of name-giving. In addition the "progressives" apparently sanctioned many political moves of the government. The collectivization of agriculture in 1960 was a case in point--while the East German bishops without exception protested against the collectivization, the League of Evangelical Clergymen endorsed it on "Biblical" grounds. Christ's words "no one who puts his hand to the plow and

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958. p. 188.

looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"<sup>1</sup> were construed to mean that Christian farmers should not look back to their bourgeois days of private ownership of property but that they should much rather look forward to collective farming in the German Democratic Republic.<sup>2</sup>

Diligent efforts were made to convey the impression that the League enjoyed the support of the vast majority of church members. The widespread newspaper coverage of its activities could have conveyed the false idea that this was one of the most influential and most important ecclesiastical groups in the country. Emil Fuchs announced publicly to Ulbricht in 1961 that the platform of the League embodied the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of Christian people.<sup>3</sup> In reality its membership consisted at the very most of one hundred pastors,<sup>4</sup> a number which represented about 2 per cent of the 5,000 East German pastors. The program of the "progressive" pastors has been consistently disavowed by the church leaders in the Democratic Republic. The League was therefore compelled to work independently of the church and outside her official structure. Even its financial support came directly from the state rather than through the channels of the church.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind political leaders conceded privately that the efforts of this front organization in securing church support for their policies have

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 9:62.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1960, pp. 179-180.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1961, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1958, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup>The Evangelical Church, p. 32.

netted them thus far only meager results. Nevertheless, the League's endorsement of the government's political program on behalf of the Christian faith has in itself supplied the Communist movement with valuable propaganda material.

By way of recapitulation, it should be pointed out again that one of the aims of Communism is the eradication of every trace of religious life. One of the Marxist stratagems, which would enhance the realization of that aim, consists of an attempt to maneuver the church into a position of political subservience. Under duress the church is to become a political instrument of the Communist movement. This tactic has been employed by the East German government in its attempt to stamp out religion. Until 1958 all requests for an endorsement of its political program met with the church's stubborn opposition. Neither cajoling nor intimidation moved church leaders to affiliate with the Communist-oriented National Front or to give a pledge of loyalty to the state. In 1957 the church signed a military chaplaincy agreement with the West German Federal Republic. This invoked the wrath of the East German state to a degree that its political leaders initiated a number of reprisals designed to strangle the church's life. Under extreme duress the church then issued in 1958 a statement in support of the government's "peace efforts." Since the church proved to be resilient in the face of political encroachments by the state, the government encouraged the creation of religious groups which would accept its invitation to subservience. The Christian Democratic Union and the League of Evangelical Clergymen were willing to accept this position, and gave religious sanction to many of the political actions of the East German regime

and the Soviet Russian government; the church in East Germany has almost fully maintained her integrity and defended her independence from secular authority.

## VI. CONFINE CHURCH LIFE WITHIN A GHETTO:

### SOCIAL CONCERNS AND PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

Communist leaders believe that the anticipated collapse of religion will be achieved in part by keeping expressions of church life enclosed in a well-defined spiritual ghetto. They learned in Soviet Russia that if the religious life of people is restricted to merely a perfunctory participation in rituals, the resultant impact of the church upon the public sector of life is quite negligible.

As has been noted earlier, the technique of forcing the church to reside within well-marked bounds was used with much success in the Soviet Union. Much of the property owned by the Russian Orthodox community was confiscated by the state in 1917 and the church's schools and institutions of mercy were taken over by the Soviet government. Some of the most important means of exerting spiritual influence on society and of practicing the Christian faith in concrete terms were thereby plucked away from the church. Moreover, although religious rituals could be performed within church buildings, they were outlawed in public places. Khrushchev clearly reemphasized this policy when he said that the Soviet state will "not meddle in religious affairs, but neither will the church's interference in political and secular affairs be tolerated."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adolph, p. 98.

Karl Nahron, Minister of the Interior, informed the East German people in 1956 that the government "will do everything humanly possible so that the church might be able to discharge her religious service in accordance with constitutional guarantees. But meddling in state affairs, in economic problems and matters of education, could not be considered church activities."<sup>1</sup> This statement cast considerable doubt on the willingness of the state to honor the church's rights and privileges provided for in the constitution.

The church's ministry of mercy in East Germany was safeguarded by constitutional guarantees. Article 46 spelled out the church's right to engage in pastoral care at public institutions and to conduct religious services in hospitals and prisons. The church's prerogative to operate her own private institutions of mercy was also recognized in the constitution.<sup>2</sup> These gracious provisions may have been made by the state partly because the concept of the church's healing ministry was deeply ingrained in the mind and consciousness of the German people. For well over a century the church had maintained some of the largest centers of healing in the world, thus affecting the lives of a multitude of people. George Forell, former religious affairs adviser to the United States Military Government in Germany, commented that "it is precisely through these institutions of enlightenment and mercy . . . that the German church is most strongly connected with the people. The serving, healing, teaching, and

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland. February 14, 1956.

<sup>2</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung. vol. I, p. 431.

nursing church is valued more by the masses than the preaching church."<sup>1</sup> A sudden prohibition of these cherished institutions could have caused an outbreak of a storm of public indignation. With this in mind East German politicians may have deemed it expedient to acknowledge in their constitution the church's right to continue with her work of mercy and healing. The Russian Orthodox church, by contrast, had traditionally maintained contact with people through her magnificent rituals and ceremonies and not so much through the expression of social concern. The Soviet regime was thus in a position to strip the Russian Orthodox church of her exiguous institutions of mercy without actually risking an outburst of public protest.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the constitutional guarantees, the church has found it increasingly difficult to continue with her work of mercy in East Germany. The constitutional provisions were partly set aside when the government sought in earnest to divorce the church from public life and to circumscribe religious activities within definite limits. Some welfare services were halted abruptly through government intervention and a number of institutional centers of mercy were taken over by the state. A lack of finances caused by new stringent regulations gravely impaired the operation of the church's work of mercy. Finally, in its determination to isolate the church, the state did not even hesitate to overstep the bounds of demarcation and to interfere with those rites and ceremonies which belong exclusively to the cult of a religious community.

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<sup>1</sup>Religious Affairs. August, 1946, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob and Berg, pp. 19-20.

#### A. The Forced Cessation of Social Welfare Services

Immediately after the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945, the church established a Relief organization<sup>1</sup> designed to alleviate the extreme physical and spiritual suffering of the people; it "provided material aid for the starving and homeless, the evacuees and refugees, disabled ex-soldiers, returned prisoners of war, orphaned children, etc., without regard to differences of race, nationality, or creed, simply on the basis of need."<sup>2</sup> Needy congregations were helped by that organization to rebuild their damaged churches and parsonages and were provided with Bibles, catechisms, hymnals, theological literature, and bicycles for pastors and other church workers.

The Evangelical Relief organization became also one of the most important agencies for the distribution of food to destitute people. The food shortage which was menacing all parts of Germany during the first post-war years became crucial in the Soviet zone. The distribution of food took place on the basis of the physical energy expended by people in their various occupations. Those with the lowest food ration cards received no fat and meat at all and were entitled only to a monthly allotment of fourteen pounds of bread, fifteen pounds of potatoes, and eleven ounces of cereal produce. People in higher categories were supposed to receive eight to eleven ounces of fat and between five to six ounces of meat per month, but the actual amount which they were able to obtain was much lower. Consequently, thousands of people were dying of starvation every day,<sup>3</sup> and it

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<sup>1</sup>Das Hilfswerk der Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

<sup>2</sup>The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, vol. II, p. 1023.

<sup>3</sup>Herman, p. 233.

was in this exigent situation that the Relief organization performed a herculean service. During the initial period of its existence, the organization "devoted more than nine-tenths of its time to the paramount questions of food, clothing, healing and housing."<sup>1</sup> By the end of 1948 it had already distributed among the destitute in Germany as many as 54,000 tons of material goods, contributed by Christian people throughout the world in an unprecedented outpouring of love and concern. This amount would triple by 1957.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the SED had also organized its relief agency and sought to alleviate the suffering of people, but the need for help was so great that not even the combined efforts of church and state could bring succor to all needy people. At no time before 1949 did political authorities interfere with the church's eleemosynary services.

However, at a meeting of the SED's relief agency late in 1949, it became evident that political leaders had drastically changed their attitude towards the church's relief work. Christian Berg, the director of the Berlin office of the church's Relief organization, brought a greeting at that meeting emphasizing the imperative necessity of aiding all needy people without regard for creed, race, or political affiliation. The overt indifference, bordering on hostility, with which Berg was treated by the SED leaders bore witness to the shift in church policy which had taken place in 1949.

During the ensuing months important permits for relief supplies became more difficult to procure. Some of the church's shipments were delayed on

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957. p. 222.

technical grounds. For instance, one twenty-ton shipment of used clothing from Switzerland was retained without a valid excuse for half a year at a border check point. The decisive blow fell on December 12, 1950;<sup>1</sup> the Ministry of the Interior ordered the confiscation of all relief supplies stored at Magdeburg for distribution among needy people. Any further entry of bulk relief supplies into East Germany was prohibited. The government claimed that the shipments by the Relief organization were used by the West for political propaganda purposes. Even though the rationing of basic food commodities was to continue for another nine years, the government asserted that the standard of living of the East German people had risen sufficiently so that outside gifts were no longer needed.<sup>2</sup> From this time on the Relief organization received permission to import food only at special occasions and seasons such as Christmas and Easter and the distribution thereof was limited to the church's institutions of mercy. The former importation and distribution of material goods on a mass basis was terminated once and for all. Vigorous protests raised by church leaders brought no reversal in the government's adamant stand in this matter, apart from the release of a portion of the confiscated supplies.

In this desperate situation a unique arrangement was developed by the church, which effectively replaced the services previously rendered by the Relief organization. Each territorial church in West Germany adopted a territorial church in East Germany for the purpose of maintaining spiritual fellowship and of rendering material assistance. This practice was carried

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von 1945 bis 1954. p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957, p. 224.

over into individual congregations. The idea of sponsorship had received its impetus through the sending of packages to needy people in East German congregations, and was later broadened to include visits by pastors, church elders, and youth groups. Congregations in the East thus received substantial material aid from their sponsoring congregations in the West, while the latter received inspiration from their adopted congregations in the Communist territory. This arrangement made an inestimable contribution to the strengthening of the church's bond of unity.<sup>1</sup>

Another blow designed to impede the church in the active expression of her concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of the people was struck on January 4, 1956. On that day the police unexpectedly arrested seventeen workers of the Railway Mission,<sup>2</sup> the church-sponsored travelers' aid society which for nearly a century had offered its humanitarian services and counsel to travelers in practically every major railway station in Germany. The Railway Mission "provided such varied services as accommodating travelers overnight, performing baptisms, hearing confessions, taking care of corpses, giving free meals, helping with children and traveling school children, and arranging transportation for the sick."<sup>3</sup> Press releases stated that the arrests were made because of alleged espionage activities by the workers of the Railway Mission. They were accused of channeling information about East German train and troop movements to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957. pp. 226-227.

<sup>2</sup>Die Evangelische Bahnmission.

<sup>3</sup>The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, vol. II, p. 1048.

Western military intelligence officers.<sup>1</sup> Newspaper editors published charges about the Mission's "subversive activities," which they claimed to have uncovered.<sup>2</sup> They even described in detail a "formal espionage course given by Nazis" in West Berlin, which was mandatory for all church workers prior to their employment by the Railway Mission.<sup>3</sup> Some "confessions" by workers, whose arrest had allegedly brought them to realize the errors of their evil way, were also published. These "confessions" confirmed the government's charges that the Railway Mission had sheltered criminals wanted by the police, gathered military statistics for espionage purposes, and operated centers to facilitate the flight of refugees. The church was consequently ordered to terminate the services of the Mission at approximately one hundred railroad stations which resulted in the complete disintegration of this phase of the church's welfare work.<sup>4</sup>

East German bishops expressed their profound regret over the action taken against the Railway Mission. In a letter to the government they refuted all charges levied against the Mission and interpreted this incident as further evidence of the state's determination to banish the church from her humanitarian work in public life.<sup>5</sup> It appeared that the bishops were right in their observation, because by the end of April the last of the seventeen church workers were quietly released from jail and the entire

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland, January 18, 1956.

<sup>2</sup>Neue Zeit, January 20, 1956.

<sup>3</sup>Neues Deutschland, January 20, 1956.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1956, p. 149.

<sup>5</sup>KJ 1956, p. 145.

affair was dropped without a single person having been brought to trial. If only a fraction of the charges raised against them had been true, the persons involved would have swiftly been brought to justice and given severe prison sentences. Albeit, the work of the Railway Mission had for all practical purposes come to an end. It had suffered the same fate as under the Nazi regime in 1938 when its doors of humanitarian service were closed by a similar arbitrary decree.

#### B. The Seizure of Institutional Building Complexes

In its attempt to eliminate the church's influence in public life and to reduce her activities to a mere enactment of rituals, the East German government proceeded with an outright seizure of some of the church's institutional building compounds. Many of these institutions were well known throughout the world for their ministry to the sick and needy, the destitute and homeless; they were the direct outgrowth of the great social movement which had swept the church under the leadership of Johann Hinrich Wichern and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh in the nineteenth century.

In her work of mercy the church in East Germany operated a total of 61 hospitals and schools of nursing, 84 homes for retarded and handicapped people, 112 nursing homes for people recuperating from prolonged illness, 19 nursing homes for mothers with infants, 33 children's homes, 75 boarding homes for school children, 325 day care centers for children of working mothers, 812 welfare centers with parish nurses, 332 old people's homes, 11 low-cost hotels for needy people, 24 motherhouses for deaconesses and nurses, and 6 schools for deacons.<sup>1</sup> The work at many of these institutions

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<sup>1</sup>Anne Jordheim, "Easter Comes to East Germany," The National Lutheran, XXXIII, Nr. 4 (April, 1965), p. 6.

was done by voluntary Christian workers including numerous young people, who dedicated one year of their life to humanitarian services. The Communist leaders realized that a seizure of these institutional complexes would greatly weaken the church's position in public life--they also knew that they would have to proceed with great caution so as not to cause the outbreak of a storm of public indignation.<sup>1</sup>

The work of the church's charitable institutions was left undisturbed during the period of the Soviet Military Administration. Their eleemosynary services were desperately needed at that time. Aside from her 40,000 hospital beds the church also had a dedicated staff of doctors and nurses;<sup>2</sup> but even at that time there appeared the first signs of discrimination against these time-honored institutions and their personnel--members of the church's diaconal orders were gradually eliminated from positions in state hospitals and municipal health services, and the nursing schools operated by the deaconess mother houses survived only with great difficulty. Nurses and kindergarten teachers employed by secular institutions received better ration cards, with twice the allotment of food and clothing, than the deaconesses working in church hospitals and kindergartens.<sup>3</sup> Almost all church hospitals and charitable homes experienced grave difficulties in securing adequate food supplies for their patients and inmates. The City Council of Rostock, for instance, "allotted the lowest possible ration cards to Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Religious Affairs, August, 1946, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob and Berg, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Religious Affairs, August, 1946, p. 426.

hospitals, observing that if they were insufficient the patients should be transferred either to the municipal or to the Communist hospitals."<sup>1</sup> Beyond these minor harassments, no serious attempts were made to force the church to surrender her institutions to the powers in authority.

With the creation of the German Democratic Republic the tolerant attitude manifested hitherto underwent a radical change. Disregarding constitutional guarantees, a number of large institutional building complexes were taken over by the new government. The Franckean Foundation at Halle was the first institutional compound to be appropriated by the state. Founded during the first part of the eighteenth century by August Francke, this institution had for a long span of time been the world center of Protestant pietism and missionary activity. Suddenly in 1950 it was stripped of ecclesiastical control and adjoined to the University of Halle.<sup>2</sup> The next seizures of a number of key welfare buildings occurred as part of the vehement attack upon the church early in 1953. The procedures preceding their seizure followed a fixed pattern which was first applied at the large Meißner Foundation in Magdeburg. After an initial publication of critical articles in the party press, a committee appeared to examine account books, sanitary facilities, and the social conditions among employees. A few days later a second investigation committee appeared, accompanied this time by agents of the secret police, which looked thoroughly at some of the conditions which had been noted with a critical eye during the first visit. Possible complaints by patients and inmates about the institution were encouraged,

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<sup>1</sup>Herman, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956. p. 24.

even those made by feeble-minded and mentally retarded people. When enough material had been gathered, the seizure was made on the superficial basis of the alleged mistreatment of inmates.<sup>1</sup> Legal proceedings initiated by church leaders effected no change in this arbitrary capture of church property.

The case of the Hoffnungstal welfare complex located near Berlin illustrates most vividly the procedures followed by the state in its investigation of the "deplorable" conditions at the church's institutions of mercy. Hoffnungstal was one of the largest institutions in East Germany, established by Friedrich von Bodelschwingh in the nineteenth century. It consisted of hospitals and homes for the aged, schools for handicapped children, and rehabilitation centers for the mentally retarded. Operating its own workshops and schools, it functioned much like a small community.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of May 18, 1953, about thirty automobiles and motorcycles roared through the main gate of the Hoffnungstal institutional complex and to the astonishment of the staff and patients more than one hundred persons, including fifty uniformed policemen, emerged from the vehicles of the motorcade. Moving with military precision they blocked every access to the grounds as if they were occupying an armed and hostile fortification instead of a charitable institution for epileptics and retarded people. Without consulting any staff member, seven different commissions, each composed of between five to fifteen persons, fanned out to different

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, pp. 144-146; KJ 1952, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1953, p. 145.

buildings in order to begin their investigation. They were particularly interested in talking with patients and inmates in order to take notes of possible complaints about their care and treatment. In kitchens and workshops they inquired if anyone was forced to work long hours. Those who expressed satisfaction with their work conditions were dismissed as being foolish. In one of the boys' dormitories a member of one of the investigating commissions took a picture of a heap of potato peelings which perchance happened to lie in the kitchen. This picture appeared subsequently in newspapers as an illustration of the kind of food served to the boys at the dormitory. The quarters of two elderly men, a wheelwright and a shoemaker, who had asked for the privilege of sleeping in their shops, were photographed as examples of the inadequate housing facilities provided for aged people. In the main residence for epileptics and retarded people, patients were asked leading questions. They were urged to admit that they were being exploited by the institution inasmuch as they were not paid regular salaries for work performed as a part of their therapy. Frequent irreverent and provocative expressions were uttered by commission members in these conversations with people. Pious old folk were told, "We'll soon break you of your habits of praying." Children in school were advised not to attend worship services. In one of the homes for mentally retarded boys the advice was given to the young inmates, "Hit your teachers in their fat bellies if they try to make you work." A police unit passing a group of patients working in a garden shouted loudly, "Stand where you are! Anyone who tries to run will be shot immediately." This kind of investigation continued throughout the day before the entire caravan

finally left late in the afternoon.

