

Kirche von Unten and Other Basis Groups in the GDR, 1987-88

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The clocks of East Berlin striking 12 on the night of 24 November 1987 rang in a new era of tension between church and state. A bald announcement that 'seven persons had been caught red-handed producing subversive material in the cellar of a building adjacent to the Zion Church' gave the official view of what happened on that night. There was a hint of a 20th century Guy Fawkes conspiracy, of a plot to undermine the very foundations of the Democratic Republic.

The events of that night and the succeeding days have since become known in some detail. A public prosecutor, accompanied by several members of the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, (State Security Service) knocked at the parsonage of the Zion Church round about midnight. The minister, Rev. Hans Simon, was roused and presented with a search warrant. His visitors wished to investigate the environmental library that is housed in Zion Church premises. The search took place and several duplicating machines and a number of documents were seized. Some young people were still in the library — they were arrested. The next day five of those detained, including a 14-year-old and a 17-year-old, were released. Two remained in custody: Wolfgang Rüddenklau and Bernt Schlegel. Their names were already well known to the security people. Hints were dropped that the authorities had Article 218 of the Penal Code in mind — 'forming associations for the pursuit of illegal aims'. During the day 21 other members of basis groups were arrested in East Berlin; others also in Rostock, Dresden, Jena, Weimar, Wismar and Halle.¹

Basis Groups and the Protestant Church

The raid on the Zion Church drew a great deal of public attention to a sometimes awkward partnership that was already far from being a secret: the protection given by the Protestant Church to scores of

¹'Dokumenta Zion', *epd Dokumentation*, 1988 No. 9, pp. 5-13.

semi-independent basis groups (some of them owing only the sketchiest kind of loyalty to the Gospel). Several times during the 1980s synods and other church gatherings have come face to face with the problem. Efforts have been made to set down some kind of 'ground rules' for this sort of cooperation. One of the clearest efforts in this direction was made by the leadership of the Provincial Church of Saxony, published shortly before the events of November 1987.² (It should be pointed out that these guidelines did not apply to East Berlin.)

The Dresden document began by defining the basic role of the church: it is, in the wake of the crucified and risen Lord, to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and to build up the Body of Christ in the light of that Gospel. Even if the church is without political power, it is aware that this primary duty has certain political implications. The following principles must not be forgotten:

We must be committed to the cause of the weak and those who suffer; we must oppose injustice and oppression.

We must be committed to the peaceful solution of conflicts; we must oppose hatred and the cult of violence.

We must be committed to the cause of preserving the environment, and be ready to accept our share of responsibility.

We must be committed to the cause of truth; we must oppose falsehood and deception.

If, as a result, the church becomes involved in political activity, it must be clear that everything we say and do springs from the primary duty of loyalty to the Gospel.

The existence of basis groups within the church springs from that primary loyalty. Indeed, Christian congregations have consisted of groups from the very earliest times. The existence of groups within a congregation is a sign of the living nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus the gifts of an individual can be unfolded and used in a meaningful way.

Recently, as we know, certain individuals and groups have been seeking the 'shelter of the church' without being members of the Body of Christ in the full sense of the word, and without identifying themselves with the church and its primary task. Understandably enough, responsible bodies in the church and members of congregations alike have asked for guidance to help them in deciding whom, and which groups, can — or should — be accepted.

The church leadership in Saxony therefore puts forward these suggestions:

²'Kirchenleitung der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirche Sachsen: Tätigsericht', *epd Dokumentation*, 1987 No. 52, pp. 1-3.

