

## THE EVANGELICAL-LUTHERAN CHURCH AND THE EAST GERMAN REVOLUTION

by Robert Goeckel

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The Evangelical-Lutheran Church has long represented a key element in civil society in the German Democratic Republic and a key actor in political change. Following the Stalinization process, the church remained the only institution independent of the Communist state. Even after the curtailment of intense atheistic propaganda by the state in the 1960s, this independent status thrust upon the church a role of political opposition. Thus the church served as a defender of German unity in the 1960s, a function it formally sacrificed in 1969, yet has retained informally until the present day. Similarly in the 1980s, the church became by default the advocate for dissent on issues such as peace, human rights, and the environment. The church became the training ground in democracy, compensating for the deficit in such democratic processes in society at large.

The church's role as an ersatz opposition existed in tension with the church's religious mission, particularly in the wake of the state's liberalization of policy toward the church after 1978. The church repeatedly affirmed its openness to alternative social groups yet sought official legitimacy as a "church within socialism." This status was conceived opportunistically by some, leading to coaptation; by others it was conceived broadly as a mandate for democratic socialism, leading to attempts to stabilize and democratize the GDR.

The Christian Democratic Union in the GDR (CDU), on the other hand, long served as a transmission belt of the Communist Party (Socialist Unity Party, or SED), despite its early postwar role as an opposition party. As a result of forced changes in party personnel in the 1940s and its programmatic rejection of Christian socialism in 1952, the CDU was subordinated to the SED (*Gleichschaltung*), leaving it little autonomy in policy matters, certainly in public pronouncements. However, because it was allotted the task of mobilizing Christians and the churches in support of the regime, the CDU derived its *raison d'etre* from the continued existence of these groups and thereby remained the leading bloc party in the SED-dominated political system.

Both the church and the CDU played an inordinately important role in the revolution in the GDR in 1989. The transformation in turn has had profoundly different effects on these institutions. I shall analyze how the role of these two very different, indeed mutually conflicting, institutions has been altered as a result of the political change in the GDR. The study will find that the church's role confirms the importance of the church's inter-German ties and its role in East German civil society. Yet because of its greater autonomy during the Communist period, the church has been less dramatically altered by the revolution than the CDU.

### **The Role of the Church: Midwife, Rather than Mother**

Despite the traditional political abstinence of Lutherans, the GDR church had become more critical of the state since the Hitler experience. This critical role, facilitated greatly by West German media coverage, proved to be a crucial permissive factor in causing the upheaval of 1989. The church leadership began to call in 1988 for change, arguing that "even the GDR cannot escape the need for glasnost." Activists demanded the freedom to travel, greater openness in the media, and greater democratization of political life. Demands for economic reform were minimal; indeed the church often criticized the semi-official consumerism propagated by the state. In particular several meetings of the ecumenical movement in the GDR in 1988-89 focussed the churches' social and political agenda for political liberalization. The church leadership also intensified the growing popular disaffection with the regime by criticizing it on concrete issues, such as its blatant falsification of election returns in the May 1989 communal elections and the renewed emphasis on Communist upbringing by the pedagogical congress in summer 1989.

The church also contributed to the unraveling of the old regime in a more specific way, namely by providing much of the leadership of the opposition. The number of pastors involved in the opposition movement has often been noted. For example, twenty-one of the new members of the Volkskammer (parliament) and three members of the government of Prime Minister Lothar de Maiziere are ordained pastors. This hardly reflects the fact that the church hierarchy was encouraging political dissidence. Rather this high profile of opposition pastors reflects both the limited ability of the Lutheran church to control its clergy, including those who collaborated with the regime, as well as the variety of motives, including political motives, of those who become theologians in Communist systems. In the context of the growing legitimacy deficit of the SED system, the greater credibility of pastors meant that this became a quasi recruitment path of political leadership. The intense political activity of some pastors has confronted the church with an organizational and political problem, namely how to reconcile these conflicting roles of partisan activist and pastor. Pastor Wilhelm Ebeling, pastor of the St. Thomas' Church in Leipzig and leading figure in the conservative German Social Union Party, for example, has been permanently released from church service by his Saxony-Dresden church; others, such as Rainer Eppelmann, leader of Democratic Awakening and pastor in the Berlin-Brandenburg church, have been given temporary leaves from church service. Assumption of part-time role as an elected representative requires approval of the particular provincial church.