During the days following this investigation the press carried lurid pictorial descriptions of the "deplorable" conditions at Hoffnungstal, foreshadowing a seizure of the institution by the state. However, before the government actually carried out its plan, the Kirchenkampf had come to a sudden end.

With the exception of the Franckean Foundation and a spiritual retreat house at Mansfeld, all confiscated building complexes were returned to the church as a result of the new course.<sup>1</sup> However, the pause in the Communists' attempt to neutralize the church in public life proved to be of short duration. When the crisis of the June uprising had passed, the state revealed again its resolute determination to strip the church of her welfare institutions. Not the former practice of forcible seizure, but a more subtle method was used this time. They now sought to gain control of the church's institutions by way of their labor unions.<sup>2</sup> Having secured ad hoc court injunctions, they proceeded to unionize the church's labor force under a veneer of legality and thereby gained an important voice in the administration of the institutions. East German labor laws allotted to union representatives a preponderant share of the management of every private enterprise including charitable institutions.<sup>3</sup> In their influential managerial posts, these representatives carried out with docile obedience

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>GDR, p. 108.

all tasks assigned to them by higher political circles. Firmly entrenched in the church's institutions through these strategically placed union men, Communist politicians sought now to effect their complete secularization. By 1956 thirteen eleemosynary complexes had fallen under state control through infiltration by the Communist labor union.<sup>1</sup>

The church found it increasingly difficult to minister to people confined in public institutions which were operated by the state. Nullifying a part of article 46 of the constitution, a new law in 1955 denied clergymen the right to conduct worship services and to administer the sacraments in state-owned convalescent and old people's homes.<sup>2</sup> This statute specified further that pastors could visit their parishioners only if expressly invited by them and even then regular visiting hours were to be strictly observed. Since then it has happened that church members died without spiritual preparation even though they had requested a pastoral visit because the clergy was not permitted to enter the hospital except during regular visiting hours.<sup>3</sup> These regulations were sometimes enforced even though the doctor in charge strenuously objected. Even Christmas services were forbidden in most hospitals. Worship services were banned also from all penal institutions, usually on grounds of an alleged lack of adequate space and facilities. In regular prisons pastoral conversations with inmates were permitted only in the presence of a guard. No pastoral ministry

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>Kundgebungen, pp. 268-269.

at all was allowed in detention prisons and jails for youth. These restrictive measures gravely impaired the church's ministry in state institutions.

### C. The Erosion of the Church's Economic Foundation

From the very outset the new East German state displayed a resolute determination to undermine the economic foundation of the church. The evident purpose thereof was to weaken the work of the church in public life through a gradual diminution of financial resources. The church in Germany had traditionally derived her financial subsistence from four distinct sources: state subsidies, public collections, church taxes, and freewill offerings. All these sources except freewill offerings were gradually choked off by the state.

The state subsidies were actually based on contractual obligations dating back to the nineteenth century when the church had transferred some of her properties to the state in exchange for perpetual annual payments. Comprising about 15 per cent of the church's total annual income, these subsidies had regularly been honored by the Soviet authorities from 1945 to 1949. As noted before, during the Kirohenkampf these subsidies were used as a means of political blackmail and were no longer paid at all by the German Democratic Republic. When the new course was launched, the government started again to make the payments but simultaneously insisted upon retaining a 30 per cent reduction.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 1956—apparently as a means of coercion—another million mark was arbitrarily sheared off

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 187.

the subsidies, leaving the church with less than 50 per cent of the original amount payable by the state.<sup>1</sup>

Another source of income for the church was her annual fund drives carried out by public solicitations on city streets and house-to-house visitations. The main beneficiaries of these public fund appeals were the church's schools and institutions of mercy. Although public drives for charitable and educational purposes were of a long-standing tradition in Germany, they were nevertheless subject to government review and approval each year. The East German state agreed in 1950 to retain this old custom and permitted the church to hold four campaigns each year.<sup>2</sup> However, at the height of the Kirchenkampf the government acquiesced to only one street collection and disapproved of house-to-house appeals altogether, while Communist organizations were permitted to engage in several public fund drives for their projects and programs. After 1953 the church was allowed to hold annually two street collections, but crippling impediments capriciously devised by local authorities made the successful execution of even these two solitary drives virtually impossible. For instance, the Magdeburg municipal government shortened by twelve days the period of time allowed for the drive; thus the campaign had to be carried out in two days, thereby drastically reducing the potential sum of money which could have been collected. Elsewhere local officials stipulated that solicitations for donations were not to be made on main streets or in railroad stations where the largest number of people could be reached. In some areas

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, p. 167.

city politicians reduced to a third the number of church workers licensed to partake in the drive, again making it impossible to reach many people. In East Berlin the permission for the public fund appeal in 1956 was delayed for so long that, when it was finally given, the church was unable to make the necessary technical arrangements in time. The amount of the church's income from the traditional fund drives was considerably reduced through these various machinations and the economic security of her charitable and educational institutions was gravely endangered.

The most important source of income for the church was a tax placed on the earnings of each adult church member. According to old tradition and mutual agreement between church and state authorities, this tax had always been collected by the government and was then handed over to ecclesiastical comptrollers. This arrangement was terminated by East German authorities in 1945. Ever since that time the church levied and collected the taxes through her own administrative offices, but was still permitted to examine the government's tax lists to ascertain the apportionment due from each wage-earning church member. As a matter of fact, article 43 of the constitution officially reinvested the church with this privilege. However, with the opening of the Kirchenkampf, government clerks manifested an increasing reluctance to place tax information at the disposal of the church's officials.<sup>1</sup> This constitutional provision was later completely revoked through a decree promulgated on February 10, 1956, by Hilde Benjamin, the Minister of Justice; she declared that all future

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1954, pp. 117-118.

payments of church taxes would be entirely voluntary and that the enforcement machinery of the state would no longer be made available to the church for collecting them.<sup>1</sup> With a single stroke this decree destroyed in East Germany one of the last significant remnants of the old church-state system. Though for a while the compulsion of custom and tradition might support this old system without the benefit of government assistance, it was generally anticipated that the church's income from this source would henceforth greatly diminish. Many church members were only nominal believers, who would not voluntarily continue to give a portion of their earnings to the church.

This was not an easy prospect for the church which had for centuries depended upon a fixed and stable source of income for her work of mission and mercy. Therefore, it was understandable that some territorial churches in East Germany reacted with overt panic to the Benjamin decree. Leaders of the Lutheran church in Saxony decided to use measures of retribution against the members if they refused "voluntarily" to pay the customary church tax. Delinquent members were to be deprived of their rights to vote in congregational elections and to serve as sponsors at baptisms, and they were also to lose the privileges of a Christian wedding and burial.<sup>2</sup> It is not known at this time if these punitive measures brought the desired result; it might have been wiser if the church leaders in Saxony had approached their members on the basis of loyalty and devotion rather than on

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, pp. 191-192.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, p. 193.

the basis of intimidation and coercion. Although no reliable statistical data showing the extent of the decline of her income have been made available, the church in East Germany was able to raise only 70 per cent of the 100 million marks needed for her work in 1956.<sup>1</sup>

With the flow of income seriously disrupted by state intervention, the church was forced to revive in her congregations the Biblical principle of voluntary giving to secure the needed finances. The right to collect one freewill offering per Sunday at the worship services had at no time been challenged by the state, but unfortunately a strong stewardship program had never been an integral part of the congregational life either in East or West Germany. Relying primarily upon income from church taxes, clergymen had never before found themselves in a position where they had to depend heavily on voluntary gifts for the operation of their parishes. Clergy and laity alike had to learn the meaning of Christian stewardship if the church's work was not to become completely paralyzed by a lack of funds. Some painstaking progress has been made in recent years as evidenced by the fact that 8.5 million marks in special gifts were collected by the church for the needy of the world during the Christmas seasons of 1959 and 1960.<sup>2</sup> Even though it was urgently needed at home, this sum of money was given by church members specifically for the alleviation of suffering in the world. This was an impressive demonstration of their growth in stewardship and their apparent willingness to support the

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<sup>1</sup>Dolberg, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1961, p. 96.

church's work on a voluntary basis.

As a result of the deterioration of the church's economic foundation, many parishes became impoverished. The salaries of the approximately 25,000 church workers (5,000 pastors, 10,000 catechists, and 10,000 deaconesses)<sup>1</sup> were very meager. Some of the church's institutions would have been unable to continue operating if the nurses and teachers had insisted upon the same salaries as those paid by state institutions. Deaconesses working in church hospitals drew only half of the wages paid to nurses in state hospitals.<sup>2</sup> The income of the clergy was meager if compared to that of other people with an academic training. Depending on his years of service, a pastor's monthly remuneration was between 400 and 700 marks while that of a university professor was between 2,000 and 4,000 marks. The average monthly salary of a teacher was 750 marks.<sup>3</sup> During the periods when the church went through financial crises such as those in 1953 and 1956, the salaries of church workers were in arrears for months or were not paid at all.

A lack of funds also posed a real problem in the reconstruction of the many church buildings damaged or destroyed during World War II. In addition to hundreds of parsonages and parish halls, a total of 2,678 houses of worship were either badly damaged or completely obliterated in

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob and Berg, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Religious Affairs (August, 1946), p. 426.

<sup>3</sup>Lohn und Kaufkraft in der Sowjetzone, ed. Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Institut der Gewerkschaften (Koeln: Bund-Verlag, 1959), p. 14.

East Germany. To be sure, the state subsidized to some extent the rebuilding of edifices which were considered to be of historical or cultural value, but it actually obstructed the repair of church structures which were primarily designed for worship services.<sup>1</sup> Even if the church managed to set aside some money for the restoration of buildings, the state consistently refused to issue permits for the purchase of building materials. By 1956 only 1,400 of the 2,678 bombed-out church buildings had been repaired to the point that they could be used for worship services.<sup>2</sup> "Many church ruins which could easily have been restored after five, seven or ten years, had finally to be abandoned." They were "allowed to decay until they were ripe for demolition."<sup>3</sup> The difficulties encountered in providing an adequate income for church workers and in rebuilding war-damaged church buildings were illustrative of numerous problems in parish life caused by the financial straits of the church.

The service of the Relief organization proved to be of great value in mitigating the financial distress of the church in East Germany. Through its channels considerable financial assistance flowed annually from West Germany to the church in East Germany. The financial deficits, which would have altogether crippled the church's work, were partly offset by annual contributions in the amount of between 30 to 40 million marks from West Germany. Only once in 1956 was the flow of this

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>GDR, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>The Evangelical Church, pp. 26-27.

fiscal aid temporarily halted by orders of the East German regime.<sup>1</sup> In 1952 the Relief organization also devised an imaginative plan for the rebuilding of many bombed-out church structures. It designated biannually some metropolis as a "city of church reconstruction" and collected gifts throughout Germany for the restoration of the church buildings in that city. The parishes in Dresden were the first beneficiaries of this unique plan and received 750,000 marks from the drive in 1953, the congregations in Frankfurt at-the-Oder received 900,000 marks in 1955, and those in Magdeburg received 1,600,000 marks in 1957.<sup>2</sup> The parishes in Rostock were the beneficiaries of the drive conducted in 1959. These appeals gathered momentum and the amount of the contributions increased from year to year. But in spite of the availability of these funds, church leaders found it difficult to obtain permits for the purchase of building materials, and the reconstruction efforts of the Relief organization thus were hampered by sparse allotments of vital construction materials.

Another bold step by the Relief organization was taken in 1953, when the church in East Germany was no longer able to pay the salaries of her workers. Arrangements were made at that time to equalize the wages of the clergymen in the East to some extent with those in the West. Under the proposed plan West German pastors would voluntarily contribute a portion of their income to the Relief organization, which in turn would distribute it as salary supplements to East German clergymen. This program,

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1957, pp. 229-230.

appropriately called the "Brothers' Aid," was implemented in 1955 and brought 3 million marks in voluntary gifts during the first two years of its operation.<sup>1</sup> It was continued every year with increasing response from West German clergymen and church workers, some of whom contributed as much as 25 per cent of their income.

However, the aid program of the Relief organization was adversely affected by the different currencies used in East and West Germany. All financial aid from West Germany had to be exchanged at the rate of one to one, even though the actual purchasing value of the West mark before 1961 was usually four times higher than that of the East mark. This proved to be a profitable business transaction for the German Democratic Republic, and it may have been one of the reasons for the government's permissive attitude towards the continuous flow of financial aid to the church.

#### D. Impediments in Devotional Life

In its attempt to debilitate the work of the church in public life, the East German state had halted the material assistance program of the Relief organization, had seized some of the church's eleemosynary institutions, and had undermined her economic structure. In order to weaken further the church's public influence, the government proceeded to circumscribe her devotional life through a number of rigid rules and to impede the observance of Sunday as a day of worship and rest. "The life of the ghetto, within the tight-drawn limits of devotional life--this is what the Communist state had devised for the churches."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957. pp. 227-228.

<sup>2</sup>The Evangelical Church. p. 29.

A watchful vigilance was maintained by political authorities over the church's activities and meetings; the church was asked to confine her work within the limitations of "legitimate" religious concerns or a special permit would be required for every meeting. In 1951 the government affirmed the rule established by Soviet officials in 1947 which specified that all recurring meetings and activities of the church held in church buildings or in rented quarters need not be reported to authorities.<sup>1</sup> Church leaders in 1947 had listed the following as "legitimate" and recurring expressions of church life: worship services; Bible studies; religious instruction sessions; welfare services; and meetings of missionary organizations, the Evangelical Union, the Evangelical Women's organization, and the youth organizations. The government exempted these activities and meetings from the general rule by which every public meeting in East Germany required a special permit. Of course, all other meetings sponsored by the church had to be reported and were subject to approval by the authorities.

However, starting in 1952 local politicians began to interpret this exemption quite narrowly. Police officers took it upon themselves to decide what constituted worship services and devotional meetings. Consequently, a pastor in one village might be accused of violating this ordinance because he failed to report a series of Bible studies while another might be permitted to present a religious play without any question whatever. It happened with increasing frequency that clergymen were hauled before judges and compelled to pay heavy fines because they had failed to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 146.

procure permission to hold meetings which were not considered to be strictly devotional in nature.<sup>1</sup> They were even penalized for discussing such topics as confirmation and the dedication of youth at meetings with parents--even though held in church buildings--because such discussions were judged to be political rather than religious in nature.<sup>2</sup> Some local policemen forbade pastors to conduct worship services in halls not owned by the church. In small villages which were without church buildings but where services had been conducted in rented schoolrooms or in movie theaters, this simply meant that people were deprived of opportunities for worship altogether. Clergymen also occasionally conducted larger services of an inter-congregational nature, which could not be held in church buildings because of limitations of space. Over such services the authorities were able to exercise as rigid a control as they wished and numerous scheduled youth rallies and mission festivals had to be canceled because the necessary permits could not be obtained. All these measures were designed to exile the church from public life and to imprison her within the four walls of church buildings.

Another effort by the government to restrict the free devotional life of the church was to be seen in the censorship of sermons. There were instances even during the Soviet period of occupation when Russian commanders ordered clergymen to submit to them in advance copies of their Sunday sermons for review and approval. In the Soviet Union this was apparently

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, pp. 154-157.

<sup>2</sup>Neuer Tag, November 2, 1957.

a well-established practice,<sup>1</sup> which military officers sought routinely to establish in East Germany. Upon hearing this, Bishop Dibelius at once registered a protest with the Soviet Military Administration and sent a letter to all churchmen in his province declaring such a practice to be wholly unacceptable.<sup>2</sup> Dibelius observed that the Nazis, too, had attempted to compromise the spiritual freedom of the church by their attempt to censor her message, but that this intrusion had been denounced once and for all by the synod convention of 1934. If secular authorities were permitted to censor the sermons of the clergy, the church would become a mere instrument in the hands of the state. After this note of strong protest, Soviet officials refrained from further attempts of censorship.

It seemed that the East German government had learned a lesson from the experiences of the Soviet Military Administration and decided not to interfere with the homilies of preachers in an overt way. At no time have government agents outright demanded that clergymen should submit their sermons for censorship. On the other hand, Communist informers have regularly been assigned to attend worship services conducted by pastors, who had manifested anti-Marxist sentiments, in order that they might take notes on their sermons. The content of their sermons was at times analyzed in newspapers to convince readers that the preachers involved were "NATO supporters."<sup>3</sup> It happened in several cases that quotations from

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Koch, Zur politischen Predigt (Muenchen: Carl Gerber, 1952), pp. 106-124.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1945-1948, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>Neuer Tag, November 12, 1957; Berliner Zeitung, November 10, 1957; Freiheit, November 13, 1957.

sermons were used against pastors at court trials.<sup>1</sup> This was a subtle way of "censoring" the content of sermons, inasmuch as it was made patently clear that homiletical utterances meeting the disapprobation of the state could be used against the clergy.

The state manifested less reservation in an effort to muffle the church's message at the Kirchentag, the huge rallies of lay people sponsored by the church. The idea of the Kirchentag was first conceived in 1949 with the purpose of presenting an effective religious witness to modern society and of strengthening the faith of Christian people by way of huge mass meetings.<sup>2</sup> The first Kirchentag, which happened to take place in Berlin in 1951, attracted 100,000 people from the East and 12,000 from the West. Thereafter, they were held with great regularity in West Germany. When the new course was charted the church received permission to sponsor a Kirchentag in the Democratic Republic; it was held in 1954 in Leipzig and was attended by 650,000 people from both parts of Germany. This rally proved to be one of the most significant religious events to occur within years in East Germany. The magnitude of its spiritual impact upon people was inestimable. When church leaders, as previously noted, petitioned the government in 1957 for permission to hold another Kirchentag, the approval this time was coupled with the stipulations that state representatives be given an opportunity to elucidate the "peaceful policy" of the German Democratic Republic to the assembled people and that "NATO bishops" be

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup>Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff, "The Kirchentag in Berlin," The Ecumenical Review, vol. IV, p. 45.

barred from preaching at the Kirchentag altogether.<sup>1</sup> Rather than compromise the integrity of their message and debase the purpose of the rally, church leaders decided to cancel plans for the Kirchentag in Erfurt. Another Kirchentag scheduled for East Berlin in 1961 was prohibited outright by the state on the grounds that this event constituted a "provocation by a militaristic church." The message of the Kirchentag and its far-reaching spiritual impact was thereby outlawed in East Germany and the limits of the church's devotional life were drawn tighter.

