

DANGERS AND CHANCES OF PRESENT DAY DEVELOPMENTS

by Jens Langer

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1. The necessity of assigning a goal for the development of today:

Volker Braun, a well-known poet in the G.D.R., describes his expectations towards the future like this: "The future is a vacuum. But that in future there may be something is not a fantastic or unreal assumption but is rooted in that there's a growing unrest in today's conditions." I want to refer to this statement in view of the international developments. Do we already clearly see where the development the world has got into will lead? What goal is worth the effort? There ought to be a culture of relations offering the peoples and the individuals the chance to develop as partners and equally entitled. Thus the word "peace" will be filled with contents such as co-operation, communication and reliability. Domination of one partner over the other contradicts this goal. If this is not unanimously agreed upon today's development will be endangered, which many people think to tend in this direction. This is still opposed by the kind of relations towards the two-thirds world. It could also be opposed by an international unitary culture which powerfully succeeds by means of the mass media and the people who command them. There is the danger of wiping out the culture of smaller peoples. Experience has taught us that this may lead to national, even nationalistic reactions. In my opinion the chances of today's development consist in bringing as many people as possible into action for the development of a culture of relations. We urgently need a clear and precise picture of the society we want to live in and which is worth aiming at.

The way textbooks and sometimes scientific papers describe future society often neither corresponds to the existing social experience of the people nor the real tendencies of today's social progress. Therefore they do not find access into the ideology and the vivid conviction of the people. Moreover, it's no fun and therefore unusual to discuss such conceptions. But when a society gives up discussing its essential goals, orientations and values, when people only seldom refer to them, then that is not normal. The everyday consciousness feels alienated from these values; social integration diminishes and cynicism spreads, especially among young people.

In order to escape these dangers on a national and world-wide scale there is the national and world-wide necessity of providing and promoting for a long time outlooks and prospects for hope. They get obstructed if one only thinks and acts in the respective sector of power. New thinking means prospective thinking; old thinking is predominantly sectorial. Proceeding from these considerations, I first want to turn to the necessity of dialogue. This is based on my experience on the necessity and existence of dialogue between Christians and Marxists in my country. Thereby I would mainly like to illustrate

how here shows a prospect which is also worldwide important for the development of a culture of relations.

2. The dialogue as an expression of a culture of relations

2.1 Tolerance and dialogue

The dialogue incorporates the tolerance of post-enlightenment into the communication of modern society becoming more and more complex with its necessity of differentiations. Frederick II said: "The wrong zeal is a tyrant who depopulates countries; tolerance is a tender mother who cares for their well-being." In the epoch of growing interest of all citizens in participation and openness as well as the necessity of these two in regard to social development Frederick's word has to be completed and developed further by stating that the dialogue which incorporates tolerance manifests the social manners of mature citizens willing to shape the country's future. Thereby the practical efficiency of a new quality in thinking and acting is manifested. The fate of the most important questions of today does no longer rest in the hands of politicians; people of various social groups take over responsibility.

2.2 The pragmatic-consentive pre-form

The interest in a consensus with regard to the contents is mainly determined by the interest of the delegating institutions and gets its limits by them. Pragmatic solutions are the result but not the goal. Therefore individuals as partners are desirable.

2.3 The action-oriented consentive form

Here the domination of instrumental reason is replaced by the wish of deepened communication led by the interest in the common obligatory truth. Dialogue under this sign provides a chance to enlarge theory. This form is so ideal that the necessity of a sequence of actions suggests itself. Perhaps this is another ideal outlook. In regard to the consensus-dialogue there are detailed considerations of the Marxist Bernd Stoppe, the following of which I want to point out:

1. Dialogue is characterized by a mutual information-transfer resulting in new knowledge.
2. The dialogue is more than a dispute on condition that the ideological basis is being problematized in the interest of finding knowledge (mental comprehension).
3. Confidence in an action-orientated consensus is looked upon as its goal.
4. Consensus is confidence in the result of the process of cognition. Because of its quality it is of social importance.

Stoppe's statement on the importance of the dialogue for one's own philosophy inquires of the Christian theology about its willingness to take the consequences. This applies also to other ideologies. "The dialogue aims at an agreement on common tasks in shaping society. Thus it contributes to the development of Marxism and concerns questions of its representation in the same way as vice versa the dialogue is concerned by the development of Marxist thinking."

