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Eastern Germany Revisited

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In the summer of 1992 we visited three eastern German cities, conducting interviews with Protestant church pastors and administrators, eliciting their views on the role of their church in the 1989 revolution, and exploring their perceptions of the church in the newly unified Germany. Our findings were published in an earlier issue of *Religion, State and Society*.[1] Although on that visit we met a lot of sadness about the loss of a separate German identity, in society as well as in the East German church, it was mixed with a certain amount of pride in the part which believers and their church had played in the peaceful revolution; and in spite of this sadness, there was nevertheless a generally hopeful feeling about the future. In 1992, most of our interviewees believed that they had something special to offer the new state and the new church, something gained from their GDR experiences. In particular, they brought with them the valuable experience of maintaining a delicate balancing act between doing their best for their community and not upsetting the state authorities to the extent of being forbidden to shelter others. East German church leaders as well as individual pastors had created a 'nice little niche' for the church within socialism, and this had provided some considerable room for their own interpretation and implementation of the Gospel. This had given them a sense of responsibility and confidence. Alongside this optimism, however, was a shrewd realism, which sometimes expressed itself as freedom from illusion. The pastors to whom we spoke in 1992 were vocal in their determination to see a church which would be more widely based, more socially useful. What was wanted was a church for the twenty-first century, no longer tied to old and outdated structures and models. The pitfalls of reliance on an over-strong hierarchy were clearly recognised, and the call which we heard more than once was for a 'roots-upwards' church, one which would be closer to the people and their needs.

We had gained the impression, then, that many were relatively optimistic about their chances of playing a useful role in the shaping of – if not a new society – then at least a new united church. On our second visit, in the autumn of 1994, we were keen to see how effectively the church had been able to put its aspirations into action. We were very curious to find out whether the hopes of some of our original interviewees had borne fruit and also to hear the opinion of new respondents, including lay members of the church. We wanted to know whether the churches were still as packed as they were during and shortly after the changes (commonly referred to as the *Wende*). We wanted to hear the opinion of both pastors and lay people on other social matters, as well as on the role of the newly united church in the enlarged Germany. To achieve as wide a range as possible in the answers to our questions, we used four of

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the same interviewees, and in addition we spoke to four new pastors and seven lay people who were active members of their churches. The interviewees were as follows. In Leipzig: Pfarrer Jenichen of the Thomaskirche; Pfarrer Lösche; Pfarrer Führer; Andreas Creuzberger, a town hall official; and a married couple, Herr and Frau Riese. In Meissen: Pfarrer Walter; Dietmar Pohl, shortly to be ordained; and a housewife, Frau Meyer. In Potsdam: Pfarrer Kwaschik; and a mother and her 16-year old son, Martina and Martin Kruse.

The questions we asked our interviewees covered the following topics: whether and how the church had changed, both in their particular setting and in general; how they judged the position of their church in the light of rising right-wing extremism and with regard to the pressing social problems of unemployment, housing, crime and so on; trends in church attendance and their significance; the importance of confirmation for pastors and parishioners, how they viewed the conflict between confirmation and *Jugendweihe* (the oath of allegiance to state communism), and how they explained the retention of a secular initiation rite to replace the *Jugendweihe* despite the collapse of the communist state; religious education in schools; church taxes; their expectations of their church, and whether and how far these expectations were being met; and the role of the church within the state. We invited all our respondents to comment on those matters which seemed most pressing and important to them.

We were stunned by the passionate feelings we encountered. Many of our respondents were desolated about the lack of impact their church seems to have within the German Protestant Church (EKD) as a whole and were worried about their people's church becoming more and more part of the establishment. This was the major change for the church as a whole, and a change recognised by almost everyone we interviewed. Feelings ranged from depressed pessimism and outraged anger on the one hand to a strongly expressed and realistic determination to make the best of a bad job on the other. We heard such sentiments as 'If my congregation were not fully behind me, I would throw in the towel.' This particular pastor felt sympathetic towards his parish in their condemnation of the church as 'establishment', in their rejection of the mindless sponsorship of parishes by commercial enterprises and in their perception of such funds as in some way tainted. There was unease with the cosy relationship between state and church, with the creation of military chaplains who become civil servants and with church taxes levied by the state. Another pertinent remark, quite often repeated, was, however, that 'the church as an institution is not so significant; things can be changed by individuals'.