The Communist state sought through devious means to keep people from attending worship services and from participating in the devotional life of the church. Even though Sundays and religious festival days were declared to be official days of rest in article 16 of the constitution, this provision was flagrantly violated by the government. By establishing a "Country Sunday" in rural areas and a "Socialist Sunday" in urban districts, efforts were made to strip that day of worship and rest of its intended purpose. An escalated seven-day work week, which was not even halted for such festive days as Christmas and Easter, was introduced in most industrial plants and coal mines. People were encouraged to make "constructive" use of their leisure time by forming "voluntary" labor brigades, which would take on special work projects in cities or would help out with field work on collective farms on Sunday. Wide newspaper publicity was given throughout East Germany to those brigades and people belonging to them were depicted as heroic and selfless individuals, who

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1957, pp. 160-161.

contributed much to the progress and glory of Communism.<sup>1</sup> One newspaper editor extolled the thousands of laborers who in spite of beautiful vacation weather had "volunteered" on several consecutive Sundays "to accomplish new Socialist deeds in honor of the fifth party rally" in 1958.<sup>2</sup> The "Country Sunday" was declared to be a day of honorary labor when "peace-loving" factory workers seized the opportunity of toiling in fields side by side with like-minded farm folk for the advancement of the Marxist cause.<sup>3</sup> Church leaders protested in vain against this open breach of the constitutional provision. In their remonstrations they expressed profound regret not only over the obvious impediments devised by the state to keep people from places of worship but also over the disruptive influence in family life caused by the unceasing work shifts.<sup>4</sup>

Another design to keep people from worship services was even of a greater affront to the church; many political meetings and rallies were intentionally held during the hour of worship on Sunday morning. Communist youth organizations in particular met regularly on Sunday morning and at times held demonstrations in front of church buildings while services were conducted inside. Some local authorities staged practice sessions of their volunteer fire departments during the time of church service. When one pastor dared to object to the time of the practice he was promptly

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland, October 14, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Magdeburger Volksstimme, July 15, 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Neues Deutschland, October 18, 1958.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1955, pp. 154-157.

denounced as an enemy of the people. It was argued that anyone even faintly interested in the safety of the community would welcome the practice sessions, irrespective of the hour of day, rather than oppose them.<sup>1</sup> According to German law and tradition all public places of amusement had always been closed on Good Friday and on other solemn church festivals. This tradition was officially honored in article 16 of the constitution, but the government made no attempt to enforce it. Public dances were permitted to take place on Good Friday without any interference by the state.<sup>2</sup> A particularly shocking example of public frivolity occurred in 1956 in the city of Brandenburg. In the midst of a carnival parade encouraged by Communist youth leaders as a kind of "folk festival," one blasphemous reveler among the laughing and applauding youth had masqueraded as Jesus Christ. A local Communist newspaper reported the incident approvingly. Church leaders were horror-stricken and issued a public denunciation of the blasphemy.<sup>3</sup> Realizing that the bounds of propriety had been sadly overstepped, the Communist mayor of Brandenburg apologized to the clergy for the incident. Nevertheless, the manifest policy to keep the people in East Germany from participating in the worship life of the church was not rescinded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Freiheit. November 12, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956. p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1956. p. 188.

<sup>4</sup>On May 1, 1960, I personally experienced one of the irksome vexations which at time beset East German people when they wish to attend worship services. On that day I intended to participate in a worship service at the historic St. Mary's church in East Berlin where Bishop Dibelius was

### E. The Communist Rival Cult

In its attempt to break the public influence of the church, the East German state overstepped the self-proclaimed line of demarcation and penetrated into the realm of the "legitimate" devotional concerns of the church. Not only were people openly discouraged from participating in church services but they were actually pressed to partake in a number of pseudo-religious rites developed by Communist authorities. The government had all along asserted that the proper activities of the church consisted in devotional exercises and rituals performed within the four walls of her buildings, but in due course it established its own rival rites which encompassed birth, dedication, marriage, and death.

The creation of the Communist rites in the German Democratic Republic was probably influenced by the legacy of Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), the political rival of Joseph Stalin. Trotsky had as early as 1923 pointed out that through a subtle manipulation of the three great moments of life--birth, marriage, and death--the Communist party could greatly solidify its hold over people.<sup>1</sup> The human being, he noted, has an innate

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scheduled to preach the sermon. However, upon arrival I found all streets leading to the church building blocked off by the police who watched the column of people marching in the Communist May Day parade. The police told me that the particular route, at which they were standing guard, was closed for "security reasons" and that I should try the next access route. During the ensuing hour I walked in a circle around the church building and was turned back by the police stationed at every street leading to the edifice. I found myself in the company of a sizable group of people who also wished to attend the worship service. When in spite of the warning by police one woman started to walk into the direction of the cathedral, she was bodily restrained by them. Bishop Dibelius, too, was stopped en route to the church building and was turned back to West Berlin. No worship service was held on that Sunday at St. Mary's.

<sup>1</sup>Leon Trotsky, Problems of Life, trans. by Z. Vengerova (London: Methuen & Co., 1924), p. 62.

emotional desire to have these three experiences in life enriched by solemn rituals; therefore, since even basically unreligious people turn to the church during those sublime moments, the Communist party should seek to replace religious rites with its own solemn ceremonies and thereby strengthen its hold over the people. Even though he was a political deviationist, East German politicians apparently relied upon Trotsky's insight and commenced to initiate Communist name-giving and youth dedication rites, as well as marriage and funeral rites. Of course, they also relied upon the precedent established by the Free-Religious congregations and by the German Association of Free-Thinkers.

With the exception of the youth dedication ceremony the three other Communist rituals were first applied on a large scale in Stalinstadt, a new East German city constructed in 1953.<sup>1</sup> With its 16,333 inhabitants in 1956 it was to serve as a model of Communist life in East Germany.<sup>2</sup> The construction of any church building in this city was prohibited. Ulbricht had been asked in 1953 whether any "towers" would be built in Stalinstadt. He replied that one tower would be erected for a city hall and another one for a house of culture but that beyond these two there existed no need for any "other tower in this city of Socialism."<sup>3</sup> To this very day the church has been unable to secure permission to build a house of worship or a church tower in that city. For a long time it

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<sup>1</sup>In keeping with Khrushchev's revision of Stalin's personality cult, East German authorities renamed this city "Eisenhuettenstadt."

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1953, p. 184.

was even impossible for the church there to buy a piece of land on which to erect a crude barrack for purposes of worship or to secure the necessary permit to rent a dwelling place for a clergyman. When Bishop Dibelius was to preach in Stalinstadt on Christmas Eve, 1953, churchmen were unable to rent a hall in the city. People who wished to hear Dibelius had to gather in two empty restaurants in a neighboring village. It was logical then that this should be the first city in which the "sacred" cult of the Communist religion was to be implanted on a large scale. A remarkable document appeared in 1958 in Stalinstadt which spelled out in detail the rites and ceremonies by which the lives of the inhabitants would henceforth be ruled; it was announced that the "great moments of life" would finally be freed from the "yoke" of the church and that from now on these moments would form an integral part of the Socialist life of the city.

Human birth, union of man and woman, and death were originally biological events, which have acquired great social significance with the progress of humanity.

These events were given an idealistic-religious interpretation and an ecclesiastical-ceremonial form by the exploiting classes in order to restrain the people and subject them to the exploiters' rule.

From the vantage point of the dialectical-materialistic philosophy of life and with the help of the Socialist state, the working class and its leading party recognize birth, marriage, and death as solemn events in the life of the growing Socialist society.

The content of these ceremonies is Socialist humanism, which is atheistic and recognizes no higher being than humanity that fights for peace, democracy and Socialism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Grundgesetze und Erfahrungen bei der Gestaltung sozialistischer Feierlichkeiten um Geburt, Eheschliessungen und Tod in Stalinstadt," Kirche in der Zeit. IX, Heft 2 (February, 1959), pp. 73-75.

Before each ceremony, whether name-giving, marriage or burial, thorough preparatory conversations were to be held by a state official with the persons involved in order to make clear to them that the vows to be taken constituted a personal commitment to Communism. In his counseling sessions with new parents, engaged couples and relatives of deceased people, he was expected to stress particularly the following points.

The ceremony for the birth of a child and its name-giving should effect the conscious union of the parents with the future struggle of the whole working class. It constitutes the solemn initiation of the child into human society. For the child's sake the parents must give a pledge to ensure his Socialist education.

The festive form of civil marriage confirms the consent of husband and wife to the concept of the Socialist ethic. In addition, the couple must take the Socialist nuptial vow. Like the name-giving rite, this ceremony too must be held in public in order to emphasize the social significance of this personal event.

The solemn funeral rite has as its purpose the praise of the good deeds of the deceased. The satisfaction to have been connected with this man shall be a source of consolation to the mourning relatives. The death of this man must cause the relatives by even more energetic work to close the gap left by him in society.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these guidelines for counseling sessions, the document contained a number of addresses which were to be given by the appointed officials during the administration of the Communist rites and also several suggested pledges and vows which were to be given by the participants.

One of the first name-giving rites was held in Altenburg on Christmas day, 1957. Every effort was expended to make this event appear like the administration of the Christian sacrament of baptism. A special room

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-75.

was used in city hall, equipped with an organ and lighted candles. The table before the presiding state official was festively decked with flowers and in the background stood a flag-draped bust of Wilhem Pieck. In order to lend solemn dignity to this occasion, an organist played Handel's "Largo." After the parents and sponsors had gathered in the "chapel," the speaker reminded them in his address that the Communist name-giving rite represented a confession of allegiance to the Workers' and Peasants' state and that the infant in their arms was now being initiated into the ranks of fighters for peace, progress and Communism. "You should take care," stated the orator, "that from earliest infancy this child is trained as an enthusiastic Socialist. He is destined to experience not only the Socialist but also the Communist social order. To this end you must be his conscious mentor and guide, thereby continuing Lenin's work."<sup>1</sup> After the parents and sponsors had given their pledge to raise the child in the spirit of Socialism, a savings booklet valued at 100 marks was presented to them along with a certificate of commemoration and written congratulatory messages from prominent political leaders. The sponsors were required to sign a document certifying their willingness to help raise the child in Socialism, just as they might have signed a baptismal certificate. As the organ music started again and the parents surrounded by well-wishers left the "chapel," they were greeted by representatives of the Communist youth organizations and were given bouquets of flowers.

The outspoken atheistic character of the name-giving rite was

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudosakrale Staatsakte in der Sowjetzone, p. 6.

clearly revealed in numerous newspaper articles which expatiated upon the nature and purpose of this ceremony.

Many people are probably wondering why the name-giving rite is being performed and also what people are permitted to take part. Increasing numbers of our citizenry, especially members of the Socialist Unity party, had expressed the wish to have their children brought up in an atheistic way of life. Consequently, ceremonies of this kind became a social necessity. This begins with our infant children, continues in public school and the youth dedication rite, and finds its climax in a festive marriage ritual administered by state officials.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist marriage rite was also embellished by an air of festive solemnity. After the mandatory counseling session with a state official, the bridal couple recited before an assembly of workers their marriage vows: "Being responsible to all working people, to ourselves and to each other, we vow to regard our marriage contracted this day in mutual love as a union established for life. By concerted efforts we vow to strengthen the achievements of Socialism as well as those of the Workers' and Peasants' state . . . ." <sup>2</sup> Should it be deemed necessary, a word of warning might be given in the wedding address lest the couple tend to view their marriage in any sense as having religious implications. "Religion is rejected as the basis of marriage," declared the wedding manual used in Stalinstadt, "because of the impotence of the church, the non-existence of God, and the immorality of church leaders who approve of war as a means of divine rule and who place woman in a position subordinate to man."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Freies Wort (Suhl), February 2, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>"Grundgesetze," Kirche in der Zeit, IX, Heft 2 (February, 1959), pp. 73-75.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-75.

Shortly after the inception of the Communist marriage rite, the District Court of East Berlin rendered a noteworthy decision pertaining to marital life, which could well serve as an important precedent for similar cases in the future. The Court decided that devotion to religion and an active participation in church life by one partner to a marriage constituted a disruptive influence, legally justifying the dissolution of the marriage and on these grounds a man was granted a divorce from his wife.

The applicant asserts that the originally happy marriage was disrupted by the respondent's joining the church in 1946. In the course of time she turned more and more to the church. Every Sunday morning she attended worship services and apart from that was at church functions twice a week.

In our Workers' and Peasants' state a man who thinks progressively cannot be expected to remain tied to a partner in marriage if that partner turns increasingly to the church.

For this reason the Supreme Court decision of July 1, 1957, which makes it difficult to dissolve a marriage which has existed for decades, cannot apply.

The premises for the dissolution of this marriage thus exist.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the name-giving and marriage rites, much publicity was also given to the Communist burial rite. The latter ceremony was always rendered as grave and solemn as was befitting such an event. To that end political circles called into life an Association of Funeral Speakers, whose sole purpose was to train Communist orators for that special task. The salaried orators, wearing a distinct garb at the burial site, reminded the friends and relatives of the deceased that their loss was also the loss of all workers in the Socialist state. The achievements of the deceased in building a Socialist society were acclaimed with the

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1959, pp. 167-168.

purpose of instilling in the listeners greater zeal in their common "struggle" against exploitation, militarism, imperialism, and fascism." The Communist orators never failed to exhort people at the burial site to close the ranks of the Socialist society and to move forward while keeping before them the good example of the deceased.

Clergymen and party functionaries clashed at times openly when Communist orators intruded in Christian funeral services with the avowed purpose of giving their own rehearsed speeches. Bishop Dibelius reported visiting a community of seven thousand people who were normally served by two pastors. He discovered that these two clergymen had to compete with five Communist funeral speakers, whose services were urged upon people by the local newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

The introduction to these Communist rites in East German communities was undergirded by a vigorous publicity campaign carried on through the media of the press, radio, and mass organizations. Pictures and articles stressing the festive aspect of the name-giving and marriage rites were constantly held before the eyes of the people. Statistics were published which conveyed the impression that almost everyone in the country was taking part in these rites. Financial contributions were solicited from people so that generous rewards could be given to parents and children who participated in the name-giving ceremony. In some municipalities mayors sent congratulatory messages to the parents of new-born children, inviting them to present their infants at city hall for the festive

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<sup>1</sup>Otto Dibelius, Report to the Evangelical Church in Germany (multilithed by the National Lutheran Council, New York; n.d.), p. 3.

name-giving ritual. Unusually aggressive party functionaries made their rounds in maternity wards of hospitals, soliciting participation from the mothers of new babies. Not all appeals were carried out in this straightforward manner. Factory workers and public employees were made to understand that failure to bring their young children for the name-giving rite might prove to be a serious stumbling block in a job promotion.

Along with youth dedication discussed in an earlier chapter, the establishment of these pseudo-religious rites represented the efforts of the East German regime to wean the loyalty of people from the church. Political strategists were aware of the fact that the connection which many East German people had with the church was based merely upon a traditional respect for the clergy and the ecclesiastical institution and crystallized in baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial. If suitable rituals with a Communist content could be imposed upon people to replace the religious ones, the church would lose her influence over people completely. Obviously, this would take time, but with the government in control of all the mass communication media and of all educational and economic opportunities, the Communist politicians could well afford to muster some tolerance and patience while looking forward to the disappearance of every trace of religious life in their society.

Available statistical data indicate that in recent years a declining number of people have made use of baptism, confirmation, and marriage; however, funeral services conducted by the clergy have enjoyed the same demand in spite of the keen competition by Communist funeral orators. Since most of the East German territorial churches in recent

years have submitted only incomplete statistics, it has been impossible to form a comprehensive picture of the extent of the decline in participation in the rites of confirmation and marriage and in the sacrament of baptism. However, the data provided by the territorial churches in Saxony and Silesia could well be taken as representative statistics of the remaining church bodies in East Germany. In 1954 the Lutheran Church in Saxony had a baptized membership of 4,430,000 people and the Evangelical Church in Silesia 230,000 people.<sup>1</sup> A pronounced decrease in the number of baptisms and weddings each year is quite noticeable in the data, but the decline reaches larger proportions starting in 1959 when the Communist rites were being firmly established.

<u>The Lutheran Church in Saxony</u>				<u>The Evangelical Church in Silesia</u>			
<u>Baptisms</u>	<u>Number of:</u>		<u>Year</u>	<u>Baptisms</u>	<u>Number of:</u>		
	<u>Confirmands</u>	<u>Weddings</u>			<u>Confirmands</u>	<u>Weddings</u>	
64,444		27,454	1952	3,796		1,566	
59,485	70,376	22,986	1953	3,781	4,307	1,356	
55,226	60,422	20,477	1954	3,434	3,746	1,173	
52,407	59,965	20,151	1955	3,366	3,606	1,221	
47,162	50,269	17,590	1956	3,144	3,097	1,145	
43,411	47,132	16,629	1957	2,955	2,764	1,072	
34,415	46,004	14,351	1958	2,529	2,544	995	
29,257	17,160	12,814	1959	2,305	957	850	
24,950	12,829	12,161	1960	2,139	754	755 <sub>2</sub>	

This statistical table reflects the rapid disintegration of the East German Volkskirche as an ecclesiastical institution to which almost everyone belonged regardless of his personal convictions. In the Volkskirche many people made use of the sacraments and of the religious rites through force of habit. Since participation in the church's rites and devotional

<sup>1</sup>Brunotte, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1955, p. 404; KJ 1956, p. 345; KJ 1957, p. 258; KJ 1958, p. 389; KJ 1959, p. 361; KJ 1960, p. 328; KJ 1961, p. 398.

life under the Communist regime no longer was a practice approved by society, but rather had become a confession of faith that could evoke possible governmental reprisals, increasing numbers of people refrained from taking part. "The bombardment of anti-religious propaganda has caused the traditions of the Volkskirche to wane; participation in a baptism or wedding, indeed even in a church funeral, has come to signify a personal confession of faith in many congregations."<sup>1</sup> Some parents requested that their children be baptized secretly by pastors, and at times they went for that purpose to communities where they were unknown. On the other hand, for the sake of expediency many nominal members decided to sever their relations with the church altogether. Thus the Volkskirche or the people's church has in recent years changed and become a confessing church, composed of only a few believers with deep faith and convictions.

The decline in the number of participants in the church's rites does not necessarily imply that all those who failed to take part accepted Communist rituals. Many people might have decided to abstain from both the Christian and the Communist ceremonies. The singular exception to this was Stalinstadt, where in 1958 68 out of 70 couples were married by a Communist functionary.<sup>2</sup> No data have been made available which would indicate the total number of Communist name-giving and marriage rites performed each year in other cities. In any case, it is reasonable to

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1959. pp. 220-221.