Based on B. Stoppe the following questions arise:

1. What relevance is the consensus outside the dialogue?
2. In what way can its social importance be safeguarded?
3. Where or what are the limits of consensus ability? 4. How can transformation into "deeds" be effected?
5. Is there the necessity of an operative "appendix" in the form of institutions?
6. How much may the partners credit one another?
7. When does confidence change into a suggestive demand, which can be productive, too?

Accordingly, three phases result:

1. elimination of false information
2. differentiated perception of the partner's values
3. Joint discovery of new dimensions of reality based on the way both the partners look at reality.

We must, of course, ask whether consensus is always possible and on this condition sensible. Consensus will be aimed at in the vast field of the right and the ethically mature. This field has constantly to be cultivated anew and is practically boundless. As concerns questions on truth and final reasons the dissension will have to be acknowledged and borne. By finding out new possibilities of extending theory it has to be worked out time and again.

2.4 For what reason is the dialogue today necessary and possible on a worldwide scale?

Our answer is that conditions have changed.

What conditions are they? I would like to answer by mentioning such changes from my point of view:

All over the world humankind has alarmingly become aware of the crisis. This necessitates a "new thinking," which is not the concern of politicians alone. As many people as possible have got to contribute to the common cause, and so have the universities within the frame of projects of dialogues and understanding. This leads to reconsidering the values and partly to a new valuation. The churches experience these processes also in the ecumenical movement, which also warns them of simplifications in the face of the continuing fight for social justice within the Two-thirds World and in Europe. Moreover, it points to the practical co-operation of Christians and Marxists as a consequence. These processes of fundamental change make an impact upon the GDR, and the GDR exercises an influence upon them. Among others this also takes into account a step to individualization. The factor of subjectivity has accordingly stronger to be observed in all societies in regard to the development of social strategies for solving problems. The intensified discussion on the coherence of social and individual human rights must in this context also locally as well as worldwide be considered more intensively.

The transition to the primacy of the state in relation to kinship and tribe meant a step to individualization. As can be seen, the rise of mankind to the domination survival unity also implies a step towards individualization. As a human being the individual has rights which he cannot be denied, even not by the state. We are but at an early stage or phase of this transition to the most comprehensive step of integration, and working out what the term "human rights" implies has but just begun. Yet freedom of the use of force and the threat of violence has up to now perhaps found only little consideration as one of those rights which in the course of time-also against resisting tendencies of the states-have to be observed in the name of mankind.

The growing emancipation of women as well as the movements that carry it are also part of the step to individualization. Therefore, in the long run the dialogue will not be allowed to evade this phenomenon. The dialogue is encouraged by the new valuation of religion by Marxist-Leninist philosophers. In the light of this, too, the Christian faith manifests that it does not exist in no man's land, but that it is socially rooted. An interpretation of the development of society which thought itself to be Marxist has proved to be only little based on reality when it assumed there would be less and less religion. Today also Marxist-Leninist philosophers are led by the fact that besides the linear continuation of Christian tradition under present conditions there is a productive trend towards the renewal of its traditions. Thus there exists the social confirmation of the Christian faith, so that it can establish as a practiced ideology and must not be looked upon as a useless consciousness. On the side of theology, this corresponds to an increase in self-criticism when analyzing ideological links in theological statements had not been taken notice of, they are brought to light quite consciously these days. Moreover, the Marxist insight into the innovating potential of Christian faith also in socialist society and for socialist society is immense. "Religion is an (ideal) expression of a certain stage of development of socialist society, but no longer its general ideological sanction. It is a protestation in the sense of productive co-shaping the social conditions not yet fully developed, but no more protestation in the sense of totally doubting society as a whole."

These changes also implicate a distinct increase in self-consciousness of Christians which can be observed in ecumenical relations as well as in the GDR despite tendencies of minorization existing further on. All these findings which hardly can be imagined without a dialogue held before demand but also encourage to accept the necessity of a dialogue, to institutionalize and intensify it freely and openly in the matter-of-fact fields chosen by the partners. This allows of relations of a higher quality which have changed and will change conditions provided that these Christians and Marxists can really be looked upon as one of the decisive prepositions to overcome irritation within the relation of institutions of ideology in the interest of global responsibility and inner peace. For a long time the dialogue will decisively contribute to this by making the authentic positions and development of the partners transparent. As has been said, this is valid on national and global scales.