Perceived Changes

Everyone felt that the church had changed, but how far they felt this to be so depended on individual situations and on the particular parish. Most felt that change was the result of the EKD merger, and many saw the ineffectiveness of their own church in putting up any resistance. It was clear to us that the most universally obvious and striking change was that their church had changed from a 'roots-up' church to an establishment, hierarchical, 'top-down' church. We heard this opinion uniformly expressed, in one way or another, by all our respondents.

Pfarrer Jenichen of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig was one of the few still to be hopeful that changes, many of which he was not in favour of, could be used positively. He was adamant that the ultimate task of the church is to preach and live the Gospel, and felt that he could reach a wider audience within the new system. It was up to the individual to make the best use of that opportunity. He did admit, however,

that his parish had advantages which were denied to many others. His city-centre church numbers many well-to-do parishioners, besides the tourists who fill the church and through whose generosity he is able to carry out many charitable and social tasks. However, even he admitted to an increase in bureaucracy, which was bringing (often unwelcome) changes and encroaching on his time.

A strong contrast was presented by Pfarrer Kwaschik in Potsdam, who for a short while in October 1993 caught the headlines by sheltering four Romanian women in his church to protect them from being expelled by the authorities. (This episode was filmed for a BBC television documentary.) He complained bitterly about his lack of time now for his parishioners and important social tasks because of ever-expanding paperwork. 'My role as a pastor is being eroded. I'm almost entirely a pen-pusher.' He was also of the opinion that the merger with the EKD was a sell-out, a one-sided takeover. He did not blame the EKD, however, but the members of his own church for failing to assert themselves. 'Very often,' he said, 'these are the same people who were frightened to speak up before, and who are frightened yet again. This is not a generalisation, but it was obvious who the courageous ones were in the GDR times, those who had the courage to act on their convictions.' He was adamant that if it had not been for the stand taken by the pastors at that time it would have been hard to find any grounds for optimism. He also expressed the feeling (endorsed by many others) that nowadays everything is justified and dictated by money. He told me that the watchword is 'expansion at all costs', but that this implies that the church needs to enhance its status and importance, which in turn implies that the church did not have an important role to play in the past; and this is far from true. There was a feeling that this previously important role was now being disregarded, and that the place of the church was being defined by western requirements.

The pressure and influence of western money was mentioned by all our respondents to varying degrees. Pfarrer Lösche in Leipzig remarked that money was corrupting the church, making it competitive and market-oriented and distracting it from its true mission of pastoral care. Pfarrer Walter expressed the same concern, seeing people's former religious belief transformed into the demand for a return on the money they had 'invested' in the church. 'It makes your theological hair stand on end,' he said, 'and we must take great care not to become corrupted.'

The gap between pastors and their layworkers was causing problems. The increased wage differential was giving rise to some resentment, and the blame for this was put on the EKD. After unification, pastors' salaries were raised to match those of their colleagues in the West, and solidarity with layworkers was thus forfeited. At that time, the pastors had asked to take 70 per cent in salary and to spend 30 per cent on the parish, but the EKD had refused, despite a great deal of popular support for the proposal. Apparently a review of pastors' salaries is currently being undertaken. The EKD was also blamed for taking away the right of church-trained catechists to be teachers, a further cause for complaint.

Administrative and financial accountability was not seen by everyone as a danger and a burden, however. Martina Kruse made the interesting observation that the new requirement had sorted out those pastors who had been lazy. She was keen to stress that the old church should not be seen in retrospect as perfect, and felt that the church could make use of the new system. She said that she wished there could be a clearer voice from the church on society's problems. She felt that the eastern church could give a strong lead here, and that if the church did nothing about social justice and equality then it was not to be trusted. Since then, we should note, the church has spoken up strongly about the perceived incompetence of the state in its handling of

social problems. In autumn 1994 a statement was issued by a working party of the two main churches in Germany accusing the state of doing too little about social problems.

We asked a supplementary question about church attendance. A general observation was that during the *Wende* the church had been to some extent hijacked by non-church groups who had had nowhere else to go, and that it was therefore unrealistic to compare the level of church attendance now with that during the *Wende*. Attendance was perceived generally to be much as before the changes. The exceptions were churches such as the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, where a change in the social mix of the parishioners had led to increased congregations.