1. Neither the persons or groups nor any statements made on their behalf may contradict the Gospel of Jesus Christ, nor may they conflict with the church's reconciling mission. Their programmes must — insofar as they need support from the church — be based on the solid ground of God's commandments.
2. They must be prepared to put themselves in the context of the church. In other words, they must be prepared for the church to ask them critical questions. That does not mean any censorship of their writings. It does mean, however, that the church's requirements should be clearly spelled out at an early stage. In this way a critical exchange of views (if appropriate in the church premises concerned) would not be misinterpreted as a restriction of the freedom which a guest can rightly expect.
3. The work of the persons or groups must always be constructive in nature. Those who go in for the mere analysis of problems, with no practical proposals, are not acceptable. They obviously do not have the basic area of agreement with the church's primary task that can reasonably be expected of them.
4. The style and manner of declarations made by individuals and groups is important, as well as what is said in them. Slander, for example, must clearly be ruled out.
5. The basic ground rules of the church's common life must be respected. For instance, there must be tolerance of other activities and view-points.
6. The church must be prepared for the expression of uncomfortable or unwelcome truths, which cannot be expressed adequately elsewhere. Some persons or groups are given shelter by the church for this very reason.
7. The acceptance of a person or group means that the church concerned puts its premises at the disposal of the former. It is understood that the hosts may enter the premises at any time, to express whatever views they consider appropriate.
8. The degree to which church channels may be used in giving publicity is determined by the degree to which the viewpoints of church and groups are in harmony.
9. The question whether a particular person or group should be accepted is decided by the church body responsible for that locality. In the case of a single church, it will be the parish council, which in all these affairs works closely with the Superintendent.

Although these principles were worked out in Dresden, they were applicable in all essentials to East Berlin. They go far to explain the relationship between the minister (Hans Simon) and the parish council

of the Zion Church on the one hand, and the environmental group on the other. The latter operated a library in a cellar belonging to the church, and produced various environmental papers (*Umweltblätter*). The situation, however, was more complicated, for it is clear that a magazine of a rather different type was found at the Zion Church — *Grenzfall* (*Border Case*). This magazine was published by a group called *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte* (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights). It was the policy of this group to remain as independent as possible of the Protestant Church. Clearly, the state security officials were more concerned about *Grenzfall* than about the environmental papers. It should be stressed, furthermore, that the groups linked with the Zion Church represent only two of the scores — perhaps hundreds — which operate today in the GDR.

Development of Basis Groups

It might be helpful at this point briefly to review the history and progress of East German basis groups. Ever since 1949 the Protestant churches have borne their own distinctive witness in matters of peace and war. An amorphous 'independent peace movement' first became evident in the early 1980s, with the general wearing of the 'swords into ploughshares' badge, and the holding of annual 'peace weeks' and 'peace workshops' in various churches. A number of more or less organised groups were in evidence at this time, generally favouring a unilateral reduction of nuclear weapons. Such a suggestion aroused the furious hostility of the state, which was at the time preaching an uncompromising doctrine of 'peace through armed strength'. By the middle of the decade there was a general feeling of helplessness and fatalism in the air — what could the ordinary citizen do in the face of competitive nuclear might? Gradually a new trend arose. It was felt to be better to concentrate on everyday matters where it was possible to have an effect. Hence peace groups turned to environmental issues and new environmental groups arose. (The environmental library at the Zion Church seems to have come into being in 1986.)

By 1987 it became clear that a super-power agreement on the reduction of nuclear weapons was within reach. The GDR was converted to the very policy which the Protestant Church had advocated publicly since 1981. The debt was not acknowledged. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* were in the air. A good deal of steam had been taken out of the independent peace movement, and the new, rather more relaxed atmosphere which prevailed — despite the many assurances from the authorities that the changes in the Soviet Union were unnecessary in the GDR — meant that many basis groups

became more visible and audible. The movement *Gegenstimmen* (Countervoices) was only one of many. Its general aim was to press for the respect of civil rights in the GDR, to work for social change, and to call for democratisation.

During 1987 a new factor came into play, with the appearance of a group known as *Staatesbürgerschaftsrechtler* (Civil Rights Activists). It comprised a large number — possibly thousands — of citizens who wished to leave the country, and had their applications to leave the country refused. This narrow understanding of civil rights brought them into conflict not only with the Protestant Church, but also with most of the other basis groups.