In the context of this critical role of the church leadership and the activist pastors, the local churches became the cradle of the revolution, as demonstrated most vividly in the case of the Nikolai church in Leipzig. The Monday prayer services for peace became catalysts for public protest which encompassed hundreds of thousands with few formal ties to the church. As the momentum of the opposition New Forum movement grew, its leaders sought to shed their identity as wards of the church. The church became, as one principal church official in Leipzig described it, "the midwife, rather than the mother, of the revolution." The church activists assured that the marches remained peaceful and orderly. The individual congregations provided shelter from the police in some cases. Following the collapse of SED authority, church officials often provided a semblance of order in turbulent and frustrating conditions. For example, Dean Heino Falcke of Erfurt was instrumental in heading the New Forum group which secured the files of the local secret police from possible destruction, either by the former members or by citizens angry at the continued existence of this organization in January 1990. Complete staffing of the 22,000 local election committees for the March 18, 1990 elections, in the face of considerable resignation on the part of the electorate, was largely due to the appeal of the church leadership for volunteers.

The credibility of the church leadership among the broader population was also demonstrated in the prominent role played by church leaders in the processes of the transition government from November 1989 to March 1990. In particular the Berlin-Brandenburg (East) provincial church enjoyed a high profile in the transition. Bishop Gottfried Forck's personal advisor, Pastor Martin-Michael Passauer, was named to head the committee charged with investigating the use of force by security forces on October 6-9 in Berlin and Dresden. Forck himself was asked by the Roundtable to serve on the committee charged with dissolving the State Security Service and overseeing the investigation of any prior secret policy activity by newly-elected members of parliament. Forck's solid record of forthright criticism of regime policy and support for grassroots dissidents in the church is widely acknowledged, leading to early suggestions that he might be a Havel-like choice for a newly-created office of president. The church was integrally involved in organizing and chairing meetings of the Roundtable from December 1989 to March 1990. Thus the church leaders played a key role in mediating the political forces in the shifting political landscape of the GDR, providing a needed authoritative institution to facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy.

Indirect testimony to the credibility of the church is provided by the SED's attempt to use the church to dampen political protest. This effort were certainly not new, having informed the policy of SED head Erich Honecker toward the church as manifested in his summit meetings with the church and support for the Luther celebration in 1983. For example, one of Egon Krenz's first acts as successor to Honecker was to meet with Bishop Werner Leich, head of the umbrella organization of the East German Evangelical-Lutheran churches, the Kirchenbund. Leading Politburo member Guenter Schabowski sought to persuade Manfred Stolpe, leading legal official in the Berlin church, to cancel a press conference scheduled in a church to protest the brutal police actions of October 7, with partial success. As the situation unraveled, the regime offered compromises to the church on issues which had long plagued their relationship. A meeting with

representatives of the Education Ministry to discuss discrimination against Christians in the schools was held, after years of refusal by the state. Pre-military training in the schools was ended and alternative non-military service was introduced, both key concessions for the militarized SED regime.

Although many would agree that the church is not the hero in the revolution and the evidence suggests that its primary role was as a permissive cause facilitating the coalescence of dissent, this in no way diminishes its importance. As a key element of civil society the institutional church provided leadership to the opposition and mediation among the political forces in the revolutionary context.

### **The Role of the CDU: *Bon Appetit* Replaces *Mahlzeit***

The key role played by the Polish Peasant Party in bringing about the collapse of Communist power in Poland suggests that, in a liberalizing context, even organizations functioning as transmission belts of the Communist party can assume a semi-autonomous role and widen the political space for opposition groups and civil society. The experience of the bloc parties in the GDR reveals a similar phenomenon. The CDU certainly did not lead the assault on SED authority, but the rising level of dissent and its particular relationship to the churches placed particular pressure on the CDU's compromised leadership and resulted in the CDU seeking greater autonomy and political clout. This change required drastic turnover in personnel and programmatic turnaround.