Right-wing Extremism

Bearing in mind the high profile given in the British press to racial disturbance and conflict in Germany, we asked all our interviewees to give us their opinion on the topic. We were amazed that some of our interviewees failed to see any connection between right-wing extremism and the church. Their answers revealed a wide disparity, not only of experience, but in perception of the importance of the question. There was a marked difference, for example, in the response between mother and son in the case of Martina and Martin Kruse. After expressing some astonishment at our question, Martina admitted to no direct experience, but said that the parish was favourably disposed to asylum seekers and any kind of immigrants. Her son, on the other hand, knew of at least ten radicals in his school of 1000 pupils. 'They are very extreme, they wear a uniform. The church should be stopping them influencing others, should be preparing pupils and giving them the right answers, giving them the right challenges. Adults think that all young people want to do is play table tennis, but that's not enough.' Pfarrer Kwaschik, in the same town, also felt that the church ought to be talking to the extremists. 'If you isolate them, it only makes them worse.' He remarked that what little the church does do is inadequate and misdirected. Not to have dialogue was dangerous, he said. It provided the opposition with material for criticising and isolating the church.

Andreas Creuzburger, who holds office at the Town Hall in Leipzig, saw some hypocrisy in the attitude of the church. 'The church is very right-wing, although it denies it,' he said. 'The church leaders denounce right-wing extremism, in the peace prayers, in the press, in church instruction, but are doing nothing to get young people together.' This frustration with the church was echoed by Herr Riese, who saw people as frightened of losing their German identity. 'The church should be a go-between, understanding and tolerant to both sides.' Both Pfarrer Jenichen and Pfarrer Lösche in Leipzig described the young as left-wing (at least, those with whom they were usually in contact) and on the side of the immigrants. Pfarrer Jenichen was not aware of problems with right-wingers because unemployment was not a particular problem in his own parish; the building of a new television station and other new jobs were providing expansion in Leipzig. Pfarrer Lösche, however, knew of a Hitler-style youth group in the town, with which he had had some uncomfortable contact. Its members had called him a left-wing pig. 'But it's not neo-fascism,' he said. 'It originates in social injustice. It's a group activity, vandalism and slogans, they just want kudos. They're looking for something to give them a meaning because they have nothing else.' He had invited the group for a discussion, but they had not turned up. 'They can't sustain a discussion,' he said. They even threatened to burn the church down.

In Meissen, Herr Pohl told us of peace prayers said outside the church in order to make a public statement. He also described how he had sent 20 confirmands to see a drama group acting out fables in Coswig, a small village which has recently been developed into a large estate on the outskirts of Meissen. Among the audience were members of a right-wing group, the Meissen Comrades.

> They laughed a lot in the wrong places, but at least they stayed for the discussion. They say they want orderliness, and discipline, they say their intentions are honourable and that they're misunderstood. But they did give the Hitler salute when they left. The church is trying to talk to them, because, after all, the potential for violence is everywhere. I have no real fear of conflict in Meissen; the danger doesn't come from the crackpot left or right, but from the ordinary citizen who isn't prepared to step back and start showing consideration for others. He's not prepared to make sacrifices (ecologically, for example), he couldn't care less and doesn't acknowledge other people's suffering. The motivation to tighten the belt a little more is hardly evident.

Herr Pohl was, however, anxious not to give the impression that there was no danger from right-wing extremism. He sees it as the consequence of lack of consensus in the country as a whole. Pfarrer Walter confirmed that the church in Meissen was trying to come to terms with this problem, talking about it in confirmation classes and religious education lessons.

Religious Education

The question of religious education and the church's responsibility for it has raised several problems. RE as such is apparently no longer universally compulsory and in most regions can be replaced by LER (morality, ethics and religion). It appears that about 25 per cent of students opt for RE and the rest for LER, although, as Herr Pohl observed, there is very little difference in actual content. In Brandenburg LER is compulsory for one hour per week during a trial period; it is not marked. Some church members have been involved in the structuring of the ethics component of LER. Recent media reports show that friction has been caused by the inclusion of the study of other faiths (Islam, for example), and the subject has sparked off much discussion in both eastern and western Germany. Some have spoken of the danger of Koran-only lessons.

The experience of Martina Kruse, a lay teacher in Potsdam who had helped to develop the new LER model in Brandenburg, was one of disappointment. Despite her involvement she did not get the job of director of LER, which went instead to a younger teacher from Berlin who in her view did not have such good qualifications. Martina had been cleared of any suspicion of collaboration in the days of the GDR (*rehabilitiert*); but she felt that, ironically, her failure to get the job was due to her record of active involvement as a Christian. She observed that the School Conference (*Schulkonferenz,* an association of parents and teachers) which makes the final decision on jobs has among its members many teachers who have been declared 'reds' but who are still employed, and often in higher posts; and that they in turn veto the deeper involvement of active Christians.