The particular movement, however, which most clearly illustrates the constant friction between church and basis groups is the so-called *Kirche von Unten* (Church from Below). Though it did not emerge as a specific movement until 1987, the *Kirche von Unten* represented a grass-roots trend which had been in evidence for several years. In East Berlin members of basis groups had enjoyed annual opportunities to meet, discuss, and make their presence felt. These occasions were the so-called 'peace workshops', held each summer between 1982 and 1986, and attended by some 3,000 people. These 'workshops' caused the state authorities no little annoyance. Moreover, the leaders of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church, meeting shortly after the 1986 'workshop', (bearing in mind the 'ground rules' quoted earlier) found it hard to justify this annual fixture as a genuine church activity. Yet after long negotiations permission had been granted for the holding of a *Kirchentag* (church festival) in 1987.

As the first *Kirchentag* to take place in the capital, and held to mark the 750th birthday of Berlin, it would have a good deal of international importance. In these circumstances, the church leadership decided — rather hurriedly — not to hold the customary 'peace workshop' during 1987. Various reasons were given — for example, the declining quality of the work done, the problems of fixing responsibility, the lack of trust between groups and leadership as well as the approaching *Kirchentag*.³ Members of the basis groups, however, felt that these were mere pretexts and that the real reason was that the church leaders were very worried about disturbing the cosy relationship with the state which had developed during the 'birthday' year.

Faced by virtual exclusion from the *Kirchentag*, representatives of the basis groups decided to hold a *Kirchentag von Unten* (grass-roots *Kirchentag*), and asked the church leadership to put suitable church buildings at their disposal. The request was backed by a threat: if no centre was allotted to them, the basis groups would occupy one by force.

³ 'Friedenswerkstatt', *Kirche im Sozialismus*, 1986 No. 6, pp. 238-40.

Thus the *Kirche von Unten* came into being. It does not claim to be a separate church or sect. Its members regard themselves as members of the Protestant Church. On the other hand, its basis and aims seem far removed from those of the *Amtskirche* (Official Church). The theology of the *Kirche von Unten* is described in a 1987 leaflet as follows:⁴

Mark 2:22 is of overriding importance: 'No man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred; but new wine must be put into new bottles.' This saying is the key to the aims and deeds of Jesus. Born in a stable, he had his origin in the lowest stratum of society. His life was that of a liberator; he belongs among those who have nothing to lose but their chains. To his 'new life' there belong new life-forms. The Jesus movement is one in which men and women are equal; it is not a fellowship of men only. The new wine rules out dominance by any kind of formal church leadership. The Jesus movement is not based on marriage and the family — that patriarchal system of oppression. Nor is it based on the principle of the amount of work performed.

The words of Jesus recorded in Mark 4:25 ('For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath') represents a cry against all expropriators. Jesus' implacable opposition to the priestly dominating class and to all kinds of capitalism is made clear in Mark 10:42-45, 11:15-18 and elsewhere.

If the work of Jesus be put into modern terms, it might be summed up as *Staatsfeindliche Hetze* (anti-State agitation) or *Staatsfeindliche Gruppenbildung* (formation of groups hostile to the state), both of which are crimes in the GDR.

Members of the *Kirche von Unten* also made known some very specific objections to the official church.⁵ They criticised the increasing bureaucratisation of the church, quoting as an example the construction of new buildings rather than concentration on youth work and other vital tasks. They objected to the church devoting so much of its meagre resources to 'symbolic projects' like the Berlin Cathedral and the Dietrich Bonhoeffer House. They strongly disliked what they thought to be the church's tendency to treat the basis groups like children. The church leadership claimed to be the only representative of the groups in negotiations with the state about

⁴ 'Fliegendes Papier' issued by *Kirche von Unten*, 4 June 1987.