Internal dissent in the CDU paved the way for these organizational changes. The early stimulus was provided by the so-called Letter from Weimar. This letter, sent to the party executive committee by four church officials prominent in the CDU on September 10, 1989, set in motion *perestroika* in the CDU. As their point of departure the initiators argued that the massive hemorrhage of emigration had left the church lacking in "competence and power" to represent those disaffected elements of society which official organizations had failed to represent. As a consequence they called upon the CDU to assume a larger role in dealing with these societal problems, particularly those causing emigration. The Letter from Weimar called for greater democracy within the party, arguing that "the principle of democratic centralism does not belong to the specific traditions of the CDU." In addition the Letter urged a greater role for the CDU in the bloc party system, including more openness in bloc deliberations, larger representation in the government, and party congresses independent of the SED congresses. In policy terms the dissidents criticized the restrictive media policy in the GDR and CDU and called for the creation of a "socialist state of law" which justifies its decisions to the citizenry. Finally the Letter supported greater freedom to travel and economic reform. The informal dissemination of the demarche engendered considerable debate in the CDU. Although Gerald Goetting, the old-guard chair of the CDU, called publicly for more dialogue in the GDR, the leadership refused to publicly acknowledge the dissent. But the rising tide of protest in October forced the party to print the letter in the October 26, 1989 edition of its organ, Neue Zeit. In a further response to internal discontent, the CDU challenged the monopoly of the SED's youth organization, the FDJ, by forming its own independent youth organization. In a challenge to the SED's monopoly of the media, Neue Zeit and

the newspapers of the other bloc parties published the manifesto of New Forum, arguing that this citizens movement possessed no other outlet for political expression.

Such signs of increasing debate in and assertiveness by the CDU would not suffice to appease demands for change in the party. Although the Weimar initiative had not addressed the question of party leadership, demands for a purge of the compromised leadership ensued inexorably in the liberalizing context of fall 1989. In the Neuenhagen initiative, grassroots CDU groups sought to mobilize local CDU organizations in support of an extraordinary party congress. Many local groups of members, particularly in Thuringia in which the CDU has always enjoyed particular strength, threatened to leave the party. To quell the mutiny from below, the executive committee pressured the aging Goetting to retire and replaced him on November 10 with Lothar de Maiziere, descendant of a French Huguenot family. A mild-mannered lawyer and vice-chair of the synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in the GDR, de Maiziere was deemed acceptable to the old-guard which dominated the executive committee: his father had collaborated with the CDU in its earlier efforts to divide the Berlin-Brandenburg church along East-West lines and the son was considered a weak personality. But de Maiziere proved less malleable than expected, moving quickly to purge Wolfgang Heyl, party vice-chair, after Heyl surreptitiously called a meeting of the presidium without de Maiziere's knowledge. At the party congress held in December, de Maiziere was confirmed in his new post; all but 17 of the 124 members of the executive committee were purged.

Programmatically the CDU did an about face from its earlier support of "real existing socialism." The party congress strongly endorsed free market reforms and German unification, rejecting "socialist experiments" in its campaign slogan for the March election. Like most of the other parties, it called for greater environmental protection and the creation of a Rechtsstaat (rule by law).

The CDU that has resulted is a hybrid of new and old. The Weimar initiative and many of the new officials in the CDU come from the Thuringian provincial church (e.g. Martin Kirchner, new administrative head of the CDU organization) which enjoyed good relations with the state and the CDU during the era of Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the Thuringian church became more assertive after 1970, it remained more pliant toward the regime and a stronghold of the CDU. For example, in the Thuringian church newspaper which he then edited, Gottfried Mueller, signer of the Letter from Weimar and now Minister of Media in the new CDU government, had criticized those wishing to leave the GDR in 1984, arguing that they should give up "dreams of self-realization in the West" and that "Christians have good prospects in the GDR and are not forced to leave the country." In September 1989, however, he urged the bloc parties to "assume more profile on questions of travel, a realistic media policy, the complete incorporation of citizens in decision process, tendencies of rejection of foreigners, and concrete environmental questions." The revamped CDU clearly has sought to recruit church officials for the greater credibility they lend to a party with an embarrassing record of subjection to the SED. Yet this quote suggests the dramatic change in views that even some church officials have made in 1989. The CDU campaign slogan--Turning (*Umkehr*) into the Future--also carried a religious connotation of

conversion and repentance suggesting greater transformation of the party (and the GDR!) than has in fact occurred.