<sup>2</sup>Neuer Tag, August 22, 1958.

assume that these pseudo-religious rites have been firmly established in East Germany and that an increasing number of people take part in them while the number making use of the church's sacraments and ceremonies is obviously decreasing.

The purpose of the Communist cult was astutely described in an encyclical letter issued by East German Roman Catholic bishops to their congregations on February 8, 1959:

One knows what the church and her service, her sacraments, and her tradition mean to the Christian. Therefore, secular forms must now serve as substitutes. By means of sacred acts and vows men shall be led to forget God and the church, and to sell themselves solely to the world, to work and to society. All this is done to impose the heresy of self-salvation under an impressive mask upon the life of men. The rites of Socialist name-giving, Socialist youth dedication, Socialist marriage, and Socialist funeral are atheistic in nature and have recently been furthered to an ever-increasing degree by state and party officials. The pressure to participate especially in the youth dedication program has grown to an intolerable degree.<sup>1</sup>

Efforts were also made by political circles to lend a Communist appearance to Christian festivals such as Christmas. By order of the East German government, public schools were required in 1949 to center their programs during the Christmas season around the birthday of Joseph Stalin which happened to fall on December 22. After the death of Stalin in 1953, "Grandfather Frost" became the new symbol of the Christmas season in Soviet countries. Dressed much like the European St. Nicholas, he was depicted as a person who rewarded children for their participation in activities of the Communist youth organizations and for their good Communist behavior. The legend about "Grandfather Frost" has been told

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<sup>1</sup>"Die Lage der Kirche in der Sowjetzone," Bulletin (Bonn: Presse und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung), No. 142, p. 1413.

with dramatic effect during every Christmas season in schools and political youth rallies in order to give children a substitute for the Biblical story of Christ's nativity. Christmas vacation was renamed "winter vacation." Extracts from Ukrainian radio programs, which were designed to "enlighten" listeners about the true nature of such narratives as the nativity of Christ, were presented as a regular feature of the Christmas season on East German broadcasts starting January, 1958.

Like any other religious festival, Christmas is harmful not only because propaganda of a religious nature principally irreconcilable with Marxism and Leninism is made during the festival, but also because it gives a new lease on life to the religious residue in the consciousness of some people . . . Jesus Christ is an imaginary person who, of course, never lived.<sup>1</sup>

Louis Fuernberg in East Germany even wrote a "Christmas" poem with a Communist content:

An Old-New Christmas Song

A child in a stable came to the world,  
Joseph the father 'd no money to pay  
for a bed all white and a room.  
On straw the Mother Mary lay,  
and cry as she might in agony  
none but dull oxen and ass could hear  
her moaning and whimpering.

Joseph looked out the stable door,  
but woe! the Three Kings failed to appear  
with gold and incense and myrrh.  
Mary held the Babe in her arms,  
her body must be the stove for His warmth,  
and instead of the milk that God pray send!  
was only the rust in the bowl.

"Ah Joseph, dear Joseph mine,  
how sad I am for this child of mine . . .  
Ah Joseph, what's to become of us?  
You ask for work, and they leave you to stand . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudosakrale Staatsakte in der Sowjetzone, p. 11.

Ah Joseph, we must go and beg,  
 My Joseph, I can see no end  
 to this earthly misery!"

And as they squatted in stable cold  
 and moaned aloud, they heard without  
 in the yard a gladdening song.  
 The door flung wide. In the lantern's light  
 came many young shepherds within,  
 to bring the parents and delicate child  
 the message of goodness and joy:

"We shepherds come from a far, fair land,  
 the people there have banished their need  
 when they redeemed themselves.  
 The children there grow up in the light,  
 and hunger and misery cannot exist,  
 for none's in straits for a roof and bread.  
 The meanest now are the great."

"Oh lead us there!" sad Joseph begged,  
 a star in the heavens rose aloft,  
 red was the light it shed.  
 That is the wonder-working Star  
 of knowledge and courage that steels men's hearts,  
 and if you know it, then you have well read  
 the story the Bible told.<sup>1</sup>

A number of new "sacred" days commemorating the heroic lives and deeds of Communist leaders were to replace all Christian festivals traditionally observed in East Germany. Prominent in the new Communist calendar were Lenin Day (April 22), Labor Day (May 1), Karl Marx Day (May 5), the Day of Peace (September 1), the Day of the October Revolution (November 7), Friedrich Engels Day (November 28), and Joseph Stalin's birthday (December 22). East German stores even carried greeting cards for some of these "sacred" days and occasions such as the name-giving rite, youth dedication, the Day of the People's Army, Teachers' Day,

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<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Church, p. 25.

Railroaders' Day, Miners' Day, and Freedom Day.<sup>1</sup>

Protests raised by church leaders against the introduction of the Communist cult in the country and the secularization of Christian festivals were of no avail. On the contrary, the ideological campaign to win people for the Communist rites was carried on with an ever-increasing intensity. Through pastoral letters churchmen continued to admonish their people to abstain from the secular rites. Whether their admonition was heeded usually depended on the depth of faith and conviction of the individual church member.

Leaders of the church made it very clear that they would never voluntarily permit the church to be banished from public life and be forced into a private ghetto or to have her activities reduced to a mere perfunctory performance of certain rituals. They were determined to continue with the church's charitable work in public life and to take a stand on important national issues. There was a deep-seated conviction voiced on numerous occasions. It was probably best summarized by Guenter Jacob at the 1956 synod in Berlin when he stated that the character of the Gospel as "the good news of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ" would never permit its limitation either as a mere "cult" or as a purely personal and private matter separated from public responsibility. In humility and obedience to God, he said, the church must regard the whole world as her work room in which she worships, witnesses, and serves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Namensweihe in Dresden," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, July 20, 1959.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1956, pp. 9-17.

It should be noted again, by way of summary, that the utter extinction of religion is an ultimate goal of Communism which is to be achieved partly through an enclosure of the church within well-marked bounds and through an establishment of rival rites. This strategy has been used by the East German government in its attempt to stamp out the religious life. In order to weaken her influence in public life, the church was ordered by the government to discontinue some of her public welfare work. The material aid program of the Relief organization was outlawed in 1950 and the work of the Railway Mission was forcibly closed in 1956. Several of the church institutional building complexes were seized in 1953, and others fell under government control through subtle labor union infiltration in 1956. To make the operation of the church's program as difficult as possible, the state undermined her economic structure. With traditional sources of income substantially reduced and at times cut off, the church was forced to rely upon financial aid from Christians in West Germany. In its attempt to circumscribe the church's life as tightly as possible, the government permitted clergymen to conduct religious services only in church buildings. Special licenses had to be obtained for meetings which were not thought to be strictly "religious" in nature. The government then initiated its own "religious" cult which resulted in a rapid decline in the number of people participating in the church's rites and sacraments, shattering the structure of the traditional Volkskirche.

## VII. RENDER THE COUP DE GRACE TO THE CHURCH: IDEOLOGICAL WARFARE

Marxist leaders believe that the final obliteration of religion will be achieved through a dissemination of atheistic knowledge. Soviet Russia was the first country in which a systematic propagation of atheistic thought was initiated. With their revolution of 1917 Bolshevik leaders apparently still anticipated that in keeping with Marx's prediction religion would wither away and die a natural death. This did not happen. Even fierce persecutions after 1917 did not bring about the complete demise of the Russian Orthodox church and, although many people severed their relation with the religious community at that time, others were determined to suffer martyrdom rather than to abjure their faith. It was partially due to this situation that Lenin and Stalin were persuaded to change their course, thus persecutions abated in intensity and were now supplanted by anti-religious propaganda. In 1922 Lenin definitely concluded that infusing people with atheistic thought constituted a better weapon in striking at religion than the use of brute force.

Since 1922 the spread of atheism in Communist countries has been carried out with rather consistent fervor, interrupted only by World War II. Like his predecessors, Nikita Khrushchev urged efforts to instill the people with atheistic ideas. In the aforementioned article of 1954, he gave new impetus to this ideological crusade by calling for a "broader

development of scientific-atheistic propaganda" in Communist countries.<sup>1</sup> Khrushchev's position on this issue hardened even more after 1954; no words of amelioration were found in his address before the twenty-second Communist congress of 1961 when he called once more for renewed efforts in the ideological battle waged against religion.<sup>2</sup>

East German government officials and party functionaries followed the directives of the Soviet leaders with great zeal. They were bent on reshaping people as rapidly as possible in the Soviet mold of atheism. Soon after Khrushchev issued his directive in 1954 the first anti-religious books and pamphlets appeared openly on the book market of the German Democratic Republic. The avowed purpose of the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge was to further these ventures in the field of publication and the volume of its anti-religious material has so far been surpassed only by that of the SED. The latter proved to be no mere "paper-tiger" in the ideological onslaught. About half of all anti-religious books published came from the SED press, the Dietz book concern located in East Berlin. In 1958 the SED established a committee for ideological enlightenment whose purpose was to supervise and improve the production of all atheistic literature in East Germany. Its goal was to publish every month about two pamphlets with atheistic contents in editions of 150,000 copies each.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pravda, July 24, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Neues Deutschland, October 18, 1961.

<sup>3</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, p. 42.

Party directives and government pronouncements advocating a systematic diffusion of atheistic knowledge were issued with increasing frequency beginning in 1954. They revealed the Communist theoreticians' apparent belief that the time had arrived for the spread of atheism on a wide scale in East Germany--the stage was set for an all-out ideological attack upon the church.

The anti-religious campaign in East Germany reached an intensity unknown in any other Soviet-dominated country. Some authorities attribute this to an allegedly German trait of treating all philosophical and ideological issues with methodical thoroughness.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it might be more reasonable to assume that two aforementioned events--the launching of the Soviet sputnik and the signing of the military chaplaincy agreement--were partly responsible for the nature and intensity of the assault. The zeal with which the East German Communists undertook their ideological battle found expression in a startling increase in atheistic publications. According to the best information available, only four books of a definitely anti-religious cast came off the presses in 1955; six additional books were printed in 1956 and 1957 respectively. The publication of this type of literature increased to twenty-one books in 1958.

A lesser number of only eight new anti-religious titles were published in 1959, but by no means did this imply an attenuation of the ideological charge. In actuality the total volume of copies had greatly multiplied since seven of the twenty-one books published in 1958 and four of the books

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1958, p. 199.

printed in previous years had been reedited for the third or fourth time by 1959. For instance, 280,000 copies of the booklet, The Sputnik and Dear God,<sup>1</sup> came off the press in four successive editions in 1958. The pamphlet, Life After Death?,<sup>2</sup> was reedited three times within the span of a year at a volume of 200,000 copies. The total number of each reedited book was somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 copies. In 1959 several writers worked on new atheistic books which were to be published at a later date--Goetz Gode was preparing for print an anti-clerical novel, The Unholy Shabuoth; Gottfried Herold was working on a novel to show how the old religious "nonsense" was slowly but surely being pushed aside by Socialism; Inge von Wangenheim was writing a novel in which two people in love were struggling with the question of whether a person could be a nuclear physicist without rejecting religion and embracing dialectical materialism; and Alex Wedding was preparing a book designed particularly to help children, who attended both confirmation and youth dedication classes, make a decision for Communism.<sup>3</sup>

#### A. Literature

In 1953 the publication enterprise in East Germany was placed under the direct control of the Ministry of Culture, which henceforth issued all licenses for the operation of publishing houses as well as for the

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Rochhausen, Der Sputnik und der liebe Gott. 4th ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Ernst Haeckel, Gibt es ein Weiterleben nach dem Tod? 3rd ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>The Roman Catholic Church. p. 41.

production of books and pamphlets. Licenses were to be granted above all for the publication of that literature which would contribute most to the solution of the economic, political, and cultural problems of the country.<sup>1</sup> Of 117 existing publishing houses in 1955, 106 belonged to the SED or to one of the subsidiary organizations of the government, while only 11 remained in private hands. About 6.1 per cent of all publications in 1955 were handled by private book concerns and 93.9 per cent came from the state-owned presses.<sup>2</sup> By far the largest publishing house was the Dietz Verlag in East Berlin which was operated by the SED. The Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge and the Free German Youth had each one large book concern, the Urania Verlag in Leipzig-Jena and the Neues Leben Verlag in East Berlin.

The publication houses operated by the church were compelled to merge into one single book concern, the Evangelischer Verlag, in East Berlin. The volume of church publications was drastically limited by a "paper shortage."<sup>3</sup> However, the production of Bibles fell into a different category--under a separate agreement between church and state a limited number of Bibles were printed by the Altenburg Bible Society and by the Central Evangelical Bible Society.

The same mendacious accusations and derisive cavils were repeated in all anti-religious books. The church was always depicted as an "antiquated

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland. May 3, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 328.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1959, p. 202.

institution of exploitation and superstition" while the party was presented as an "agency of enlightenment and progress." "Faith and stupidity, church and inquisition, religion and mysticism, clergy and hypocrisy, monk and quack, nun and cudgel woman--all this was to coalesce like poison in a feeling of shudder and horror in people."<sup>1</sup> Clandestine references were made to the backwardness of people who took religion seriously. The goal was to imbue people with a resentment against religion and to cause them to relinquish their church membership. Religious faith was to be replaced by a feeling of pride in the achievements of Soviet science. By the same token the content of certain religious books in some localities was held up for public ridicule. In one instance a window display of "filthy and trashy" literature sponsored by political agents in Naumburg included copies of the Old Testament and pamphlets written by West German theologians.<sup>2</sup>

A cursory perusal of the atheistic literature published between 1954 and 1960 will reveal the nature and scope of the ideological attack launched upon the church. In some of the books, the nature of religion is discussed only in general terms while the acceptance of atheism is urged upon people. In another category of literature, religion is dealt with from a pseudo-scientific point of view. Finally, in a third category of books, the integrity and character of certain church leaders come under the blatant attack of protagonists of Marxism.

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<sup>1</sup>Hermann Hartung and Gottfried Paulsen, Was liest die Jugend der Sowjetzone? (Bonn: Deutscher Bundes-Verlag, 1959), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Solberg, p. 258.

## 1. The Nature of Religion

Precisely 8,321 new book titles were published in 1956 in East Germany; 985 of them were translations from the Russian and other Slavic languages.<sup>1</sup> It was not surprising then to find that several treatises on religion written by Soviet authors were translated into German. Foremost mention should be made of F. N. Oleschtschuk's delineation of Atheism, which was originally written for the Large Soviet Russian Encyclopedia.<sup>2</sup> He contended that atheism was not just a flaccid negation of a supreme being, but much rather an aggressive force which would overcome every "remnant of religious superstition." Almost an identical definition of atheism was given by Zebenکو in his work, Atheism of the French Materialists in the 18th Century.<sup>3</sup> Similar convictions were expressed in three other Russian translations, Religious Superstition and its Harm,<sup>4</sup> The Rise of Religion,<sup>5</sup> and The Inception and Class Structure of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> As might be surmised from their titles, the "evil" socio-economic aspect of religion constituted the main subject of analysis in these books.

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup>F. N. Oleschtschuk, Atheismus (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1955).

<sup>3</sup>M. D. Zebenکو, Atheismus der franzoesischen Materialisten im achtzehnten Jahrhundert (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>P. Pawjolkin, Der religioese Aberglaube und seine Schaedlichkeit (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1954).

<sup>5</sup>J. P. Franzew, Die Entstehung der Religion (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1959).

<sup>6</sup>A. P. Gagarin, Die Entstehung und der Klassencharakter des Christentums (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1955).

Another translation, Kolonizki's Communist and Religious Morality, was published by the Communist Youth organization as an aid in the education of the East German youth. The author's classical Marxist thesis that religious ethics furthered slavery and exploitation while Communist morals strengthened liberty and progress has already been noted previously. He insisted that the phenomenon of religion was the result of man's utter helplessness in his struggle against the ruling classes. Kolonizki denied that religion ever served as the foundation of morality and asserted that it was the basis of immorality. "Religion," he declared, "is the fountainhead of hypocrisy and lies. Everything which religion preaches is consciously false and contains not even a small kernel of truth." The "so-called holy gospel" represents simply an accumulation of spurious stories and fairy tales which were invented to divert the thoughts of workers from the realities of this life to a "fantastic heavenly salvation with a mythical life after death." Such superstition, stated Kolonizki, could never be tolerated by the Communist movement. The main aim of his booklet was to confront people with a new concept of morality: "Whatever serves the cause of the people, the interests in the liberation of laboring people, and the creation of the classless Communist society--that is unconditionally moral. In contrast . . . whatever impedes the battle of Communism--is unconditionally immoral."<sup>1</sup> Kolonizki believed that this principle of morality enabled the Soviet man to become a fearless fighter on behalf of the new Communist society and a free master of his fate.

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<sup>1</sup>Kolonizki, p. 9.

The Communist concept of morality propounded by Kolonizki became one of the basic motifs which was used by East German writers and playwrights in their literary activities. It was set forth with particular eloquence in The Measure, a stage production by Bertolt Brecht, a noted East German playwright.

Whoever fights for Communism  
 Must be able to fight and not to fight  
 To tell the truth or not to tell the truth  
 To render services and to deny services  
 To keep promises and to break promises  
 Expose himself to danger and to avoid danger  
 To be known and to be unknown  
 Whoever fights for Communism  
 Has only a single virtue:  
 That he fight for Communism.<sup>1</sup>

The new Communist standards of morality were also used by poets as a means to justify the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961. Heinz Czechowski in his poem "The New Age" sought to provide such justification:

The New Age  
 Requires a new morality  
 We work, plan, co-rule--  
 Rulers without number.

We build industrial combinations,  
 Improve an improved world.  
 We ask for peace  
 That what we build may abide.

As long as on the other side  
 No friendly state exists,  
 We learn the building of a wall,  
 But how to shoot as well.<sup>2</sup>

The classical teachings of Marxism on religion were compiled and

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<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Pressespiegel der Sowjetzone, No. 16 (April 24, 1962), p. 3.

published in two separate works, Marx-Engels on Religion<sup>1</sup> and Lenin on Religion.<sup>2</sup> An up-to-date interpretation of these teachings was given by the aforesaid Scheler in his booklet, The Position of Marxism-Leninism Towards Religion. In it Scheler analyzed the official position of Marxism, and therefore of the SED, towards the church in modern East Germany and towards every form of religious life. From the Supernatural to the Natural was the first book published in a new series entitled Signposts to Atheism.<sup>3</sup> The Marxist interpretation of fifty metaphysical concepts such as "truth," "soul," "freedom," and "righteousness" was given in this volume. A brief explanation about procedures to be followed in the abrogation of church membership was also included. The authors assured the readers that additional volumes of this series would soon be forthcoming.