Another problem was raised by Herr Riese. If the church is seen to be involved in teaching RE, he observed, a common reaction is to believe that the church is speak-

ing on behalf of the state. Citizens of the former GDR are so accustomed to schools teaching only state-approved material that they cannot conceive of the church as an independent source of ideas. Pfarrer Kwaschik said that only 20 per cent of his colleagues and lay helpers were in favour of innovations such as RE and 80 per cent were against, but he himself saw the potential for influence which teaching of RE could afford to a pastor if he wanted to take advantage of it. His colleague in Leipzig, Pfarrer Jenichen, similarly spoke of the opportunities for a church representative in school answering questions asked by the children. Similarly, Dietmar Pohl saw here a chance to reach those children who had not been baptised. He pointed out the double opportunity for communicating religious ideas in schools, both to those who opt for religious instruction (25 per cent) and to the others who take LER, as there is little actual difference in the content of the courses.

Pfarrer Walter in Dresden pointed out that because of the possibility that now exists of opting for RE in schools there is less scope than previously for Christian catechists to instruct children. It is now only in areas with a strong tradition of a popular church, such as the Erzgebirge, where two-thirds of pupils still go to catechism classes, that this method of assimilation into the church is still important. Here RE is not taught in classes 7 and 8 in schools because it is assumed that pupils who wish can attend church confirmation classes.

Confirmation

The choice between confirmation and *Jugendweihe* of course no longer presents the agonising moral dilemma that it did in the GDR, but we were surprised at the relatively low level of importance those whom we questioned attached to the whole issue. For the Christian, confirmation remains a witness to belief, but for the non-Christian, it appears, it is largely a matter of fashion. *Jugendweihe* has no meaning now. For atheists, the secular ceremony of *Jugendfeier* has been substituted. Meanwhile confirmation has taken on an entirely new significance, one much regretted by most of our respondents. 'It's not a heroic thing to be confirmed now,' said Herr Pohl, 'it's mostly done for money' – for the sums of money which are given as presents by friends and family to the confirmand. Confirmation does not usually succeed in keeping young people in church afterwards, as we heard from Martin Kruse, Martina's 16-year-old son, who admitted that his interest had waned, and that he wanted to be more challenged. Several respondents used the term 'rite of passage' about confirmation. Andreas Creuzburger recalled the old conflict between *Jugendweihe* and confirmation, but saw an act of some form of commitment as of considerable importance for churchgoer and non-churchgoer alike.

Church Tax

Opinion on the question of church tax, which highlighted the link between church and state, was widely varied and sharply divided. Whereas Martina Kruse approved of church tax as giving the church a regular income with which to plan, Andreas Creuzburger disapproved of tax-gathering on principle. 'To collect church taxes via the state is wrong. The church ought to provide a different focus, and not be part of the state structure. That doesn't mean that church and state are enemies; but everything has to be decided on individual merit.' Herr Riese also saw state collection of church tax as a retrograde step, feeling that money ought to go directly to the parishes. 'The church is conformist now, no longer oppositional. It is now a voice of

the state, for example through religious instruction in schools, which is viewed as indoctrination.' In Pfarrer Kwaschik's experience, parishioners felt that innovations introduced by the EKD were moves against the East German church, and for that reason many of them were refusing to pay.

> Unification wasn't handled in a sensitive manner. We weren't asked about things like military chaplaincy and church tax. Some specific work within the parish is financed via the church tax, but now we have a cut of 40 per cent. Many don't pay church taxes, they have lost their trust in the church. Their savings are always being made at the expense of the East.

Pfarrer Jenichen remarked somewhat bitterly that pastoral care was seen nowadays as less important than money-raising, 'but you can't ignore people just because they don't organise their money'. In Meissen, Pfarrer Walter saw people leaving the church because of the tax, even though there was more actual cash coming in.