⁵ Hans-Jürgen Röder, 'Rebellische Kirchenbasis', *Kirche im Sozialismus*, 1987 No. 3, p. 87.

awkward questions, and the leadership's attitude meant that activities of the groups were censored or even forbidden. In particular, they accused the bishops of behaving in some ways like agents of the socialist state.

It is far from surprising that the Protestant Church leaders found it hard to cooperate with the *Kirche von Unten*. To negotiate with a body which had no recognised leaders was indeed difficult. They believed that the 'left-wing' interpretation of the teaching of Jesus was not borne out by modern — or for that matter traditional — scholarship. The Protestant leadership certainly had a great deal of sympathy with basis group criticisms of GDR society and of the party's rule, but they could not convince them that the policy of 'small steps' was of any value. The Protestant leadership worked for minor but practical measures (such as the revision of a particular paragraph of the criminal law, or the preservation of a certain area of woodland outside Berlin), whereas the *Kirche von Unten* appeared anxious to reform the whole country in a fortnight. Most worrying of all was the fact that this movement had neither 'members' nor 'rules'. Even though it claimed to be a Christian body, it might at any time become dominated by people who were in no way committed to the Gospel.

Such being the situation, discussions between the church leadership and the *Kirche von Unten* were not likely to run smoothly. It could hardly be said that the latter adhered to many of the ground rules outlined at Dresden. In particular, the groups insisted on having church buildings to work in, while ruling out any form of control or supervision by church authorities. Yet in due course an East Berlin church was allotted to the *Kirche von Unten* — (the Galilee church), and later a second was added — for the holding of the *Kirchentag von Unten*.

A member of the *Kirche von Unten* describes the occasion as follows:

Attendance was very high. On the first day premises that ought not to have housed more than 3,000 had more than that number present. There was so much of a crush that discussion in groups could hardly take place. It was then that the church leadership decided to supply a second venue. They chose a building planned to house a part of the original *Kirchentag* that had attracted very few visitors. The *Kirchentag von Unten* was very successful and made a big impact — both on the basis group visitors and on the numerous official *Kirchentag* visitors who left their own official events and came to the *Kirchentag von Unten*. It was a hazardous undertaking. We had not been quite sure if a second building would be needed, but events proved our expectations right.

A leaflet describes the movement's participation in the final evening

of the official *Kirchentag* (at a football stadium in the Berlin suburb of Köpenick):⁶

On Sunday we numbered about 300 people, carrying banners, going towards Köpenick. The escort of gentlemen in plain clothes, whose painstaking attentions many of us had enjoyed for many days, continued right up to the gates of the stadium. At the entrance a *Kirchentag* official tried to persuade us, unsuccessfully, to keep our banners in the background. We walked in a long procession through the throng of people as far as the centre of the stadium. There stood a vast stage, on which a group of grey-clad women stood holding an enormous banner. We circled the stage several times. There was some applause, but also critical and hostile looks. Four of us went forward to affix our banner to the central tower. One youngish woman ran up to us and shouted: 'Get lost! You have come here only to make trouble!' Despite some problems, we were able to affix a banner to the tower.

We were not assigned any official part in the programme at the stadium, on the grounds that it was already full, and exact timing was needed because of the presence of television crews. Nevertheless, the event overran its time by a 20 minute margin! Never trust a cleric!

At the close of the *Kirchentag* a group of participants stood in a line, holding the official banners aloft. One of our number wore a *Kirche von Unten* banner in the form of a pair of handcuffs. Others held their black (or black and red) banners high in the air; three of us imitated the holy monkeys from the East. We were very disappointed that almost no pictures of our actions were shown on western television. (Needless to say, nothing of the kind appeared in GDR television reports.)

As we were leaving the stadium we had discussions with a number of *Kirchentag* participants who shared our point of view. They wanted to know if and how we were going to continue with our activities, if further leaflets were going to be produced, and how they themselves could take part. There is discontent on every hand with the official church and with the reluctance of conservative churchmen to make any kind of change.