### **From Church in Socialism to Church without Socialism**

The church had never been stalinized under the old regime, retaining considerable autonomy; hence, one would expect the effects of the revolution of 1989 on the internal organization of the church to be less far-reaching than in the case of the CDU. Yet the political liberalization has had extensive impact particularly on the external relations of the church.

To be sure, the church has not remained completely immune to leadership purges. The most prominent of these has been Bishop Horst Gienke of the Greifswald provincial church. In office since 1974, Gienke long had a reputation as more receptive to regime overtures, endorsing GDR positions of peace, urging citizens to vote, and the like. However, until 1989 his authority as bishop remained intact. Without consulting the other provincial churches, in 1989 Gienke invited Honecker for the consecration of the Greifswald cathedral and both reaffirmed the formula of the "church within socialism" that was used to characterize the relationship under Honecker. Moreover, the state expressly scratched the politically-troublesome Bishop Forck of Berlin-Brandenburg from its list of invitees to a state reception for the occasion. The ensuing criticism from other provincial churches and the central church office in Berlin spilled over into his own church, resulting in an unprecedented vote of no confidence in his leadership by the November synod. Gienke thereupon resigned and emigrated to West Germany. Another church official whose star has faded is Manfred Stolpe. Stolpe, the long-time church lawyer responsible for negotiating with the Honecker government, was for the first time since its formation in 1969 not elected to the church leadership by the East German church federation. Stolpe was apparently tarnished by Krenz's attempt to employ him to dampen criticism in October 1989. Thus the political changes have had some fallout on church leaders particularly associated with the previous relationship with the state.

The Wende has brought the church relief from the SED regime's efforts to replace Christian belief with a socialist personality. For example, the youth consecration ceremony, an ersatz for confirmation, has been made voluntary. Although early indications suggested a continued high rate of participation by youth in spring 1990 (90%-95%), the official estimates have been revised downward and some churches are now again emphasizing the irreconcilability of confirmation and the youth consecration ceremony. The state's proclaimed goal of "Communist upbringing," a source of major conflict with the church throughout the Honecker era, was abandoned already in November 1989. The church leadership has become more assertive, demanding that the Young Pioneers and Free German Youth (FDJ) organizations be separated from the schools and that religious holidays be restored. The period of the alternative service option, introduced already by Krenz in November, has been cut from 18 months to 12 months in response to the church's request. Thus in policy areas that were ideologically sensitive to the Communist regime - education and military training - the church has scored considerable gains from the political change.

The Communists' position on the religious question has also been altered. The successor Party of Democratic Socialism now emphasizes a policy of alliance and the "outstretched hand," in contrast to its earlier rejection of religion. The PDS in its election platform rejected the view of religion as an "opiate or foreign organism in society" and endorsed a "modern realistic theory of religion that recognizes its power for giving meaning to life and society." No longer is religious belief grounds for dismissal from the party. The PDS endorsed the separation of church and state and the autonomy of the churches from state interference, as well as equal rights for all citizens. In concrete terms the PDS endorsed positions that the church has long supported, such as pacificism, overcoming of consumerism and the destruction of the environment, religious contributions to culture (particularly citing Jewish contributions), and the mutual fight against drugs and alcohol. Echoing Honecker and Krenz earlier, the PDS affirmed that "the humanistic basis which binds members of the PDS and the believers is greater than that which divides them." The conciliatory stance did not help the PDS any more than it did Honecker or Krenz, but does reflect the effect of the revolution on the ideology of the Marxist party.