Military Chaplaincy

The issue of the church's involvement in pastoral care for the armed forces is still unresolved for the former East Germany, and it did not seem to excite as much comment on this visit as it had in 1992. It was obvious, however, that many pastors hoped that the church would make a decisive stand on the issue. Military chaplaincy was seen largely as an anachronism, most soldiers not requiring or requesting it. As Andreas Creuzburger remarked, 'The church shouldn't have functions as part of the establishment. I am against military chaplains. Most soldiers do not request specialist pastoral care. They should be looked after spiritually in the parishes where they are serving.' Several of our interviewees felt that pastors should not be tied to structures in this way, and pointed out that the issue would cause a real predicament for many pastors who advised young men not to do military service in the GDR. Martina Kruse remarked that a pastor who became a civil servant by joining the army might find himself required by the state to act against his conscience. Herr Pohl said he did not expect a quick decision on the issue. It was the only area, in his view, where church and state did not seem to be in agreement. As Pfarrer Lösche remarked, 'Our view on the military chaplaincy issue is the only independent East German church opinion to survive. We've taken everything else from the West, lock, stock and barrel.' Hope is high, therefore, that on this point at least the church in eastern Germany is not giving in.

Social Problems

On the subject of social problems and the role of the church in social action there was once again a wide range of opinion. The state has accepted responsibility for much of the social work formerly done by the eastern church – for the homeless, for example. Only one respondent, Herr Riese, thought that the church should confine itself to charitable activity only, and leave social problems to the politicians. Our other interviewees felt that the church had a role to play here, but the scope and extent of such a role was perceived in several different ways. Unemployment was cited by several as a major area of concern. 'The church could do more,' said Martina Kruse. 'All the opportunities are there, but often they're not followed up because the pastor is overloaded. And even when some attempt is made the unemployed don't come because

they are ashamed. Work played an important role in the GDR. People felt acknowledged through their work – this is missing now.'

Although some of the *Landeskirchen* are not particularly active in the sphere of social action, a number of churches in Berlin-Brandenburg are doing more, demanding changes in employment policies for example. Manfred Stolpe, formerly secretary-general of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR and now prime minister of Brandenburg, was quoted as telling people to get more politically involved, and it seems that he is still regarded as a churchman and someone who will lend a sympathetic ear. Pfarrer Führer in Leipzig had started a number of initiatives for the unemployed after gathering experience in the Ruhr valley. He said that these initiatives also help the church: 'We are not just a hollow body for tourists.' At the Thomaskirche in Leipzig self-help voluntary groups are run and church people are being asked to show practical solidarity. The Thomaskirche also runs a women's refuge and a mission to the homeless. The latter is run in conjunction with the district government department, with a paid leader, an example as Pfarrer Jenichen saw it of 'public money going into social coffers'. Herr Pohl in Dresden, however, was less content with the church's record in social problems. 'The church could solve the housing crisis by donating land,' he said, adding that 'we in the church have to learn that the church must also come up with ideas about how to change social structures. This isn't an East-West problem, it's a general human problem.' Pfarrer Walter said there were fewer social problems in his Dresden parish, and that even if the unemployed did come forward to ask for help, the church had few resources with which to respond. He felt that the solidarity in adversity which had been the common experience of the GDR was now missing; rents had risen sharply, relationships between landlords and tenants had altered and conflict had greatly increased. 'The East Germans don't trust the market economy,' he said.

Church–State Relations

The question of church–state relations and the place of the EKD within the state structure proved even harder for some of our respondents, and provoked some harsh criticism. 'There used to be rigid state control,' said Pfarrer Kwaschik, 'and now we get just as much control from bureaucracy.' He saw the church as very right-wing, and blamed the EKD for money-saving moves which were always at the expense of the church in the east. However, the eastern church was also to blame, he said, for not being astute enough after unification. 'We had lots to give, but decisions were made over our heads; we were never asked. The GDR systems were often evil, but they were at least sometimes truly social.'

Several of our interviewees mentioned the practice of asking clergy to bless state buildings, which was seen as both ridiculous and insulting to the church. Pastors were also invited to contribute a church presence at various state functions. Some pastors saw the danger that the church would thus become a pillar of the state, while the people still perceived the state as the enemy.

The relationship between church and state was seen from many and sometimes diametrically opposing viewpoints. Herr and Frau Riese: 'The church–state contract doesn't work in the east. The church has no function in the state.' Andreas Creuzburger: 'The church should be a counterbalance to the state, looking at each problem as it arises, independently, and not tied to state policies.' Pfarrer Führer: 'I want a strict separation of church and state. The church has to be with the poor. We have to find a path through grey materialism, atheism and godlessness.' Dietmar Pohl: 'We

should seek cooperation rather than conflict with the state. People tend to see the church as part of the organisation of power which is the state, even though the law says the two are separate.' Pfarrer Lösche: 'We are going the way of a state church – we are becoming leaden and untruthful.'