The nature of the Christian faith was scurrilously assailed in an anthology of satirical essays and poems published under the title Secrets of Religion.<sup>4</sup> The apparent purpose of this work was to befoul even the most sacred teachings of the Christian faith. The book also contained some of the farcical reflections on religion written by such well-known authors as Maxim Gorky, Wladimir Majakowski, Giovanni Di Boccaccio, Francisco

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Ueber die Religion (Berlin: Diets Verlag, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>W. I. Lenin, Ueber die Religion, 4th ed. (Berlin: Diets Verlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Guenter Heyden, Karl Mollnau, and Horst Ulrich, Von Jenseits zum Diesseits (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1959).

<sup>4</sup>Geheimnisse der Religion, ed. R. Hoffman, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1958).

De Goya, and Mark Twain. Another publication with the identical design was the book, In the Name of God.<sup>1</sup> The author expatiated with much overt glee and sarcasm upon every misdeed committed in the name of God throughout history. Derisive references to religion were also quite common in history books written for the "average" reader. For instance, a whole section of Chapter II of World History<sup>2</sup> consisted of poems by Erich Weinert who was the leading propagandist of atheism in Germany during the Weimar Republic. In one of his poems, "The Fable on the Divine World Order," Weinert described a potter who was well off as long as he sold the pots by himself, but whose fate changed when he agreed to have another man sell the pots for him.

And since what the pots had yielded  
 Grew into abundance, the man took  
 Two people into his house, who were not eager  
 To work, and said to them:  
 "You will be well off, if you serve me,  
 You are my priest, and you my hangman!  
 You have heard the complaints of the farmers  
 That this kingdom was unjustly earned,  
 And even the potter has lost his love for work.  
 You, Priest, will have to find a Law for me  
 Proving the order I introduced  
 Was made by God; and all disobedience  
 Will invoke punishment by the Almighty.  
 And you, my Hangman, shall be his companion  
 Wherever he preaches. And whenever  
 A grumble emerges, threaten with the sword!"  
 The Landlord took land, and cattle, and cabins,  
 And forced into servitude those becoming poor.  
 And when they gathered to deliberate  
 The Priest appeared and warned them  
 Of resistance against the order of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Im Namen Gottes, ed. G. Heyden and H. Ulrich (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1959).

<sup>2</sup>Kapitel II der Weltgeschichte (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1954).

The socio-economic position of womanhood in the Christian religion came under scrutiny in a book entitled Woman and Religion.<sup>1</sup> According to the author, women had always been enslaved by the church, the Bible fostered polygamy and approved of harems, and the sexual exploitation and misuse of women by "pious" men was nonchalantly tolerated or even encouraged. Throughout ages the church insisted that women should perform three tasks: work in the kitchen, pray in the church, and bear children. Communism changed the status of women and liberated them from this yoke. The book's content was vividly summarized on the front cover by a picture which depicted a Christian woman as a withered nun and a Communist woman as a young, fecund female blooming with health and happiness.

Some polemical literature, which was written by deceased materialistic thinkers, was published in new editions. For instance, selected writings of Ludwig Feuerbach, one of the leading materialistic philosophers of the nineteenth century, were reedited and published under the titles Man Created God in His Image<sup>2</sup> and The Nature of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Ernst Haeckel's influential brochure, Life After Death?, was reissued three times in 1958. Haeckel, an eminent natural scientist, had sought to prove the irrationality of the belief that a corporeal being such as man should be endowed with an incorporeal substance such as a soul.

<sup>1</sup>Karl-Heinz Jesper, Frau und Religion (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1959).

<sup>2</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, Der Mensch schuf Gott nach seinem Bilde, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, Das Wesen des Christentums, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956).

Even though some of his ethnological theories were completely overshadowed by the research of the last fifty years, Haeckel's writings were reprinted without any comment in an obvious attempt to make capital of his famous name. The literary legacy of August Bebel, one of the earliest Marxist leaders in Germany, was also republished in several editions under the title Is Religion Necessary for People?<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Soviet Science and Religion

In a number of books and articles the Christian faith was attacked from the vantage point of Soviet science. The "pseudo-scientific" literature evidenced the convictions of the authors that religion would soon wither away and that the future belonged to Soviet man. One of the books, Scientific Prediction—Religious Prejudice,<sup>2</sup> was a case in point. Gurjew, its Soviet Russian author, asserted that faith in a supernatural being is actually harmful to man because it keeps him from developing his innate capacity for self-reliance and that miracles and prophecies originated through ignorance or deception. Only Soviet knowledge, based on scientific social and natural laws, enables man to predict the future; scientific action by human beings rather than blind faith in supernatural beings will give rise to a new and bright world. In bourgeois society, Gurjew observed, religion is a necessary evil which would be overcome with the defeat of capitalism. "In Socialist society, where exploitation of man by man is

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<sup>1</sup>August Bebel, Ist die Religion fuer das Volk Noetig? 2nd ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>G. A. Gurjew, Wissenschaftliche Voraussicht—Religioeses Vorurteil. 2nd and shortened ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

non-existent and everyone is assured of a happy future, the reason for the existence of superstition is removed."<sup>1</sup> The same line of reasoning was followed by other Soviet scientists in their works entitled Nature-Man-Religion<sup>2</sup> and The Myth of the Soul,<sup>3</sup> both of which were translated into German. In another book, Natural Science and Religion,<sup>4</sup> a survey of history was made to ascertain the nature of religious opposition to the development of natural science. The author concluded that Soviet science was the most advanced form of natural scientific knowledge, and since religious faith and natural science were diametrically opposed to each other, the Christian religion would wane to the point of extinction while Soviet science would rise to unprecedented heights. In a work entitled Is the Bible Valid?<sup>5</sup> an attempt was made superciliously to refute the historical credibility of Biblical narrations and to prove that the Scriptures had always been a major hindrance to progress. Similar efforts were made in the booklet Faith or Knowledge?<sup>6</sup>

Some writers employed biological data in order to disparage certain

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>B. M. Kedrow, et al., Natur-Mensch-Religion (Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums fuer Nationale Verteidigung, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>D. A. Ehrjukow, Der Mythos von der Seele (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1959).

<sup>4</sup>Olof Klohr, Naturwissenschaft und Religion (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>5</sup>Heinrich Fuchz, Hat die Bibel Recht?, 3rd ed. (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1958).

<sup>6</sup>Herbert Gute, Glauben oder Wissen (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

religious tenets. In the treatise, How Life Originated on Earth.<sup>1</sup> the Darwinian theory of evolution was set forth as an undisputable scientific fact. No acknowledgment was made by the author of the fact that Darwinianism is merely one of several "theories" by which an attempt is made to explain the riddle of life and the universe; the Biblical account of the origin of life was given no hearing. The thrust of the Darwinian theory was also used in another booklet, Man Created by God?<sup>2</sup> in which the author ridiculed the Biblical account of creation. The tenor of the "scientific" methodology found in that booklet was vividly revealed on the cover picture where the "Creator" was depicted as an aged and stooped grandfather with a long beard and bald head. Caught up in the business of creating man, God holds a needle and measuring tab in His hands and a human skeleton partly covered with red flesh stands before Him on a chair. Pieces of human integument are sewn to the raw flesh by the "Creator" and half-naked little angels with wings are seated on the ground, cutting pieces of human skin with huge scissors for the human skeleton. Another bewinged angel engages in the business of ironing out some wrinkles from a huge bale of integument. This brief description of the cover picture will suffice to reveal something about the "scientific" nature of that booklet, which through repeated printings attained the level of 150,000 copies within a few months after its publication.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob Segal, Wie das Leben auf der Erde entstand. 3rd ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Guenter Ostmann and Harald Wessel, Ist der Mensch von Gott erschaffen? (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

The successful launching of the Soviet sputnik on October 4, 1957, inspired some writers to contemplate the nature of religion from yet another "scientific" point of view. The line of reasoning followed by most authors of the "sputnik literature" was usually identical; possibly the only variation was in the degree of sarcasm expressed in their booklets. The logic of such a brochure as Holy Heaven--Unholy Rockets<sup>1</sup> was typical: since the sputniks were unable to find any trace of God in the universe, he is non-existent. The author of the pamphlet, No Room for God in the Universe,<sup>2</sup> manifested the same conviction. In the booklet, The Sputnik and Dear God, the author stated in biting language: "It is peculiar that dear God should permit those to penetrate into the universe who do not believe in Him, namely, the godless Communists. His faithful shepherds spend much time in fervent prayer, but aside from that they are unable to do anything but to send to heaven the odious stench of rockets exploding in utter failure."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. The Evangelical Church

The ideological Communist attack upon the religious community in East Germany was focused especially on Bishop Dibelius. The editors of Neues Deutschland, the official organ of the SED, published in 1960 a

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<sup>1</sup>Guenter Heyden and Horst Ulrich, Heilige Himmel--Unheilige Raketen (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Pfaffe and Karl-Heinz Naumann, Kein Platz fuer Gott im Weltall (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Rochhausen, p. 3.

"documentation" entitled Here Speaks Dibelius.<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from his speeches and sermons taken out of context were reproduced in that book, surreptitiously interspersed with statements and pictures of leading Nazis of the former Third Reich. Some of Hitler's utterances were used as a basis for interpreting Dibelius' homilies. With unfailing regularity the editors reiterated the charge that Dibelius was in collusion with the American imperialists just as he formerly was in collusion with the Nazi regime. A summary statement read that "in word and deed Otto Dibelius misused his authority in the church . . . he supported politics of war and of German militarism . . . he prepared the way for the Third Reich . . . he justified the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich . . . he now defends an atomic war, the spread of an ideology of revenge, and a propaganda of hatred against the East."<sup>2</sup> In order to support their claims with "cogent evidence," the editors introduced two pictures showing Dibelius in the company of Nazi leaders. The first picture was taken on March 21, 1933, when Dibelius and other clergymen greeted Paul von Hindenburg, who was then president of the Weimar Republic, in front of the Nikolai church at Potsdam before a worship service,<sup>3</sup> and the second picture depicted "Dibelius" sitting in the chancel of the Garrison Church at Potsdam during an official ceremony at which both von Hindenburg and Hitler were the speakers. These pictures were to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that

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<sup>1</sup>Hier spricht Dibelius—Eine Dokumentation. ed. Neues Deutschland (Berlin: Ruetten & Loening, 1960).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-135.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 65, 73.

Dibelius had indeed collaborated with the Nazis. A copy of Here Speaks Dibelius was sent to every clergyman in East Germany as a complimentary gift from the editors of Neues Deutschland.

In defence against these charges Dibelius retorted in his autobiography that his record under the Nazis spoke for itself. He was deposed from his church post as superintendent-general of the Kurmark in 1937 by Nazi authorities and later stripped of every vestige of ecclesiastical authority because he had dared to uphold the freedom of the church's conscience under the totalitarian government. He was affiliated with the Freiburg group which plotted the overthrow of Hitler--most members of that group were put to death after the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life by Goerdeler in August, 1944. Finally, at the risk of their own personal safety, Dibelius and his wife harbored Jewish people in their home to the very end of World War II.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind Dibelius wrote "it was not altogether easy to get the congregations of my diocese to believe this [the Communist charges], for everyone knew how I had fared under National Socialist rule."<sup>2</sup> Regarding the photograph showing him and von Hindenburg in front of the Nikolai church, Dibelius declared "what the picture showed was an elementary act of courtesy which is performed as a matter of course all over the world when the head of state takes part in a solemn service. This picture could hardly be interpreted as evidence of National Socialist leanings."<sup>3</sup> Concerning the second pictorial print,

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<sup>1</sup>Dibelius, In the Service of the Lord, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

Bishop Dibelius averred that "this picture showed a gowned clergyman sitting in the chancel behind Hitler. It was asserted that I was the clergyman, although it was plain at a glance that I was not present. It was pure fakery."<sup>1</sup>

The author of another booklet, Cross and Federal Eagle,<sup>2</sup> dubbed Dibelius as the "Atom-Bishop," a villainous American warmonger blessing the atomic arsenals of the West. The author noted that even though it appeared that Dibelius was an "incorrigible fascist," the church as a whole need not follow in the footsteps of the "Atom-Bishop"--the door to the World Peace Movement was open to the church and the community of believers was welcome to join forces with the German Democratic Republic to strive side by side for lasting peace and a better world for all people.

In his autobiography Dibelius had the following comments to make about the often-repeated charges, such as was made in Cross and Federal Eagle, that he endorsed the possession and use of atomic weapons by the West:

Two years after the Evanston conference [1954], it was suddenly alleged that I had said, at the conference, that the atomic bomb was really not so bad after all; it simply sent 100,000 people to heaven more speedily than usual! It was impossible to find anyone who had actually heard such a statement with his own ears. On the other hand, those who had been at Evanston stated one after the other that they had never heard me say any such thing. Nevertheless, the statement was reiterated in schools, at all Communist meetings, in all newspapers, for years on end. I kept receiving letters from

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup>Harald Wessel, Kreuz und Bundesadler (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

pastors saying that there was talk of it in the congregations, and was there any truth in it? In the streets of East Berlin, along the autobahn and in many other places, huge billboards showed the "Atom-Bishop" with appropriate captions. When one of our leading clergy had it out with the Secretary of State for Church Affairs, saying that the authorities knew perfectly well that the story was pure invention, he was told: "If it is against Bishop Dibelius, then any stick will do!"<sup>1</sup>

In 1959 the central committee of the SED commissioned the writing of a book entitled Philosophy of Crime.<sup>2</sup> In it the church and her shepherds were assailed with a verbiage of abusive language. The specific charge brought against the church was that she had consistently contributed to the development of German militarism. Starting at a very tender age the church would teach children to hate the East and later she would provide for them a theological rationale whereby they would readily accept atomic weapons from the United States. Thus the church was in reality not teaching a theology of God but a philosophy of crime.

A somewhat similar accusation was hurled against the Evangelical academies in a book called The Crusade of the Evangelical Academies Against Marxism.<sup>3</sup> The academies were said to break the proletarian will for revolution in the Western hemisphere by rendering a false interpretation of Marxism to the laboring people and by applying the Christian faith to the daily life of the masses.

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<sup>1</sup>Dibelius, In the Service of the Lord, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>Guenter Heyden, et al., Philosophie des Verbrechens (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1959).

<sup>3</sup>Dieter Bergner and Wolfgang Jahn, Der Kreuzzug der evangelischen Akademien gegen den Marxismus (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960).

#### 4. The Roman Catholic Church

Although constituting a minority group in East Germany, Roman Catholicism did not escape the scathing ideological attack upon religion. In one publication, The Vatican and Neo-Fascism,<sup>1</sup> the "dictatorial" hierarchy of the papal see was compared to that of the Nazi regime. The same position was set forth in the work, The Criminal Record of Political Catholicism,<sup>2</sup> when the author suggested that Roman Catholicism had always favored fascism because the pope was usually able to procure special privileges for his church from Nazi dictators. The present aim of the papal see was to Catholicize the United States with the greatest speed possible, changing it into a neo-fascist country. The author concluded that as a radical rightist bastion, the pope would then be able to deploy America against the Communist bloc. The "infamous" role of the Roman Catholic church in "furthering" the military objectives of the Nazi regime during World War II was the subject of analysis in a book entitled The Vatican in World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Certain Roman Catholic practices were accorded an uncommonly vulgar treatment by some writers. For instance, one author devoted his whole book, The Holy Robe of Trier,<sup>4</sup> to a discussion of the "utter absurdity" of a Catholic practice such as the veneration of relics. One of the

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<sup>1</sup>Alighiero Tondi, Vatikan und Neofaschismus, 5th ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1959).

<sup>2</sup>Karl A. Mollnau, Aus dem Schuldbuch des politischen Katholizismus (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>M. M. Scheinemann, Der Vatikan im zweiten Weltkrieg (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>G. Zschaebitz, Der Heilige Rock von Trier (Leipzig-Jena: Urania Verlag, 1959).

authoritative publications on philosophy in East Germany entitled Jesuits--God--Matter was written by Professor Georg Klaus.<sup>1</sup> The thrust of Klaus' work was directed against the theological position propounded by the well-known Jesuit scholar Gustav A. Wetter. The preface and concluding remarks in particular were of a primitive and scurrilous nature: Klaus opined that "the Jesuits have inherited nothing from the apostles but the purse and the kiss of Judas" and that Wetter had many things in common with the "infamous American warmonger J. F. Dulles."

### 5. Anti-Religious Novels

The ideological campaign to undermine the religious faith of people was carried out not only through "scientific-political" literature but also through the subtle use of fiction. A number of novels published in recent years with a definite anti-religious innuendo were written especially for children and youth. The plot which novelists often used either revealed the cruelty of religious fanatics to hapless young people or it depicted the uncanny support given by evil pastors and priests to debauched bourgeois people. The obvious purpose of the stories was to win the sympathy of youth for the Communist cause and simultaneously to instill in them a deep dislike for the church.

A novel by Edwin Strittmatter called The Miracle-Maker<sup>2</sup> was published with the purpose of unmasking the "fraudulent" character of religious miracles. It became the book of the month among the Free German Youth in

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<sup>1</sup>Georg Klaus, Jesuiten--Gott--Materie (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Erwin Strittmatter, Der Wundermacher (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1957).

1958. In one of the scenes Stanislaus, one of the heroes of the story, a young schoolboy who already had his own naive but clever thoughts about religion, related during a class session his own interpretation of the miracle of the raising of the young man at Nain.<sup>1</sup>

Stanislaus tells the story about the young man of Nain. The children began to pay attention. ". . . When he [Christ] came to the gate of the city, behold a corpse was carried out. He was a youth. He had a mother and was her only son. His mother was at work. The son had stolen into the cellar, and there he found the preserves. So he started refreshing himself." The class laughed . . .

"He ate until he had devoured all. Then he got a belly-ache, and he was overcome with grief: 'Heavens, what will my mother say when she comes home from work!' And his belly ached more and more, and he laid down on the sofa. When his mother came, he pretended to be dead." The children giggled . . .

"The mother moaned: 'Oh God, oh God, my dear son is dead.' The cellar would have revealed why he was dead."

Now the class began to get excited . . . Stanislaus continued his story: "When the Lord saw the corpse, he smelled the rat. He saw the boy's blueberry snout and tickled him. The Lord said to the mother: 'Behold, woman, your son has a little belly-ache. I fancy, he has gobbled up your preserves.'"

Now the tumult becomes such that the teacher enters the room. He makes Stanislaus tell his story once more.