The revolution has also altered the interface between church and state in the GDR. Previously, the SED's policy was set largely by the Central Committee apparatus and executed by the State Secretary for Church Questions, whose office was officially attached to the Ministry of the Interior. Any need of the church, whether pertaining to media, financing, construction, visas for travel, etc., required state approval, usually in Berlin. Since November 1989, these offices have been reduced to skeletal staffs. De Maiziere himself was initially named deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers in charge of relations with the churches by the Modrow government, thereby effectively short-circuiting the previous bureaucratic channel. As a result, the churches no longer require state approval for most activities, relieving them of state control but also forcing them to become more entrepreneurial in meeting such practical needs as repair of buildings.

Not surprisingly, the devaluation of the state's role has had implications for the other instrumentalities which it used to propagate its policy toward the church. In the past, organizations such as the Christian Peace Conference had been used to mobilize pastors on behalf of the regime's foreign policy. Journals, such as Standpunkt for Protestants and Begegnung for Catholics, sought to legitimize the system. The Christian Peace Conference has now been disbanded in the GDR and the journals have ceased publication. In turn the church has been able to expand the circulation of its weekly newspapers via newsstand sales; previously they were available only by subscription and circulation levels strictly limited by the state.

If the end of Communist rule has yielded the advantages of a liberal political environment for the church, it has also brought some uncertainties for the institution internally as well. The church lost large numbers of employees--four times its normal losses - to the emigration to the West, particularly among non-clergy employees of the church who in many cases were seeking refuge from the regimentation in state enterprises. Although it is difficult to estimate, indications suggest that church attendance has declined since the height of the protests. Similarly the number of those studying theology, an attractive

prospect in the past for those rejecting politicized occupations, has declined. Recently non-clergy church workers have even organized nascent trade unions, suggesting increased labor conflict within the church itself. All of these developments may threaten the organizational maintenance of the church, already an organization battered by secularization and state pressure. Thus the loss of its role as a de facto opposition has cost the church some support from society; the collapse of the state means that groups in the church no longer need to close ranks in the face of the powerful, centralized SED state.

Paradoxically, the revolution has also had the effect of bringing about warmer relations between the Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran churches. These relations had long been chilly, in part because the small Catholic church, existing in diaspora conditions in the homeland of Luther, feared being dominated by the much larger Protestant church. But the Catholics had also been critical of the Lutherans for their efforts toward a *modus vivendi* with the regime and a social-political role based on the concept of "church within socialism." Although the political abstinence had abated somewhat under the papacy of John Paul II, the Catholics remained more politically abstinent than the Protestants until the waning days of the Honecker regime. However, the Catholics have now agreed to join the Working Group of Christian Churches in the GDR, an ecumenical organization in which they had only maintained observer status. Thus the change of regime has appeared to have lowered the barriers to improved ecumenical relations in the GDR.

The end of communism in Eastern Europe has meant the end of the artificial unity imposed on opposition groups; this holds true for the East German church as an pluralistic institution of civil society as well. If the previous system made strange bedfellows of pastors and scientists/atheists (for example, Pastor Eppelman and Dr. Robert Havemann), the process of electoral competition has made enemies of former friends. Those in the church must, as Bishop Christoph Demke of Magdeburg put it, "learn each other anew," namely come to terms with the variety of political viewpoints that were masked beneath the apparent unity of the church. A prime example was provided by Democratic Awakening, which split into two factions, a conservative wing promoting human rights and reunification and led by Pastor Eppelmann, and an ecological-social wing led by Pastor Friedrich Schorlemmer. Eventually the Eppelman faction won, and Schorlemmer left the party. Another example has been provided by Pastor Markus Meckel founder of the leftist Social Democratic Party (SPD) and currently foreign minister, initially refused a coalition government with Pastor Ebeling of the conservative DSU.