There is no doubt that the summer of 1987 represented — for the church leadership as well as the grass-roots — the high noon of East German *glasnost*. Surveillance did not disappear, but it became a good deal less oppressive. A large-scale 'Catholic Meeting', held in Dresden and ending with a meeting of over 100,000 people on the

⁶Report of *Kirche von Unten*, issued June 1987.

banks of the Elbe, caused few problems. There was even a hint of a Roman Catholic 'Church from Below' — observers at the open-air event saw banners displayed with watchwords such as 'Destruction of the Environment', 'AIDS', 'Abortion', 'Misuse of Power', and 'Loneliness'.⁷

The most remarkable instances of *glasnost'* were evident at the Olaf-Palme Peace March (September 1987), when for the first time the authorities admitted banners belonging to church members and to members of independent groups. According to one observer there were no less than 600 members of basis and peace groups at the final assembly and their banners were, needless to say, the most noticed and admired. The same person reports that she walked part of the way at the side of a party functionary. There was of course a discussion: was this new-found freedom a 'gift' from the state in view of the impending visit of Honecker to the Federal Republic, or was it to become a permanent feature of GDR life? The official functionary thought that it was evidence of the state's willingness to change. She felt that any gain is always balanced by a loss. And so it was.

State Repression of Basis Groups

Not many weeks after the peace march — during the night of 24 November — the blow fell. Word quickly spread through East Berlin, and during the evening of 25 November about 150 members of various basis groups met in the Zion Church. Two of those arrested (Rüddenklaud and Schlegel) were still in gaol and members of the basis groups set about discussing ways of ensuring their release.

The *Kirche von Unten* decided on a time of intercession, to last as long as the two remained in custody. They held a vigil, with candles, outside the Zion Church. Many local Protestant churches were full every evening, and the action had an immensely powerful effect on the population as a whole. Practical help of various kinds was brought to the vigil-keepers. The security personnel were, of course, always on duty, photographing, filming, and taking copious notes. Nevertheless, the vigil-keepers remained undaunted.

If the state authorities had expected that the church leadership would quietly abandon the cause of the basis groups, they were sadly disappointed. As early as 25 November Bishop Forck protested in the strongest possible terms about the unauthorised search of church premises. On the evening of that day, too, General Superintendent Krusche appeared at the Zion Church; here he read a statement which

⁷See Arvan Gordon, 'Major Church Events in the GDR', *KNS*, No. 281 6 August 1987, pp. 10-11 and *RCL*, Vol. 15 No. 3 (1987), pp. 330-32.

gave strong support to the vigil-keepers — and to the arrested men. The action taken by basis groups and church leadership alike was most striking, and must have had a powerful effect on the authorities. Early in December the prisoners were released, and the charges against them dropped.

During the winter, echoes of the Zion Church affair continued to rumble on, though it seemed that both church and state wished to reduce tension. As things turned out, however, there was to be no return to 'normality'. 1987 had seen a considerable growth among the numbers of would-be emigrants. Dissatisfaction grew, as applications for emigration were either left unanswered or refused without any reasons given; in most cases, applicants were constantly harassed by the security forces. (It should be pointed out that, according to the legal doctrines of the Federal Republic, a move from East to West Germany or vice-versa is not regarded as *emigration*, but simply as a journey from one part of the country to another.) Many church-based groups of would-be emigrants sprang up, but there were constant stresses. For one thing, the church leadership had for years underlined the duty of believers to remain in the GDR, where their witness was sorely needed. Nearly all the members of the other basis groups wished to remain in the GDR, and work for change within that society. Cooperation was thus distinctly difficult. Neither the *Kirche von Unten* nor the *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte* group was very welcoming. However, the latter had a small subgroup concerned with the criminal law of the GDR, and despite initial doubts, some 200 representatives of the would-be emigrants were accepted. The subgroup was working for the basic human right to cross frontiers without harassment.