This time the story had one more modification. Before his mother came, the youth smeared his face with chalk. He wanted to look genuinely dead.

Several writers sought to portray in their novels the struggle of the proletariat against bourgeois clericalism. Hans Maassen, a winner of the East German "Heinrich-Mann Literary Prize," depicted in his Mass of Barcelo<sup>2</sup> the tremendous accumulation of wealth by Jesuits in Spain and their approval of unjust social conditions at the end of the

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 7:11-17.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Maassen, Die Messe des Barcelo (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1956).

Spanish civil war. According to Maassen, the archbishop of Valencia was in the church after the upheavals of the civil war. Maassen showed how a miracle was "fabricated" by the church so that people would again cling to the priests and bishops. A book by Jan Griwa, Beyond the Pyrenees,<sup>1</sup> also had as its setting the civil war in Spain. It described the "sinister and evil machinations" which priests employed in order to keep their Catholic people from joining the Communist side during the civil war. According to Griwa, the padres of Spain did not hesitate to kill their own parishioners, in order to prevent them from joining forces with the Communist "liberators." The novel, The Crime of Pater Amaro,<sup>2</sup> sought to portray the "clerical tyranny" which the Roman Catholic church exercised over the common people in Portugal. In his children's novel, Trini,<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Renn colorfully depicted the powerful alliance between the clergy and reactionary landowners in Mexico against the poor and exploited peasants and farm hands. Whenever the village padre entered a hut of his peons he instinctively held his nose since the stench of the people's disease was so nauseating. For this work Renn received the East German "National Literature Prize." In Philip Bonosky's boys' novel, He Wished to be a Saint,<sup>4</sup> a young clergyman from a "good bourgeois" family sprinkles the poor people's church with perfume each time he enters the sanctuary for worship

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<sup>1</sup>Jan Griwa, Über den Pyrenaen (Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums fuer Nationale Verteidigung, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Eca de Queiros, Das Verbrechen des Paters Amaro (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1956).

<sup>3</sup>Ludwig Renn, Trini (Berlin: Kinderbuch Verlag, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>Philip Bonosky, Er wollte ein Heiliger sein (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1955).

services. Another fictional story, Pastor Lohkamp,<sup>1</sup> deals with the church's support of rising capitalists and clerical condemnation of the laboring people during the industrial revolution in Germany. The same theme was also used in the novels, The Heretic of Naumburg,<sup>2</sup> and The Brother of the Executioner.<sup>3</sup>

Another favorite theme of East German novelists was that of the alleged mistreatment of children and youth in Christian institutions. The story of a young boy growing up in a Roman Catholic orphanage was related in the book, In the Shadow of the Cross.<sup>4</sup> Old nuns demanded unconditional obedience from the unfortunate orphans on whom no love was wasted and the poor children were taught the extrinsic value of deception and fraud. The young boy finally managed to escape from the orphanage and later came to accept Communist ideals, leaving behind the "evil" influences of religion once and for all. Quite a similar plot served as the basis for the novel, The Wooden Rosary.<sup>5</sup> Young girls were kept locked up like prisoners in a filthy Catholic orphanage where they gained an intimate knowledge of the impure desires and devious sexual life of their supervising nuns.

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<sup>1</sup>Helmut Rohlf's, Pfarrer Lohkamp (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1955).

<sup>2</sup>Rosemarie Schuders, Der Ketzer von Naumburg (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup>Hanna-Heide Kraze, Des Henkers Bruder (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup>Burkhard Homolla, Im Schatten des Kreuzes, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1956).

<sup>5</sup>Natalia Rolleczek, Der hoelzerne Rosenkranz (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1956).

The orphaned girls were daily beaten with wooden rosaries which were otherwise used by the nuns for meditation and prayer. In his travelogue, The Transformed Dragon.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Lundquist, a Swedish winner of the "Lenin Prize," observed that the Roman Catholic orphanages in China were "institutions of terror." In defending Mao Tse-tung's religious persecutions, Lundquist described among other things the alleged living conditions of the children in those orphanages.

Clothed in rags and nourished with garbage, five-year olds had to work at hard labor at least eleven hours a day. Girls reaching the age of seventeen were sold for fifty silver dollars as concubines and working slaves to anyone, not infrequently to sickly, senile men, sadists, and syphilitics. Each day, a certain amount of work was required, and whoever did not fulfill his quota was punished. They had to kneel on stone floors for hours, were confined to dark rooms, and were struck on their naked bodies. Diseases were not treated.

Clergymen were presented in Communist fictions as incorrigible drunkards, sexual perverts, spineless neurotics, and selfish debauchees. The intention of the novelists was apparently to "hit the reader hard between his eyes" through mere shock and to undermine his confidence in the clergy. In Strittmatter's The Miracle-Maker young and innocent Stanislaus, while hospitalized, came to believe in the kindness and purity of a nun until another patient in a neighboring bed disillusioned him by saying: "Holy? But you should see her stare at my genitals whenever she makes my bed." A classical example of this type of literature was Denis Diderot's Nun.<sup>2</sup> Written about 150 years ago, this novel was translated

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Lundquist, Der verwandelte Drachen (Leipzig: V.E.B. Brockhaus Verlag, 1956).

<sup>2</sup>Denis Diderot, Nonne (Berlin: Volk und Welt Verlag, 1956).

for the first time in 1956 into German and published in the German Democratic Republic. The book jacket furnished by the publishing house, Volk und Welt, read:

Here we experience the struggle of Suzanne, who, by being exposed to the sadism and pious injustices of nuns, is offered as a sacrifice for her mother's premarital sins. Finally she comes into the monastery which is a Lesbian Eldorado where reception into the nuns' community consists of an attempted seduction by the mother superior.

Ethel Lilian Voynich treated the familiar theme of clerical immorality from a startlingly new angle. In The Cardinal's Son<sup>1</sup> a high-ranking Roman Catholic clergyman actually managed to become a "redeemed and decent" sort of human being because he separated himself from the church. Interested in the welfare of humanity, the cardinal's life was spotted by only one dark blot dating back to his youth, an illegitimate son. Believed to be dead, the son suddenly emerged as a revolutionary in the Vatican state in 1848. Placed under arrest and awaiting death by execution, the son finally confronted his father, the cardinal. Now the son said: "I don't want any more compromises, Padre . . . you must choose between the two of us. Do you want to offer me part of your love, one part for me, the other for your Devil of a God? I don't want the crumbs falling from his table. If you belong to him, you can't belong to me." Voynich drew the ultimate conclusion of atheistic propaganda that if the "decent" padre was logical, he had to secede from God. The son continued, "What do you have to do with this dead world of priests and idols? They are covered by the dust of centuries, and corrupt, they're rotten and false!"

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<sup>1</sup>Ethel Lilian Voynich, Der Sohn des Kardinals (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1957).

Leave this church inflicted with plague--flee with us towards the light! Padre, we are the Life and the Youth!" With these "heroic" statements the son suffered a martyr's death because the weak cardinal was still unable to make a decision for apostasy and flight. The weight of guilt almost drove the cardinal insane; with terrible blasphemies during a Corpus Christi procession, he tossed the host away. A short while later the cardinal died as a "new" human being, but not without an intimation that the agents of the people had murdered him out of revenge. This novel was first published in 1897, reached ninety editions in the Soviet Union, and sold almost one million copies in China alone. It was translated into German and published in 1957 in the German Democratic Republic.

The alleged subversive and sinister role played by clergymen as spies and warmongers, brought out so starkly in Here Speaks Dibelius, was used as the basis for clerical intrigue and cabale in several Communist novels. The novel, The Father's Doves,<sup>1</sup> was a good example of this type of literature. In this work the author described how a priest misused the Roman Catholic confessional for espionage purposes and with his priestly blessings actually drove the crew of a submarine to death. This work of fiction was given an air of factual reporting; the place of this "event" was said to be Ostende during World War I. Even though a Flemish journalist proved in detail that the author's account was of a purely fictional nature, some newspapers in East Germany published the story as if it had

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<sup>1</sup>Willi Bredel, Des Vaters Tauben (Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums fuer Nationale Verteidigung, 1959).

been an actual event. The author himself never took a stand on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the foregoing perusal of anti-religious literature, it is evident that the propagation of atheism in the form of literature has been energetically carried on in East Germany since 1957. Many of these anti-religious books were reedited several times. The professed goal was to imbue people with atheistic convictions and to cause them to sever their relations with the community of Christian believers.

#### B. The Media of Journalism and Broadcasting

All newspapers in the German Democratic Republic were placed under the stringent censorship of the government press agency. Watchful political surveillance was kept not only over the secular press, but over religious periodicals as well. Already in 1951 the government made it quite clear that the avowed goal and purpose of the newspaper was "to educate the working masses, to strengthen their political consciousness, and to lead them to revolutionary action."<sup>2</sup> In the hands of the SED the press proved to be a powerful tool for the political reorientation of the East Germans. Later it was used as one of the most effective means for the dissemination of atheistic knowledge.

About 400 magazines, 35 weekly periodicals, and 40 daily newspapers were published in East Germany. Although the circulation of the 40 daily

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<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Church, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Neuer Weg. March 1951, p. 19.

papers was kept secret, it was estimated at 4 million copies.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 60 per cent of that total circulation were SED papers, 20 per cent were papers of Communist labor unions and of the Free German Youth, and the remaining 20 per cent represented papers of various subsidiary political organizations and parties. Obviously, the paper with the widest circulation was the official organ of the SED, Neues Deutschland. In addition, the SED also had one paper in each of the five East German provinces.

Two popular papers, the Berliner Zeitung and the Berliner Abendzeitung, also enjoyed a wide circulation. Hermann Leopold, the editor, imitated Western papers by using color headlines and eye-catching typographical and pictorial effects, but in content he followed the SED line. Another influential paper was Die Tägliche Rundschau, issued by the Soviet occupation force. Die Junge Welt was the mouthpiece of the Free German Youth. Editorials and news releases in all papers were structured after those in Neues Deutschland, although in theory a few newspapers were to reflect the sentiments of certain "political minority groups." For instance, Die Neue Zeit was to represent the views of the Christian Democratic Union and Der Morgen those of the liberal democrats or "bourgeois" people.

Of the eight territorial churches in East Germany with a combined membership of almost 15 million people in 1950, only four were permitted to publish a periodical and their total circulation outside Berlin

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<sup>1</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 243.

was limited to 65,000 weekly copies.<sup>1</sup> Licenses were also granted to the church for the publication of another half-dozen religious periodicals, including one for youth, one for theological studies, and one for religious education; the total circulation of these six papers was limited to 60,000 biweekly copies.<sup>2</sup> Dibelius was granted a joint Russian and American license for a periodical, Die Kirche, but this paper could be distributed only in Berlin and the circulation could not exceed 60,000 copies. Roman Catholics were without any religious paper until 1951 when they secured permission to publish a biweekly periodical with an allocation of 100,000 copies.<sup>3</sup> Thus in 1951 the total circulation of all church papers combined was around 285,000 copies issued on a weekly and biweekly basis. Even though a few more periodicals published in West Germany were received by East German parishioners via mail, it has been estimated that three times as many religious papers would hardly have sufficed to meet the barest needs of the church in East Germany.<sup>4</sup> By way of contrast, the 26 million Protestant church members in West Germany received 4 million weekly and biweekly church papers.<sup>5</sup>

A number of parishes were fortunate in obtaining a license for the publication of a monthly congregational newsletter, but detailed

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<sup>1</sup>Solberg, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1956, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup>KJ 1950, p. 453.

regulations affected the form and content of even this publication. The government specified that the only items allowed to be printed were two Bible verses, a hymn stanza, the ministerial acts, and announcements pertaining to the worship services and congregational meetings. Brief devotional messages by the pastor or Bible commentaries, even if only a sentence long, proved to be sufficient reason for the revocation of the license.

The distribution of church periodicals was impeded by strict censorship, thus curtailing the freedom of religious expression. At times some issues of the periodicals did not pass the scrutiny of political censors and consequently were confiscated by the state. As an illustration, three editions of the Froehliche Botschaft were seized within a single month in 1953 on the grounds that certain statements were critical of the government.<sup>1</sup> The edition of Der Sonntag published on November 30, 1954, was confiscated because it contained the following words: "If one no longer believes in God, a substitute must be provided, because it is necessary to have some sovereign power for the prevention of complete chaos. Such a substitute may be found in ideologies, in propaganda devices, and finally, in force."<sup>2</sup> The censor claimed that this sentence disparaged the East German government by implying that it was based on arbitrary force. Several editions of Die Kirche were also seized by the state.<sup>3</sup> On December 11, 1955, it featured an article appropriate for the

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Der Sonntag, November 30, 1954.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1956, p. 165.

Advent season on the subject of the "last judgment;" attention was called to the great interest shown by people in court trials and judgments of all sorts. Whatever might be the ultimate outcome of these trials, the author noted, whether just or unjust, it would be well to remember that God Himself would render the final verdict at the "last judgment." The censors declared that this article was discriminatory in nature and that it represented a reproach against the administration of justice in East Germany. Of course, the entire issue was then seized by the state. In 1953 two West German church periodicals, which had previously been permitted to enter East Germany by mail, were stricken from the post office's list. One of the papers outlawed in this arbitrary fashion was the Evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung, the official organ of German Lutheranism, and the other was the church's welfare journal, the Innere Mission.

The distribution of church periodicals became even more difficult when on June 9, 1955, the government decreed an "Order for the Distribution of Democratic Publications." The new mandate kept bookstores and newspaper stands from selling religious periodicals; church papers henceforth could be obtained only on an individual subscription basis via mail directly from the publishing house. In order to save in postage and to ensure a wide distribution of papers in the parish, the church had followed the practice of sending religious periodicals in bulk to the pastors. Now this practice too was prohibited by order from the government. A clergyman could now receive no more than four copies of a given paper

or, in an unusually large parish, a maximum of ten copies.<sup>1</sup> Clergymen suspected that the main purpose of this new regulation was to enable postal employees to provide the government with a list of the most faithful church members in each parish. The avenue of diffusing religious knowledge through the press was almost completely closed to the church while at the same time atheistic propaganda campaigns were rampant. Moreover, when unbridled attacks were made upon the Christian faith in the SED press, there was no way for the church to reply.

The only church journal exempted from this rigid new rule was the Theologische Literaturzeitung which was classified as a professional journal with little "ideological" content—its direct sale by bookstores and magazine kiosks could continue. By way of comparison, the clergy in West Germany at that time had access not merely to one, but to 646 professional magazines.<sup>2</sup>

Commentaries and articles on religious life in East Germany were often printed in SED newspapers, although they were usually unfavorable. One of the accepted editorial policies was to encourage people to send letters critical of religion to their newspaper offices for publication. Some people apparently responded, for invariably newspapers carried some comments by readers derisive of the church.

Some editors published in their newspapers lengthy anti-religious stories in serial form. For instance, in the early part of 1959 the

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1956. p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 359.

story, The Heavenly Kulu, by the Soviet Russian A. Saporin appeared in Die Junge Welt. In this serial Communist scientists landed in a spaceship on Venus and found the inhabitants living in the stone age period when their religious consciousness was just beginning to develop. The reader was then shown by the example of the indigencous people of Venus how his own religious history supposedly had developed, namely, how a belief in God had grown out of man's ignorance of nature and fear of the elements. Saporin concluded in the final installment that it will be only a question of time and enlightenment before man's belief in God will disappear, just as with time and knowledge the superstitions of the people of Venus will disappear. Other serialized anti-religious novels were Erwin Strittmatter's The Miracle-Maker and Willi Bredel's The Father's Doves.

Religious news releases in newspapers and magazines covered a wide range of topics, touching on such varied events as a visit by Billy Graham to West Berlin, the formation of the League of Evangelical Clergymen, or the "espionage activities" of the church's Young Congregation. A news coverage of Billy Graham's evangelistic crusade in West Berlin will serve as an illustration of the kind of reporting on religious events found in those newspapers. The caption of the news release read, "A Protestant Goebbels: Billy Graham 'sells the Gospel like soap'--Wallstreet pays."

We happen to know who the financiers of Graham are and that his proclamation consists of nothing else but the gospel of Wallstreet. We know that a man who places the Christian message on the level of advertisements for soap, can hardly be a trustworthy preacher. "You cannot serve God and mammon."

When Graham returned to the USA three years ago, he gave his report to President Eisenhower. His mission at that time was not of a religious nature, just as his mission at the present time is not of a religious nature. The aim of his mission is to misuse Christian people.<sup>1</sup>

It would be impossible to delineate all aspects of the ideological assault found in newspapers, but an intimation of its scope and nature might be gained by a discussion of articles dealing with church membership and with Soviet sputniks.

### 1. Sputnik Articles

Numerous articles and poems about Russian sputniks were published in newspapers, manifesting almost a "divine faith" in Soviet science. Karl Maron wrote in 1957 that the technological feats performed by Soviet science ought to make it clear once and for all that the future belongs to science and not to religion.<sup>2</sup> A host of other Communist leaders joined in proclaiming the obsolescence of religious faith; their intention was to convince people that Soviet science would emerge victorious even in the face of stubborn opposition by forces of "blatant superstition" and "nebulous religious faith." Many sputniks articles and editorials were written in a derisive tone, making religious faith appear quite ludicrous.

One of the most exalting doxologies dedicated to Soviet science was written by the editors of the Freie Welt. They asserted in glowing terms that Communism has now proven its ability to continue the creative work of God and to outdo him. With sputnik the eighth day of creation

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<sup>1</sup>Neue Zeit, September 29, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>"Bischoefe bedrohen Gewissensfreiheit," Neues Deutschland, October 19, 1957.

has begun; the Bible tells a fantasy about the seven other days of creation, but the eighth day of creation which has given earth a new satellite is a reality and a day of true Socialistic activity, and with such the Biblical account cannot compare.<sup>1</sup> Another jubilant note of triumph extolling Soviet science was published under the title "Planetarian Manifesto."<sup>2</sup> Johannes Becher imitated in this lengthy poem the style and form of Friedrich Schiller's well-known "Ode to Joy." The following samples will illustrate the variety and abundance of the sputnik material published in newspapers.

We teach truth. This truth is much easier to comprehend than certain other unimaginable nonsense. It must be clear to you all by now that the artificial earth satellite, launched in the universe by Soviet scientists, does not circle around the globe merely to say "hello" to a dear God or to angels, but that this greatest achievement of Soviet science shall help humanity to explore the universe.

It is the human being who changes the face of the earth. It is the human being who puts to use the most secret and powerful forces of nature. Man is the mightiest of all beings, for there is none higher than he is.<sup>3</sup>

The sputniks have most convincingly demonstrated to the masses that the universe is left neither to the mercy of<sup>4</sup> a God nor to that of any other supernatural or idealistical force.