No longer possessing a "protected space," the church is confronted with major questions of self-definition and identity. First, internal differences in the church have developed over the tempo and priority placed on German reunification. Bishop Leich of Thuringia, until February 1990 head of the East German church federation, strongly supports rapid German reunification. In a move which provoked criticism in the church, he and Bishop Martin Kruse, head of the West German churches, signed the so-called Loccum Declaration, affirming that "we want the two German states to grow together. That will occur in several steps in the framework of an all-European process of consensus-building." Other church leaders, such as newly-elected head of the church federation,

Bishop Demke, are wary of a rapid reunification under West German auspices, arguing that "the advocacy for the poor, disadvantaged, and oppressed as well as protection of the creation must take precedence over a nationally-oriented increase in living standards." The opponents of the Loccum Declaration charged it with seeking a "consciously political effect" and "a development in the church in contradiction to that which those (active in the democratization of society) want politically." The opponents, issuing a counter "Berlin Declaration," charge the Leich-Kruse initiative with making the church's role again dependent on the national entity, with stimulating German nationalism at the expense of dealing honestly with the negative side of this phenomenon in the past.

Closely related to this question of the church's stance toward German reunification is the question of the church's relationship to the West German churches. Forced under state pressure to leave the EKD in 1969, the East German churches have since retained a "special community" with the EKD, entailing financial assistance from the EKD and considerable consultation between the churches. The Loccum initiative calls for giving this special community "organizationally appropriate form in a church." Although it calls for a careful treatment of the differences between the churches in this process, it clearly advocates a

church reunification parallel to the political reunification. Critics rejected this parallelism with German national reunification as a devaluation of the ecumenical movement and a charged that it was not based on democratic discussion within the church. Demke, for example, countered that the "churches do not stand under the same time pressure as the governments" because the special relationship continues, arguing that "the tasks of witness and service in the area of the GDR will for years be different than in the Federal Republic." Demke rejected a simple merger of the two church bodies. Similarly the GDR church federation at its February 1990 synod also signaled a slower process of integration, insisting that the identity of the East German churches not be lost.

The tempo and extent of inter-German church reunification is likely to depend on the particular church organization in question. Reflecting its special position, the Berlin-Brandenburg church never formally divided and is moving towards reintegration quickly, already holding its first unified synod since 1961 and agreeing to "steps toward the restoration of organizational unity and a common legal order." The situation is complicated, however, by the existence of two regional bishops. Gottfried Forck, bishop of the Eastern region, served beyond his planned retirement in 1987 in response to urging of church leaders who feared instability in this key church in a period of increasing state pressure. He now anticipates retiring in September 1991. Yet Bishop Martin Kruse of the Western region will not retire until 1994, necessitating an interim solution for the Eastern region, mostly likely in the form of a deputy bishop's office until a joint bishop is elected

in 1994. The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in the GDR, the organization which unites the Lutheran provincial churches, will likely move quickly to merge with its West German counterpart. The Evangelical Church of the Union, the organization uniting the so-called Union churches, did not formally separate from its West German counterpart. Although this will make merger easier, many of the liberal opponents of a rapid

absorption by the West German churches are found in the Evangelical Church of the Union.

The debate over the church's response to the German question revealed another effect of the new situation in the GDR, namely the creation of cross-border coalitions in the churches. This phenomenon, turning on differences between conservative Lutherans and liberal Union church leaders, is hardly new. For example, in 1971 West Berlin liberals and East Berlin conservatives colluded in support of the standing bishop, liberal Kurt Scharf of West Berlin, while East Berlin liberals supported a separate bishop in the person of Albrecht Schoenherr. But the increasing independence of the GDR churches after 1969 tended to erode such inter-German coalitions and impose greater unity on the East German churches. Under the liberalized conditions, the Berlin Declaration opposed to rapid church reunification was signed by liberals in the West and East; similarly conservative Lutherans in the GDR, such as Leich, will likely collaborate more with Lutherans in Bavaria than with liberals in the Union churches in the northern GDR. This north-south cleavage in the church interestingly parallels the similar political cleavage so vividly demonstrated in the March election results.