3. Prospects and tasks: An example.

3.1 On the way to a society of individuals?

According to Norbert Elias, the social development of mankind can be interpreted as a sequence of steps to individuality. The way humankind took from tribe to state has provided more and more room for the individual. Within an observable range we obviously experience at the end of the 20th century the strengthening of such trends. "Man's understanding of himself" and "self-organization" of individuals are more and more at issue and are partly put into action. In this process the individual human beings on the one hand become independent, on the other they become susceptible to trouble and vulnerable. With growing independence they obviously need more protection and care. This manifests in early partnership, family orientation and the forming of groups. The societies in East and West still have to adapt to this: to be really useful to the individual in verifying his freedom so that the willingness grows to look upon the whole and the institutions-also the church-as hopeful and to take them seriously.

In this process the practical unfolding of the individual human rights plays a decisive role. The churches have been paying growing attention to this since the signing of the final document of Helsinki on August 1, 1975. They have assessed the connection of social and individual rights. Moreover, they have caused the public accessible to them to be aware of the progress achieved in the GDR, too. Irrespective of these facts, they take an interest in the further unfolding of the individual human rights corresponding to the stage of consciousness of society.

The more offensive the GDR (allied to the other states of the CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Aid) will realize the individual human rights, the more clearly will be demonstrated in what general and especially practical way the West will behave in respect to the individual rights propagated by the West for the East. As e.g. a more extensive concept of facilities for travel including those for leaving the country for good can be observed, especially after the KSZE-Conference in January 1989, it becomes obvious that the individual human rights are no longer of interest as a means of exerting political pressure, instead, it seems they are looked upon as a negative influence on one's

own population so that restrictions on entry permit and asylum are being considered. However, it is decisive that with growing individualization by means of a further shaping of the rights of the individual there grows a sense of feeling at home which the individual is so urgently in need of. There is no denying the fact that the churches themselves have a lot to do for their co-operators and members in order to convey to them the conviction of being practically accepted in their respective institutions; e.g. with conflicts in legal or ethic questions between leadership and co-operator. The problems mentioned are not only discussed by the population but also by influential experts. Thus Eberhard Poppe, Professor of Constitutional Theory, Martin-Luther-University, Halle, points out:

The socialist state which acknowledges the social-economic and cultural rights of man bears a huge duty and responsibility. Obligated to the values of Socialism it acknowledges to understand the dignity of man not only as a postulate but to guarantee it by social-political acting. Realizing human rights is done by man, depends on civic performance of duties and essentially on what is or is not done by social executive bodies or by fellow-citizens. Contradictions because of wrong decisions, illegal attitudes unfair requisitions may occur. Therefore the citizen must be given the means to legally carry through demands concerning his rights as a human being if denied this right. Attention must constantly focus upon the completion and further shaping of this system of protection. The further development of the legal protection of human rights has to take place in the field of constitutional and especially administrative laws. Not because of a big number of violations, but because this is the field where 20 million and more government decisions are taken which directly concern the relation between the citizen and his state. Whether this refers to the provision of a place in a creche, a visa, the allotment of a flat, a trade or building license, a building site for a plant, whatever object there is, the citizen's attention is greatly focused on whether the individual is treated legally equal and just.

Günter Quilitzsch and Rosemarie Will, lecturers at the Humboldt-University, Berlin, Department of Jurisprudence, come to the following conclusion on the function of the state:

In a qualitatively new way the task devolves upon the state to solve conflicts arising with the reproduction of the mode of production. The logic movement of the new contradiction will necessitate the creation of a comprehensive mechanism for regulating conflict. The mechanism will solve the conflicts in interest of the subjects of the basic production relations. The solving of conflicts by the state as an inevitable element within the social reproduction process will increasingly necessitate that the state if itself involved in the conflict will have to obey the rules of solving conflicts to the same extent as the other subjects will have to. In this way the state has an effect on the realization of interests and needs by finding forms to solve contradictions. The importance of the state in the social reproduction process becomes apparent by its contribution to determine the content of the social interests and to safeguard their priority.