Let the American spaetnik [play on words, i.e., late-comer], if it ever manages to get off the ground, take up wireless communication with the Creator. In case of success, we shall be very happy to report in detail about it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Freie Welt: quoted by Solberg, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Neues Deutschland. November 16, 1957.

<sup>3</sup>Neuer Tag. October 21, 1957.

<sup>4</sup>Neues Deutschland. December 4, 1957.

<sup>5</sup>Neues Deutschland. December 6, 1957.

Soviet satellites penetrated deep into the universe, but even there no God or paradise were discovered.<sup>1</sup>

True ideas will be victorious. These ideas consist of a materialistic concept of the world; every comrade may be convinced thereof. Evidently though, some people perceive this and fear that their old, decadent, spiritual structure will disintegrate. Some old grandfathers, who do not wish to relinquish their belief in a supernatural being, could take this amiss. But the era of the conquest of the universe has dawned upon us. It is not expected of those old grandfathers that they should board spaceships. Whoever believes that aside from the universe there exists a space in which God and other spirits dwell must be afraid to hit the gate of heaven with a spaceship someday and thus evoke the wrath of spirits.

Whoever believes that his fate depends on higher beings stands in opposition to our rising Socialist society.<sup>2</sup>

My heart is filled with pride,  
 Reverence and love  
 For the giants of science,  
 Who opened to humanity  
 The door to the universe.  
 And with me are millions,  
 Who hope fervently,  
 That this new lofty star  
 Finally will be able to fulfill  
 What the star of Bethlehem promised in vain:  
 The promise of peace on earth!  
 My heart is filled with gratitude,  
 Love and devotion  
 For the creature, which for us  
 Now circles in gigantic strides,<sup>3</sup> the globe,  
 Conquering for us the universe.<sup>3</sup>

Man,  
 Perhaps still impressed by events,  
 Which were told him for two thousand years,  
 Hears about ascension day  
 And thinks, just another holiday.  
 What occurred at that time?  
 A man was killed  
 For the human race,

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<sup>1</sup>Neues Deutschland. December 4, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Ostsee Zeitung (Stralsund edition), January 25, 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Else Czech Kuckhoff, "Sputnik 2," Berliner Zeitung. November 15, 1957.

As told so cleverly by old folk,  
That is called ascension day,  
In a Christian way.

What are they doing today?  
They use Christianity in a hypocritical way,  
And kill the human race with atomic weapons.  
That is called ascension day,  
In a clerical-militaristic way.

What has happened in our day and age?  
Sputnik three ascended to heaven.

Its pip pip  
Is much louder than all the bells.  
A person must really smile--ascension day--  
Yes, but in a Socialist way.

Man,  
Greatly impressed by events,  
Hears some signals from the universe.  
Astonished, he listens--ascension day?  
O yes, space travel.<sup>1</sup>

Since the sputnik material was to appeal to as many people as possible, East German writers used a variety of literary devices such as satire and ridicule, logic and reason. Emotions of love and devotion for Soviet science were to be evoked in the reader. The goal was to undermine the religious faith of people to the point where they would sever their relationship with the church. This was succinctly stated in a booklet prepared by the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge: "In a practical way, the appearance of the sputniks in the firmament has forced many still doubting people to accept the materialistic world view and has prevented them from wasting further thoughts on God."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Articles on Church Membership

Varied psychological appeals were made in newspapers and magazines

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<sup>1</sup>Armin Greim, "Himmelfahrt 1958," Neues Deutschland, May 17, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Heilige Himmel-Unheilige Raketen, p. 19.

encouraging people to relinquish their church membership. Above all, the fact was stressed that article 47 of the East German constitution made specific provision for the abrogation of church membership; according to that provision, a person merely had to make known his intention in written form before a local court, sparing him a last and possibly "distressing" interview with the clergy. Widespread publicity was given to a new law passed on July 13, 1950, which modified article 47 and made it still easier to rescind church membership. A person could now file his renunciation papers either with a local judge or with a municipal clerk in city hall free of charge.<sup>1</sup> Newspapers urged people to make use of this new provision.

Most news media suggested that a surrender of church membership was tantamount to a declaration of loyalty to Marxism. Entire sections in newspapers and magazines were devoted to this subject, importuning people to leave the church en masse. The Wochenpost featured periodically a page dedicated to the propagation of atheism, which consisted primarily of farcical reflections on religion and of delineations on the "intrinsic benefits" to be gained by relinquishing church affiliation.<sup>2</sup> Articles with identical implications were regularly published in the satirical magazine, Eulenspiegel. The demand that people should break with religion and turn their backs on the church was voiced impatiently in numerous articles of the Tribuene, the organ of the Communist labor union. A relentless battle

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<sup>1</sup>Dokumente zur Staatsordnung, vol. II, pp. 202-203.

<sup>2</sup>Wochenpost, Nr. 33, 1958.

by the labor union against religion was announced in a special edition of the Tribuene in which the editor affirmed that "from time immemorial the battle of the laboring class has been connected with the acceptance of atheism and with the simultaneous expulsion of religion from all areas of political life."<sup>1</sup> Still other newspapers publicized the government's creation of special agencies in factories and public places, designed to process declarations of church withdrawals on the spot. These agencies were apparently established because Communist officials had learned that a surrender of church membership could be obtained more readily when psychological pressure was applied in public rather than in a more relaxed atmosphere at home. One newspaper, for instance, informed the people about the exact location of these agencies in Rostock and advised them that the government's offices would be open at a late hour for the benefit of those who, on account of their work, were unable to rescind their church membership during regular hours.<sup>2</sup>

A series of articles published in the Leipziger Volkszeitung illustrates the psychological pressure applied by public news media in order to persuade people to withdraw from the church. The articles were entitled "The Robes of Comrade Lommatzsch" and started as a monologue by a person who tried to maintain his standing in both the Communist and Christian camps:

" . . . now, comrades, as we come to the conclusion of the study course set up by our party, let me summarize briefly: The future

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<sup>1</sup>Tribuene. Nr. 75, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>"Wie ein Kirchenaustritt erklart wird," Ostsee-Zeitung, November 13, 1957.

belongs to Socialism. Through the study of Marxism-Leninism, we know the laws of development in nature and in society. And on the basis of these we conclude that Socialism also gives the proper perspective for Germany!"

"Are there any further questions?"

No one had anything else on his heart. So Group Leader Comrade Lommatzsch arose from his chair, proud that he had once more rendered a service for his party. That was on Monday.

" . . . now, comrades, as we come to the conclusion of today's session of our shop management committee, let me summarize briefly: Our plant may well be called the 'black sheep,' but what more can we possibly do to expand production? I am of the opinion that under present circumstances we are producing at top level."

"Does everybody agree? Are there any further questions?"

No one raised any objections. So Shop Manager Comrade Lommatzsch arose from his chair, satisfied and proud that he had once more rendered a service for the plant. That was on Thursday.

" . . . now, Freida, let's be done with breakfast. Are you or are you not going with me to church? Usually you are there every Sunday but, for some reason, today you insist on working in the garden. Oh, well, give me the hymnbook then . . . . "

And Private Citizen Lommatzsch arose from the table, proud that he had once more been able to do something for his soul's salvation. And that was on Sunday.

" . . . now, comrades, this is my position: In the shop I am a Marxist and at home I am a Christian. That is all I have to say about the matter!"

And since no one else had anything further to add, Party Member Comrade Lommatzsch arose from the chair, satisfied that he had been able to conclude another party meeting.

Comrades and readers are going to ask whether such a thing is actually possible. Yes, it is possible, and it actually happened in the Dimitroff Power Plant in Leipzig. In precisely this way, or at least very similarly, Comrade Lommatzsch, plant manager, propagandist for the party study course (recently relieved of this function), and zealous churchgoer, conducted himself. For a long time this Comrade has clung to a state of ideological coexistence. He supposed that he could speak about the unconquerable power of dialectical materialism and at the same time about the omnipotence of God.

Let us be clear about this. It is a serious situation which faces us in the Dimitroff Power Plant. If this plant has been properly named the "black sheep," the reason is that until recently there was no real party activity there. Half-hearted efforts toward collective work by the plant management and party membership were tolerated, and the voice of the workingman was accorded little or no attention.

Comrade Lommatzsch is to blame for this. And he will bear this guilt just as long as he believes it is possible to wear different robes to fit different situations.<sup>1</sup>

Before the opening of the next party assembly, Lommatzsch did tender his resignation from church membership in written form to a SED secretary. But during the assembly itself, Lommatzsch declined to elaborate—in spite of urging—on the teachings which he had thus far drawn out of the ideology of the party. Under terrific pressure he had made a formal decision about his church membership, but apparently only to keep peace and quiet. Lommatzsch's case was indicative of the psychological pressure used in news media to force the issue of withdrawals from the church. An identical position was taken in a poem entitled "Are You Still in the Church?," which was published in a number of newspapers at that time:

I met a Communist and asked one day:  
 "You still a churchman? and he said:  
 'You think I'd go to church and pray?  
 Fine Communist I'd be, my lad, pale red!  
 Of course, we haven't formally resigned,  
 But that's a superfluity, the kind  
 Like marrying in church - (catch me!)  
 At father's funeral no orat'ry  
 Disturbed our woe. Too well the cloth's aware  
 Of how we think—we're written off.  
 And as for tithes—I only scoff  
 At the collector—now he's never there.'"

"Now Comrade, let me ask, what's game?  
 The parish register still shows your name!  
 Your pastor stands and proudly tells his flock:  
 'This Communist still clings to Peter's rock  
 (A man the hostile camp of state would claim),

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<sup>1</sup>Leipziger Volkszeitung. May 20, 1953.

Which proves, dear friends, that Christianity  
 Is stronger far than Communist profanity!<sup>1</sup>"  
 "By Marx, I'd never thought of that!  
 I must apostatize today - that's flat!"<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Radio and Television Programs, Motion Pictures, and Stage Productions

The news media to disseminate atheism in East Germany included the government owned and operated broadcasting system. A State Radio committee was established in 1952 to coordinate all radio programs; this committee was under the surveillance of the SED's Department of Agitation and Propaganda. The political control assured that only pro-Communist programs would be heard over the East German radio stations. Beginning in 1952 all stations were reduced to three in number--the German Broadcaster, Radio Berlin, and the Radio of the German Democratic Republic. Radio broadcasts transmitted from West Germany were jammed.<sup>2</sup> Since the broadcasting system was controlled by the government, it could be used against religion and on behalf of atheism.

During the period of the Soviet Military Administration, the church was permitted regularly to broadcast worship services on Sunday morning. The meditations were usually given by such leading churchmen as Bishop Krummacker and Pastor Grueber. With the end of the occupation period in 1949, the new East German government decreed that these two churchmen were to be replaced by such "progressive" pastors as Mehmert and Kehnscherper as the regular speakers on Sunday morning. When repeated protests

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<sup>1</sup>Erich Weinert, "Bist du noch in der Kirche?" Wochenpost. Nr. 33, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>SBZ von A bis Z, p. 267.

against this governmental fiat proved to be of no avail, the church declined to lend its official name to any religious broadcasts given by those two clergymen. Therefore, religious programs were henceforth permitted to be broadcast only intermittently and as a rule at unfavorable hours early in the morning or late at night.<sup>1</sup> With the intensification of the ideological attack, the church was unable to secure radio time for worship services even for such festive days as Christmas and Easter.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently as one concession to the church, the State Radio committee continued to broadcast the traditional performance of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion on Good Friday, but beginning in 1959 it was broadcast in a distorted form only; the various parts of St. Matthew's Passion were on the air at different times during the day and even late at night while dance music filled the intermediate periods of time, reducing the impact of Bach's message.<sup>3</sup> For all practical purposes, the broadcasting system as a means of mass communication was closed to the church.

On the other hand, anti-religious assaults were not uncommon on the radio. Programs of an unmistakably atheistic nature were sporadically to be heard on Sunday morning. For instance, the Radio of the German Democratic Republic broadcast a program on September 14, 1958, entitled "Astronomy Disproves the Fairy Tale of Creation;"<sup>4</sup> its content dealt with

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<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Church, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1959, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1959, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>Pseudosakrale Staatsakte, p. 14.

the "superstitious nature" of the Christian faith and the "shady background" of certain church leaders. To cite another example, the German Broadcaster sponsored a program on June 24, 1959, entitled "Church and Politics." The commentator, Karl Mollnau, presented a lengthy analytical lecture in which he enunciated a relentless fight by all progressive people against "political clericalism with its militaristic-imperialistic designs."<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting of the SED's Baltic district in 1958, one functionary demanded that the state provide more than merely sporadic radio programs of an atheistic nature, but that it broadcast on a regular basis for the "edification" of atheists.<sup>2</sup> He probably had in mind the consistency and regularity with which Radio Moscow beamed its anti-religious programs across Eastern Europe.

In one of these broadcasts Radio Moscow castigated the sacrament of baptism as a menace to health. The radio announcer observed that "thousands of babies die of pneumonia every year due to this senseless and dangerous rite."<sup>3</sup> He declared that a high incidence of heart trouble resulted from baptisms, and cited lengthy statistics to prove that under the czars the life expectancy of people due to this sacrament was only 32 years. "But now," the commentator asserted, "life expectancy in our glorious Soviet homeland is up to 69 years--largely because of our health

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1959. pp. 164-167.

<sup>2</sup>Ostsee-Zeitung. January 16, 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Armstrong, Religion Can Conquer Communism.

services and the fact that fewer baptisms take place."

The church in East Germany was also besmirched by way of television programs. One particularly sinister program was the showing in 1960 of a "documentary" entitled "Dibelius and the Schnorr Case,"<sup>1</sup> which involved a deacon by the name of Schnorr who in 1927 in the parsonage had allegedly shot a person. Since no evidence of guilt was available and malicious rumors about Schnorr spread like wildfire, Dibelius in his capacity as superintendent-general of that area defended Schnorr publicly before his congregation. A day or two after Dibelius' defense, Schnorr assaulted a young servant girl; the murder case itself was never solved. The "Schnorr Case" presented on television in 1960 suggested that Dibelius, together with a reactionary and corrupt bailiff by the name of Friese, had sought by every possible means to protect a known murderer. The motive of Dibelius' action was supposed to have been cold political calculation. "The film was so riddled by outrages" that the church intended to sue its narrator for libel, but Dibelius disagreed with this action. He stated that "I have never replied to all this propaganda--apart from answering questions addressed to me personally by letter. This propaganda, so far as I could see, did not hurt my church, and this was all that mattered."<sup>2</sup>

Foreign motion pictures derogatory to religion were regularly shown in East German movie theaters. Typical of these pictures were the Swedish film, She Danced Only One Summer, and the French film, The Red and The Black; the latter film portrayed all representatives of the Catholic

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1960, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup>Dibelius, In the Service of the Lord, p. 221.

church as corrupt and inhuman people. The Soviet Russian motion picture, Stinging Fly, and the Chinese picture, Claws of the Devil, depicted the leaders of the church in a yet worse light. According to Claws of the Devil, the bishops were secret agents of an imperialistic espionage network; the dwelling places of the bishops and priests were stocked with weapons, and nuns served as operators of a concealed wireless communication system.<sup>1</sup> Some Soviet films capitalized on religious rites and sacraments such as that of baptism. A brief description of one plot will illustrate the nature and content of these Soviet-produced motion pictures.

The "hero" is named V. Myashnikov and his wife is Masha. They live in a small town in the Ural mountains. The husband is quite happy until he begins to suspect "something religious" in his wife's frequent visits to her mother who is an evangelical believer.

Myashnikov's suspicions . . . are confirmed when he cleans the house in anticipation of Masha's return from the hospital where she has given birth to a fine, healthy baby. He finds a Bible and a golden cross hidden behind a wardrobe. Here is ample evidence of the "criminal activities" of his wife!

. . . Masha takes the baby to her mother's home. She returns to report that the baby has contracted "inflammation of the lungs." Myashnikov is convinced that the baby's illness is the result of christening--and how often have the people been warned that pneumonia follows baptism! To make matters worse, Masha takes the baby to her pastor for a blessing instead of taking the child to a hospital. Two days later the baby dies. The story ends when Myashnikov sues for divorce on the grounds that religion has ruined their family life.<sup>2</sup>

Stage plays were used for the same anti-religious purposes as motion pictures. Harald Hauser's production, In the Heavenly Garden, was representative of the atheistic stage plays written by indigenous East Germans.

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<sup>1</sup>Petrusblatt, August 7, 1955.

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong, p. 159.

The setting for Hauser's play was Tibet where a young "buddha" was dying in a monastery. A Tibetan monk was unable to save the "buddha" but a Chinese medical doctor was able to help him by means of an operation; however, the abbot of the monastery tried to prevent this because the Tibetan people would think that the supernatural power of the monks was limited. Of course, the "buddha" died without medical help. Through the example of backward Lamaism, Hauser "proved" in his play the hostility of religion to all progressive scientific work and he attached to religion irrational traits--repulsive at first sight--that are necessary for effective propaganda.

### C. Anti-Religious "Art"

Another influential medium of mass communication which served politicians in fortifying atheism in East Germany was that of the graphic arts. Religious faith and church leaders were publicly vilified in cartoons, caricatures, posters, and billboards. At times this was done in a crude and tasteless fashion.

The East German government's propagation of atheism was undergirded through sporadic art exhibits sponsored by neighboring Communist countries. Some of the "art treasures" exhibited were nothing but derisive caricatures of prominent bishops and the pope; their titles read, "The Pope Devours Dollars," "American Help for the Vatican," and "Truman Strengthens the Vatican." The exhibits were shown not only in large East German cities but were also taken to large factories and industrial complexes so that as many people as possible could see them. Newspapers hailed these art exhibits as a "great help in the battle for the

preservation of peace."<sup>1</sup>

At the height of the debate about the military chaplaincy agreement in 1957 gigantic posters designed to besmirch the character of Dibelius were erected in prominent public places. The picture on the posters depicted Dibelius as an angel with large wings and an impressive halo falling from the sky in the form of an atomic bomb. The caption of the poster read "Vom Himmeler hoch, da komm ich her!" which was an obvious word play on the ancient German Christmas carol "From heaven above to earth I come" with the name of the infamous Nazi Lieutenant Himmler used in place of the German word "Himmel" ("heaven").<sup>2</sup> The message of the picture implied that Dibelius as the successor of Heinrich Himmler would in the name of religion favor an atomic war. On another occasion when Dibelius traveled to East Berlin to participate in a worship service, local parishioners hastily removed huge wall slogans, bracketing his name with that of a convicted sex maniac named Balluseck. Along with the sex deviate, the bishop was decried as a notorious perverter of German youth.<sup>3</sup>

Some articles specialized in portraying the "vile militaristic" facet of religion through newspaper cartoons. The 1957 Christmas issue of the Berliner Zeitung featured a caricature of Konrad Adenauer and Joseph Strauss, the former West German Minister of Defense, in the stable of Bethelhem. Adenauer knelt before the manger praying "Joe, please show

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<sup>1</sup>Neue Zeit. March 23, 1951.