Pfarrer Walter summarised the conflicting positions well. He said that the church had played an effective role under a totalitarian regime because it had had to fight for its very existence. In some ways, though, the church had had greater freedom than now, because the state had not interfered with the preaching of the Gospel or with the allocation of jobs. Now, however, things were different and in many ways worse. Under the EKD church members from the eastern church had yet to learn the true meaning (and the limitations) of democracy, and were in danger of being motivated solely by finance. He saw the EKD as having a weak image, and being in danger of losing grass-roots support.

Frau Meyer saw state and church as now forming an indissoluble unity, but felt that the church should not have a political role. 'I see the task for us as that of wielding more moral influence. I'd like to live in a Christian state, but the church can't be a dictator, it should be an example.'

Conclusion

It became obvious to us early in our survey that most if not all of our respondents felt that the church had changed drastically since 1989. Some at least of the laity were encouraged by the new opportunities. 'The church has changed in a positive way,' said Martina Kruse. 'People have greatly matured; they can now dictate their needs to the pastor.' The pastors particularly were feeling the pressures of belonging to a very different structure, however. 'I demonstrated because I wanted changed conditions which *we* had brought about,' said Pfarrer Kwaschik,

> but now the conditions are changing us. We are being ordered about yet again, it's just different people doing it. Now it's bureaucracy which is in charge. People are still afraid, including us in the church. What use are rules and regulations, if we can't do what Jesus did? He healed people. We are forced into a straitjacket. I see no hope from the pastor's point of view.

One of the topics causing the gravest concern seemed to be the perceived conservatism of the 'new' church, which was seen as becoming too institutionalised and as reluctant to engage in self-discovery, to open itself up to dialogue or to ask questions. A church which had been a spiritual home for all opposition refugees during the *Wende* now had no power to rally such people, being too concerned to conform with the requirements of the state. One respondent, Herr Riese, said that political questions are now 'back where they belong, with the state opposition. Day to day politics don't belong in church, the church should give overall moral guidelines, not get caught up in political quarrels.' His was a lone voice, however.

The call for the church to go 'back to basics' was echoed by several of our respondents. The church should be the repository of moral precepts, warning society when it was going wrong. Herr and Frau Riese expressed the opinion that now there was no pressure from outside the church was in danger of falling apart, that solidarity – a sense of community and of communal responsibility – had been lost and that people were too self-absorbed. They felt that the church ought to promote understanding and tolerance, and carry out the function of arbitrator. Barbara Greulich, a hospital chaplain and pastor to whom we had also talked on our first visit, was very critical of the

failure of her church to speak out, observing with bitterness that 'no one is likely to admit that we let everyone down, that we acted wrongly.'

Pfarrer Jenichen in Leipzig was one of the more optimistic. The population in the Thomaskirche had changed and he saw this as healthy for the church. The relatively more wealthy community was attending more frequently and he saw his church as more active than before, moving away from pastor-centred activity, more socially involved, improving its contacts with people seeking a faith and offering shelter to those outside the church.

Less optimistic, and probably the most radical of those we interviewed, Pfarrer Führer of the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig had a similar vision for the church – as a working church, preaching and living the Gospel. 'The church mustn't lose its drive,' he said, and he quoted the Old Testament, talking about a journey through the desert and the risks of building a golden calf. His understanding of God's will was for 'a church which stays alive. The pastor must be mad, an idealist. We need to engage with the poor, as Jesus did.' He told us of his own close involvement, and that of his church, with the peace movement, and explained his attitude to those who were involved in the events of the *Wende*. Of those who attended the peace prayers, he told us, 90 per cent were non-Christians.

> In the name of Jesus we allowed those people into our church. From 1988, everyone came to the peace prayers, and this led to a confrontation with the church. It dragged many people out of their apathetic laziness, and allowed progress within the church. My actions were inspired by Jesus – he was a radical and not a 'false god' of the bourgeoisie. You can't just quote Jesus to justify existing conditions. The salt of the earth stops the rot.

Pfarrer Führer also declared himself to be in favour of strict separation of church and state.