3.2. Social need of publicity

When talking together many people stress that in society there must be readiness for non-programmed discussion in public, in the press, on radio and television. Such publicity is looked upon as an essential part of social exchange with one another.

This kind of publicity especially makes it possible to describe movements and political changes in the GDR in an offensive way. This sets the media a great task. When, for example, in a discussion with officers of the Army of the Federal Republic of Germany representatives of the People's Army of the GDR declare that proceeding against the religious peace symbol "We shall beat our swords into plowshares" at the beginning of the 80's was wrong, the report about this statement should in the well-understood interest of the GDR not only concern some church papers but is a statement of common public interest because all citizens involved in those distressing differences ought to be told in what way our society can self-critically deal with its errors. So to speak "semi-publicity" has such signs of social prospects fall flat and causes doubts as to the seriousness of such statements. This problem is also pointed at by GÃ¼nter Soder, professor at the Humboldt-University, Berlin, Department of Economy, Section Marxism-Leninism:

Proceeding from the fact that for finding decisions there must be information and the amount of information available, the masses need to be optimally informed in order to participate in thinking, deciding and working. This does not only mean a simple increase in the amount of information but safeguarding that the information needed is available. Its reliability must be ensured, otherwise it would not be of any use in finding correct decisions. In view of the masses of information we should ask how to work it up more detailed so that connections and processes of development become more perceptible. Would it not be more effective if the information provided the GDR mass media were shown as problems and in its true contradictory nature and thus stimulate the working people to an active discussion on their social environment?

However, it must be seen that also the performance of social tasks has to pass through the needle eye of the subjective, thus taking into account the growing importance of the personality. The churches partly offer their rooms and also meetings such as the Days of the Church for this purpose. Yet this cannot cover the whole range of the public. In order to approach this goal and to give it full meaning Christians work hard in a church which does not see itself as opposed to the whole of society but as a body which can be defined as a community of personalities enabled to political thinking and acting in the spirit of Jesus Christ from the image of a church for others, realized in learning together with others.

The tasks mentioned thus comprise:

--The intensive forming of democratic features to have citizens participate in executing power in the sense of 'more socialism' (Gorbachov)

--The creation of a vast public for the process of forming one's opinion in the interest of an attractive representation of our society, the aim of which is to make all citizens feel at home.

--Public discussion of controversial standpoints in the media.

It is part of the process of forming opinions by an exchange of views as it befits people who have attained majority. They are also given the opportunity of organizing within the frame of already existing, in the process of development unfolding forms and beyond them.

To my mind all these features express the democratic potentials of socialism at its present stage. The personal engagement of its citizens will contribute to its richness and attractiveness. This engagement is a social obligation. Cooperation, co-determination and participation in the work of shaping society are tasks to which the church encourages its members and which the members show a vivid interest in.

This obligation associates with commitment in the development of a peace culture which in the field of foreign policy involves security in partnership as well as a rich communication within society in the field of home policy. In this way living together wins new openness and renewal.

This peace culture also involves the acceptance of national and religious minorities, of guests and visitors from abroad, that is in the breadth of their respective way of life. Accepting foreigners demonstrates, too, international solidarity in one's own country and an increase in global consciousness for solving problems in one's home country.

From the point of view of Christian hope I consider these goals of social activity as tasks which Christians, Marxists and people confessing to diverse ideologies are for a long time obliged to because these tasks concern necessary elements of a development which sees individual and state depend on each other and thus approach each other more and more. Christians and churches are not in an isolated position when based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ they face the problems of human beings. The past decades have given proof of this. From the perspective of the Kingdom of God their chance consists in being ready to learn with others and to translate the results into action. Thus they join the community of all those who because of their presuppositions are also ready to do so. When time presses, hope, dialogue and cooperation are demanded on all sides in order to develop practical perspectives, however, modest strength, courage and the institutional resources. e.g. with Christians and churches may be. To be able to realize the chances of today's developments so that they cannot be subdued by simultaneous dangers it is necessary that every country contributes to the culture of relations. This contribution is supported by a climate of international relations which itself corresponds to this culture and at the same time wins by it.