<sup>2</sup>The Evangelical Church. p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Solberg, p. 231.

me the child, I too would like to worship Him." Whereupon Strauss uncovered a rocket lying in the manger.<sup>1</sup> The insinuation of this cartoon was that Adenauer "worshiped" the power of atomic weapons under the hypocritical mask of religion. A similar conclusion was to be drawn from a sketch of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Frings of Cologne with an atomic bomb hidden under his clerical vestments.<sup>2</sup> The same idea was conveyed in yet another cartoon picturing a row of tanks with a clergyman kneeling before them. The tanks were all marked with the emblem of the cross, the traditional insignia of the German army, and a Bible was placed on one of the tanks. While prostrate before the Bible and the tanks bearing the symbol of the cross, the clergyman uttered the words: "I vow, O Lord, that I shall serve Thee faithfully and justly in the sign of this cross."<sup>3</sup> The alleged intimate collaboration between military forces and the church was also implied in a sketch of four figures entitled "Four letters which may not be trusted." The first figure consisted of a Nazi storm trooper waving a flag on which the letter "N" was inscribed, the second figure depicted an atomic bomb marked by the letter "A," the third in this link of four statues was a clergyman holding a cross in the air thus forming the letter "T," and the final figure consisted of a huge cannon symbolizing the letter "O." Obviously, the word formed by the four figures was "NATO."<sup>4</sup> Its tacit message was that fascist and religious elements were

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<sup>1</sup>Berliner Zeitung, December 24, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Eulenspiegel, Nr. 27 (1957).

<sup>3</sup>Eulenspiegel, Nr. 25 (1957).

<sup>4</sup>Volksstimme, November 29, 1957.

component parts of NATO. In still other cartoons the clergy were made to appear as "stupid" and "backward" people. This was vividly illustrated in a caricature of an obese clergyman who tried to establish communication with God. The clergyman, with his immense and flabby body squeezed into a chair, sat before his private wireless communication network. He listened intently to various signals and then muttered, "Is that the Russian spaceship or have I finally succeeded in establishing communication with God?"<sup>1</sup>

Billboards were widely used in the propaganda drive against religion, and were particularly used against the rite of confirmation. The sad face of a confirmand looking into a dark future while clinging to a Bible appeared on one half of such a billboard; the happy face of a Communist youth facing a bright future while holding one of Marx's books was shown on the other half.<sup>2</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from such billboard advertisements was quite clear: young people who wished to be on the side of "truth and light" were to join the ranks of Communism.

Atheistic "art" was expressed in still another form. It happened occasionally that crude slogans like "NATO agency" and "blatant superstition" were splashed in huge letters on the walls of church buildings.<sup>3</sup> Bulletin boards announcing congregational meetings were covered with swastika signs. Although those responsible for the wanton defacement of

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<sup>1</sup>Eulenspiegel, June 1, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Pseudosakrale Staatsakte, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Kirche in der Sowjetzone, p. 4.

church property were never apprehended, it was assumed that the Free German Youth instigated these acts of vandalism.<sup>1</sup>

The preceding examples show that the graphic arts were used freely in attempts to advance atheism in East Germany and to lessen the church's influence on people.

#### D. The Church's Reaction

Protests against the avalanche of atheistic literature which started to envelop East Germany in 1954 were voiced repeatedly by the church and her leaders.<sup>2</sup> Initially these deprecations seemed to make some impact upon the government, but with the opening of the full-fledged ideological assault all supplications by the church were brushed aside.

Kolonizki's booklet, Communist and Religious Morality, published in 1953 under the auspices of the Free German Youth, was a case in point. Its content was highly offensive to Christian people and it was one of the first pieces of atheistic literature which appeared openly on the book market. Not only did the Free German Youth distribute it from house to house, but it was also presented to high school students and teachers and they were urged to use it in class as one of their textbooks. Erich Andler, who was in charge of the church's youth department, wrote a letter of protest to Erich Honecker, Chairman of the central committee of the Free German Youth. Andler equated the distribution of Kolonizki's booklet to a "most monstrous broadside attack on the church and her teachings yet

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Kirche im Kapf der Zeit, pp. 174, 194, 178, 180.

perpetrated in the German Democratic Republic." "The descriptions of the Christian church and her message contained in this pamphlet," said he, "are so completely false and so biased and unobjective that they scarcely merit attention. There is every indication that the author was not motivated by a desire to encourage intellectual discussion but was driven by burning hatred."<sup>1</sup> Andler doubted that such rabid polemics as this would shake the faith of Christian people, but conversely would make it very clear that there existed no bridge of understanding between Christian faith and Marxist ideology. Mitzenheim wrote a similar letter to the municipal government of Erfurt, though his main purpose was to protest the use of the booklet as instructional material in the local high schools.<sup>2</sup> These remonstrances brought about the tentative result that late in 1953 Grotewohl intervened to suspend the mass distribution of this booklet. But it was introduced again in East Germany at a later and more favorable time when the publication of atheistic literature had become the accepted norm rather than the exception.<sup>3</sup>

Through the government's ideological warfare the church suffered a heavy loss in membership. Under the force of subtle pressure and persuasion, many nominal Christians found it expedient to sever their relation with the church. In 1950 of the 18 million people in East Germany only 7 per cent were without church affiliation,<sup>4</sup> but in 1961 approximately

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1953, pp. 191-192.

<sup>2</sup>Kirche im Kampf der Zeit, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>Kundgebungen, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup>Brunotte, p. 17.

14 per cent were without church membership.<sup>1</sup>

The increasing loss of adult members and a corresponding decline in the gain of new members by the church in the 1950's are vividly brought out in the statistical data furnished by two territorial churches, the Lutheran church in Saxony and the Evangelical church in Silesia. Since the remaining six territorial churches have not regularly submitted membership reports, it has been impossible to draw up an accurate and comprehensive statistical picture of the church's overall membership decline.

<u>The Lutheran church in Saxony</u>			<u>The Evangelical church in Silesia</u>		
<u>Adult Membership</u>			<u>Adult Membership</u>		
<u>Decline</u>	<u>Gain</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Decline</u>	<u>Gain</u>	
6,201	6,496	1946			
11,049	6,422	1947	318	339	
14,585	6,554	1948	470	310	
22,135	5,592	1949	928	279	
27,178	5,156	1950	1,394	258	
36,117	4,671	1951	1,827	252	
35,748	4,604	1952	1,973	212	
36,578	4,001	1953	1,960	177	
38,754	3,815	1954	1,744	237	
50,693	3,743	1955	2,164	192	
42,806	3,397	1956	1,555	146	
46,235	3,183	1957	1,159	166	
101,515	2,626	1958	3,576	145	
66,698	2,059	1959	2,601	117	
54,838	1,892	1960	2,159	123 <sub>2</sub>	

In 1954 the Lutheran church in Saxony had a membership of 4,430,000

<sup>1</sup>"Protestant Population in the DDR," Sonntagsblatt, October, 1961, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>for 1946-1951, Zahlen aus dem kirchlichen Leben, pp. 42-45; for 1952-1960, KJ 1955, pp. 436-438, KJ 1956, pp. 365-366, KJ 1957, pp. 273-276, KJ 1958, pp. 404-405, KJ 1959, pp. 376-377, KJ 1960, pp. 343-344, KJ 1961, pp. 428-431.

people and the Evangelical church in Silesia 230,000 people.<sup>1</sup> In the light of the information provided in the table their annual loss in membership in the 1950's must have been approximately 1 per cent, and it may have been even higher because these statistics listed only the decline of adult and not of child members. The combined membership of the eight territorial churches in the German Democratic Republic including East Berlin decreased from 14,921,000<sup>2</sup> people in 1950 to 13,000,000 in 1961.<sup>3</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that almost 2 million people rescinded their church membership as the result of ideological warfare. Just about 4 million people fled from East to West Germany between 1945 and 1961<sup>4</sup> and it may be assumed that the majority of these refugees were listed as numerical losses by the church in East Germany. Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain what number of people actually decided to withdraw from the church as a result of the attack by militant atheism.

By way of summation, it should be reiterated that the obliteration of religion is an unswerving goal of Marxism. One of the important strategies used by Communist leaders in their attempt to reach that goal has been a militant ideological assault upon religion, coupled with a vigorous propagation of atheism. In line with that aim, the government

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<sup>1</sup>Brunotte, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1958, p. 431.

<sup>3</sup>Sonntagsblatt, October, 1961, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>"Inside East Germany--Story of a Red Failure," U.S. News and World Report, LI, Nr. 10 (September 4, 1961), p. 35.

initiated in 1954 a systematic ideological onslaught on the church in East Germany. Its intensity was compounded in 1957 through the successes of Soviet science and the military chaplaincy agreement. Since 1957 this campaign has been carried out through all available media of communication with the avowed purpose of rendering the coup de grace to religion. The people were urged to leave the religious community en masse. The church's freedom of expression was crassly curtailed through stringent censorship and a drastic reduction of paper allotment. This campaign has caused the church to lose approximately 1 per cent of her members each year since 1950.

## VIII. SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

It has been shown that Communism is not only a socio-political movement but a modern religion as well. Communism has its own creeds, morals, aspirations, and promises of redemption; it vies with old religions for the devotion and allegiance of man. Communist leaders have repeatedly stated that a collision between Christian faith and Marxist ideology is inevitable. Marx and Engels predicted that religion would die a natural death in proletarian countries but, when Lenin and Stalin were confronted by the fact of its continued existence in Soviet Russia, they tried violent means to bring about its demise. Khrushchev endorsed instead the use of ideological weapons as a means to put an end to religion.

Communist church policy in East Germany was flexible and was dictated by principles of expediency, but the goal of bringing about the extinction of religion remained unchanged. German Protestantism, affected by its struggle with the Nazi regime, had a strong resolve to be obedient to God and thus was not willing to accept the bid to political subservience issued by the Communist power in East Germany.

The church fared reasonably well under The Soviet Military Administration. This was due to the fact that church leaders and Communist

officials had a deep respect for each other, that the Soviet government was seeking to ingratiate itself with West German people by projecting a favorable image of Communism, and that the first stage of Socialist development called for peaceful relations between church and state.

With the creation of the indigenous Communist government in East Germany in 1949, a ruthless attack upon the church was initiated. It was caused by a waning of mutual respect, by a consolidation of political power in the SED, by a rapid Socialization of the country, by the refusal of the church to sanction the socio-political plans of the government, and by an alienation of West Germans. The attack on the church was abruptly ended in 1953 and a new course, allegedly on a friendly basis, was inaugurated by the state.

The new course of the government's church policy in 1953 resulted in an ideological attack on the church which has been carried on with ever-increasing intensity especially from 1957 on. This attack was triggered by a directive from Khrushchev, by the successes of Soviet science, and by the obdurate stand of the church towards the state's political overtures. These events bear out the fact that even though the church in East Germany has at times been treated with tolerance and even with "benevolence," the unswerving aim of the government has been to bring about her ultimate destruction.

In order to eliminate the church's influence in public life, the government established a monopoly over public education; public schools became seedbeds of atheism. Through the promulgation of the Lange decree in 1958, it became impossible for the church to continue with her religious

instruction in public schools. The education of theological students continued without too much interference by the government, but they were forced to sign a pledge of loyalty. The quota system apparently barred some students from entering schools of theology, and a shortage of clergymen resulted partly from it.

In 1953 the government sought to eliminate the church's hold on the East German youth by ruthlessly attacking the church's youth organizations, but this assault ended in a fiasco. The state then inaugurated in 1954 pseudo-religious rites to compete with the church for the devotion and loyalty of the youth and of people in general. This approach proved to be successful, and a growing number of people have availed themselves of Communist rather than Christian rites. Only about 10 per cent of the youth are still confirmed in the Christian faith, and the remaining 90 per cent pledge their allegiance to the Communist state.

Repeated attempts were made by the state to maneuver the church into a position of political subservience. Under duress the church was to become a political tool of the Communist regime. Until 1958 all requests by the government for an endorsement of its political program met with the church's stubborn opposition. Neither cajoling nor intimidation moved church leaders to affiliate with the Communist-dominated National Front or to give a special pledge of loyalty to the state. In 1957 the church signed a military chaplaincy agreement with the West German government. This invoked the wrath of the East German state to an extent that its leaders devised a number of measures of reprisal designed to strangle the church's life. Under extreme duress the church then issued in 1958 a

statement supporting the government's "peace efforts." Since the church's resistance to the political encroachments proved strong, the government encouraged the creation of religious groups which would accept an invitation to subservience: the Christian Democratic Union and the League of Evangelical Clergymen resulted. They have given religious sanction to many important political actions of the East German regime and the Soviet government, but the church as such has basically maintained her integrity and independence from the state.

In order to weaken her position in public life, the church was ordered by the government to discontinue some of her public welfare work. The material aid program of the church's Relief organization was outlawed in 1950 and the work of the Railway Mission was closed in 1956. Several of the church's institutions of mercy were confiscated in 1953 and, although returned to the church, some fell again under government control through subtle infiltration by labor unions in 1956. To handicap the church's work of mission and mercy, the government undermined her economic structure. The traditional sources of income were largely eliminated and the church had to rely heavily on financial aid from Christians in West Germany. In its attempts to circumscribe the church's life as tightly as possible, the government would not allow clergymen to conduct worship services outside church buildings. Special licenses had to be secured for meetings which were not thought to be "religious" in nature. With the devotional life of the church confined within her buildings, the state created its own pseudo-religious rites, which resulted in a rapid decline of the number of people participating in the church's sacraments, rites,

and devotional life.

One of the important means used by Communists in their effort to destroy the church has been a militant propagation of atheistic knowledge. A systematic ideological assault on the church began in 1954 and was intensified in 1957 through the successful launching of the Soviet sputniks and the ratification of the military chaplaincy agreement. Since that time the anti-religious campaign has been relentlessly carried on with the avowed purpose of rendering the coup de grace to religion; the church's freedom of expression was curtailed through strict censorship and limitations were imposed on the circulation of religious periodicals. The ideological onslaught resulted in an annual loss of 1 per cent of church members.

The structure of the Volkskirche has largely been disrupted in East Germany.<sup>1</sup> Participation in the life of the church and in her great rites and sacraments by the people is no longer simply a matter of tradition but has become an act of confession, impelled by faith in God. Many people who had only nominal ties with the church rescinded their membership as a matter of socio-political expediency and pledged allegiance to a new god, the Communist regime. The dwindling number of participants in religious rites has indicated how shattering and extensive has been the collapse of the Volkskirche, the people's church in which almost everybody for centuries had automatically been baptized, confirmed, married,

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<sup>1</sup>Heinz Brunotte, "Landeskirche, Staatskirche, Volkskirche in Deutschland." Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung. XI, Nr. 161 (August 15, 1957), p. 266.

and buried. This disintegration has cogently been manifested by the statistics of the Lutheran church in Saxony: in 1953 the church had 70,707<sup>1</sup> children in Sunday school and in 1960 only 35,486;<sup>2</sup> in 1952 parents presented 64,444<sup>3</sup> infants for baptism and in 1960 only 24,950;<sup>4</sup> in 1953 the church confirmed 70,376<sup>5</sup> young people into the Christian faith and in 1960 only 12,829;<sup>6</sup> in 1952 clergymen joined 27,454<sup>7</sup> couples in wedlock and in 1960 merely 12,161.<sup>8</sup> During the 1950's the Lutheran church in Saxony averaged an annual loss of 50,000 adult members, that is, approximately 1 per cent of her total membership. Since participation in the rites of the Volkskirche was tradition-bound and was not necessarily determined by religious faith and convictions, many nominal church members left the Volkskirche with apparent ease and made use of the rites of the new faith, the Communist religion.

An interesting statement was made in 1958 by Albert Norden, SED Secretary for Agitation, that revealed the keen anticipation with which the party looked forward to an early collapse of the Volkskirche. Of those who still belonged to the church, Norden ventured the opinion that at least 98 per cent were bound to the church only through the traditional ties of rites and ceremonies. These people, not really Christian by conviction, would easily be won for Communism by tact and patience. On the basis of party observations of church services and religious activities,

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<sup>1</sup>KJ 1955, p. 443.

<sup>2</sup>KJ 1961, p. 427.

<sup>3</sup>KJ 1955, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup>KJ 1961, p. 398.

<sup>5</sup>KJ 1955, p. 413.

<sup>6</sup>KJ 1961, p. 405.

<sup>7</sup>KJ 1955, p. 416.

<sup>8</sup>KJ 1961, p. 407.

about 150 out of every 10,000 persons were exceedingly loyal to the church; with this group Norden saw little hope of success. Norden further claimed that 90 per cent of the youth were already enlisted for Socialism, but he nevertheless warned his party associates to concentrate upon congregations where large numbers of parishioners still attended religious instruction and worship services.

For the pastors Norden reserved his bitterest barbs. In the past the SED had approached the clergy with invitations, visits, and friendly dissuasion, treating them like "prima donnas." "For twelve years," complained Norden, "we have sought in vain to win them." Now such tactics were to be discarded. Atheistic propaganda had already unmasked these "pious hypocrites." The East German people had rejected the "fascist clericalism" which they propagated, and had made them objects of derision and laughter. Norden advised that they be left alone to putter about in their church buildings until the day would come when they withered away for lack of air and lack of money. "When in the next few years the last of the old women have died off, the pastors will have to weep their tears alone on the lifeless walls of their empty churches." Norden recognized it would be desirable to give every possible encouragement to those pastors who manifested "progressive" tendencies. But unfortunately, he admitted, "one must look for them with lanterns, and they are mostly old men who are looking for a quiet and comfortable eve of life."<sup>1</sup>

If Norden's judgments were correct, by far the largest number of

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<sup>1</sup>Solberg, p. 269.

clergymen would have to be written off by the SED as hopeless cases. Apparently the Communist regime had no expectation of annihilating the church by a frontal attack on the clergy. The Communists would rather wage a war of attrition, capitalizing upon the inherent weaknesses of the traditional Volkskirche.

In its church policy the East German government has attempted to destroy the church's influence in public life, to use organized religion for political purposes, to circumscribe religious activities within well-defined bounds, and finally to facilitate the anticipated demise of the church through ideological warfare.

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