We are frequently struck by the contrasting views expressed by people in the same city. Pfarrer Lösche, working in Leipzig with Pfarrer Führer and Pfarrer Jenichen, but in a different district, had little of Pfarrer Jenichen's optimism, and less of a sense of urgent radicalism than Pfarrer Führer. 'The old believers are dying and the young are too busy with shopping and travelling; the sense of community has disappeared,' he said. His parish had shrunk and he detected a general sense of disappointment. He felt that the church had wasted its chance for renewal, and that the EKD could be only partly held to blame. 'Our church failed to sell its ideas to the West German church, particularly on the ecumenical level, where we could have given them plenty of initiatives. Now we are dependent, because of the money, and we find that we have miscalculated.' His own vision was of a humane church with a warm atmosphere, one which must not neglect its real duties, those of prayer and preaching the Gospel, which he saw as its most powerful tools.

Whereas the concept of change within the church was seen by some as a threat, others saw it as a necessity. This view was powerfully expressed by Dietmar Pohl. 'The East German church has had to try to jump on to a moving train, and it's too late to change the train's direction. The best way to preach the Gospel is through social action, as part of the system,' he said. He saw the church evolving a more spiritual interpretation of the Gospel, with more charismatic and evangelical services. He foresaw a process of learning, which would bring with it new insights and also new responsibilities. He described a church which fell from its pedestal after so many of its members were accused of collaboration with the *Stasi*, with the effect that

many people were now frightened to make political statements. Herr Pohl stressed the fact that only the Synod and the bishops can speak for and in the name of the church. The church ought to be the messenger of peace, but because of the complexities of the administrative structures, everything takes such a long time. He described the plight of the pastor, especially in a small village parish, struggling with the complicated new laws and structures, and thus losing many potential advantages. The church in the East had been proud not to have any power, it was a church for human beings, but nowadays the people see the state and the church as one, and cannot differentiate.

Pfarrer Walter in Meissen gave a clear picture of the changed and changing role of the church. He was in no doubt that the church had changed, and observed that some pastors had adapted more readily than others. He was also sympathetic to the difficulties facing the laity in adapting to the changed situation. 'We are confused with the CDU in people's minds, and we get blamed for the CDU's mistakes. It was easier in the GDR, because conviction came from having an outside enemy, the refuge was in Jesus.' There is a division in the church, he said, between the pietist wing and the politically engaged wing.

At the conclusion of our first visit in 1992, our perception was of a quiet optimism, of a church facing difficult changes and adaptations, losing a proportion of its followers, but relatively confident of its overall direction and mission. The picture two years later was somewhat different, and reflected, we felt, some of the wider complexities and confusions which have surfaced since unification. Dietmar Pohl vividly described how the expectations which the church may have had, and in some cases still does, are often not being realised because of complicated administrative structures; but he was quick to concede that if the pastor is a good one, then his parish will be good too. The hope would seem to be for a church which should not seek to strengthen its power base or to promote itself, but to live in a humble way alongside the people. In many ways, the church is succeeding in this aspiration; but the task of simply keeping the boat afloat is itself an exhausting process. In autumn 1994 Herr Pohl was about to be ordained and take charge of his own parish. He described very clearly the opportunities and the pitfalls facing a pastor. 'The pastor has opportunities, the Gospel can be interpreted, but this must not be done as an exercise in self-promotion, because this will separate him from the people and he will be in danger of becoming part of an institution.'

It remains to be seen whether the pastors and the people of the former East German Protestant Church will be able to maintain their old commitment to a human-oriented, non-institutional community, or whether they will find themselves swallowed up by the mighty machine they perceive the EKD to be. As we interviewed pastors and laypeople, our sympathies were roused for those who have still not given up hope of being listened to and who see it as a matter of the greatest importance to make themselves heard. To ignore their voices would be a criminal waste of the strengths which the East German churches developed at such cost under communism, particularly their concern for a fairer deal for the less fortunate members of society. It is to be hoped that those pastors in the West who are in sympathy with their eastern brethren will strive to speak with them with a common voice. The church could achieve so much by tapping into the vast resources of available experience and energy, and by harnessing them for the right cause. The EKD's experience and well-oiled structures, allied with the people-power of a grass-roots church which was not suppressed but encouraged, could so well lead the way in the fight for social justice.

Notes and References

[1] Beth Cantrell and Ute Kemp, 'The role of the Protestant Church in Eastern Germany: some personal experiences and reflections', *Religion, State & Society,* vol. 21, nos 3–4 (1993), pp. 277–88.