The debate over church reunification naturally is intertwined with the question of which elements of the GDR church experience should be retained in the future. In particular the issues of an official church tax and religious instruction in the schools--long thought dead in the GDR since the SED state terminated both in the 1950s--are now again on the agenda. Many in the GDR churches maintain that this separation from the state represents a salutary development in the modern church compared with the West German church, which remains accustomed to such social status. Yet others argue that the decline in membership in the GDR churches will leave them dangerously weak in the new economic conditions, an ironic parallel to the fears of many East German managers currently. And the GDR churches cannot expect the West German churches to continue past subsidies in the context of a voluntary decision by the East German churches to abjure a church tax system. It is thus not surprising that in March 1990, the GDR church leadership not only raised pay scales to anticipate inflation, but also endorsed the church tax system. Yet a semi-official status, along the lines of a national church or Volkskirche, leaves many uneasy in the GDR church, which is accustomed to parishioners who are committed, even if few in number.

Similarly the debate rages regarding the reintroduction of religious instruction in the schools, as in the FRG. Some favor it as a means of familiarizing society with the Christian heritage which the SED eliminated. Some see it as a way to build the strength of the church. Others are wary of the taint of establishment which this suggests.

The developments since the upheavals of fall 1989 also suggest that, in the context of a rush towards reunification and a new beginning, the church may assume a new role as the repository of historical memory of the socialist period. The church's credibility in the population was sorely tested by its decision to give Honecker refuge after his release from the hospital. Yet the church thereby affirmed its reputation for fairness. More significantly the church has reaffirmed this principled position by acting as a guarantor of

neutral justice by securing the files of the secret police and, in the case of the newly-elected members of the parliament, analyzing their files for evidence of alleged activity on behalf of the secret police. In a revolutionary situation with more than its share of Wendehaelse, or political weathervanes, some press for summary justice, others advocate a new beginning in order to escape responsibility for their past roles. The church stands as a beacon for justice without political amnesia. Some, such as Falcke, fear that this critical role of the church which derived from its powerlessness in the SED system, will be lost in the new situation and call for a period of "self-evaluation" by the GDR churches.

## **Conclusion**

**The analysis of the political transformation of the GDR in 1989-90 suggests several conclusions regarding the role of the church. First, the developments reaffirm the importance of the church's role as an all-German link, despite the state's policy of Abgrenzung. Yet the prospect of church reunification is ironic, given the gradual growing apart of the two churches by the early 1980s and the relative absence of nationalism in the churches. On issues of church finance, relations with the Third World, and peace, for example, differences between the East and West German churches had been increasing. The East German church's relative autonomy vis-a-vis the state, however, also attests to the stronger position it enjoyed when compared with churches in Communist systems with few international ties.**

**Compared with other Communist regimes, the GDR case demonstrates the greater importance of the church as an element in civil society. Certainly the church did not actively organize an opposition, as in the case of Poland. Yet the role of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in the GDR dwarfs the marginal role played by the Orthodox churches in the political liberalization of Romania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union. Rather, as in Czechoslovakia, the church nurtured an opposition by maintaining alternative space in an otherwise rigidly-organized Leninist system. The church provided a training ground for organizational skills and democratic practice, as manifested by the large number of church-based political figures in the new system.**

**Despite its ideological conflict with the SED regime, the church is ironically more likely than other institutions to retain elements of its past experience of socialism. Little appears likely to remain of "real existing socialism" in much of GDR society, particularly after the electoral results of March 1990. The Wende, or transformation, has left no segment of society unaffected, even "non-political" areas such as sports and the music scene. Yet because the church was less affected by the Leninist system, its rejection of the GDR legacy is less sweeping than in these other institutions. There have been few purges in the church leadership and the church's calls for social justice stand in stark relief to the popular embrace of West German-style capitalism. Indeed, because the regime had found some of the church's positions on social and foreign policy issues congenial, there have been few calls for an increased role for the church in order to fill the moral and ideological vacuum**

resulting from the collapse of communism, as one sees in the USSR among Russian nationalists. Nor is the resurgence of religion after the collapse of the Nazi regime likely to be repeated in the post-Communist regime. The collapse of the Leninist system in the GDR was due in no small part to the Evangelical-Lutheran church. It too will fall prey to the greater diversity of German tradition and the pluralism of liberal democracy. Yet, more than other institutions in the GDR, the church is likely to embody elements of the past in the new Germany.