The critical moment came on 17 January 1988. It was well known that a big march was to be held in East Berlin on that day in honour of two communist heroes, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Remembering the freedom allowed at the time of the Olaf-Palme march, several basis groups planned to take part, including *Kirche von Unten*, *Solidarische Kirche* (Church of Solidarity) and *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte*. There was certainly a good deal of friction among the groups. Not surprisingly, much publicity was centred upon leading members of the *Kirche von Unten*, who carried on their banner a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg: '*Freiheit ist immer Freiheit des Andersdenkenden*' ('True freedom means freedom to think differently'.) They were arrested on their way to the demonstration. At that time, or shortly afterwards, several well-known members of basis groups were arrested, among them Freya Klier and Stephan Krawczyk, a married couple Regine and Wolfgang Templin, Bärbel Bohley, Werner Fischer (all members of

the *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte*), Vera Wollenberger and Ralf Hirsch. In all, 100 or more activists were arrested.

It is not appropriate to deal here with the aftermath of 17 January. Suffice it to point out that most of the would-be emigrants were soon released, but the authorities made use of their presence to charge leading members of other groups with *Zusammenrottung* (illegal association) or similar offences. Most of the well-known activists were expelled to the West, though at least three retained their GDR passports. In response there were numerous silent demonstrations and church services of intercession during the second half of January. The support, however, did not come only from grass-roots. Once more, forceful action was taken by the church leadership. There were vigorous protests against the arrests. Vera Wollenberger was immensely touched and heartened to see Bishop Forck sitting in the courtroom at her trial and the church's lawyer, Schnur, was actively involved in the defence of the accused. Once more the *Kirche von Unten* and the 'Church from Above' were seen in action side by side.

There seems little doubt that the state's aim early in 1988 was to cripple the basis groups. Though they continued to function, less was heard of the groups after the spring of that year. The church leadership expected that there might be difficulties during the four *Kirchentage* that were due to take place during the early summer at Görlitz, Erfurt, Rostock and Halle. Yet the problems that arose stemmed mainly from the bold speaking of the official church. True, the basis group known as the *Solidarische Kirche* (working with two others) issued an open letter entitled '*Neues Handeln*' ('A New Approach') addressed to all Christians in the GDR.⁸ At Rostock the basis groups seemed satisfied with the facilities accorded them, and Bishop Stier commented that there was no division between 'Church from Above' and Church from Below. Of all the statements issuing from the four *Kirchentage*, the one which perhaps caused the most stir emerged at Halle. It was a discussion document read by Pastor Friedrich Schorlemmer of — appropriately enough — Wittenberg. Under the heading '*20 Thesen zur Erneuerung und Umgestaltung*' ('Twenty Theses Concerning the Renewal of Society'), Schorlemmer made all kinds of suggestions: the holding of genuine elections on a democratic basis, revision of the criminal law, a more humane approach from officialdom; more attention to 'green' issues, and so forth.⁹ It is perhaps not surprising that the authorities reacted to these and other initiatives by suppressing or modifying Protestant Church

⁸ 'Briefe an Christen in der DDR und ihre Gemeindevertretungen — Neues Handeln', *epd Dokumentation*, 1988 No. 39a, p. 6.

⁹ Friedrich Schorlemmer, '20 Thesen zur Erneuerung und Umgestaltung', *epd Dokumentation*, 1988 No. 39a, pp. 22-23.

publications on at least 40 different occasions during 1988. It looks as if the party leadership has taken the decision that the church's witness must be drastically muzzled.

Conclusion

In conclusion, perhaps, the point should be stressed that the Protestant Church is under attack on many fronts. Many of the basis groups attack the 'official church' for being too traditionalist, too much attached to old habits and forms of service, too dependent on western funds, too often reflecting official party policies, and too afraid of upsetting the state. There are various Christians, and indeed non-Christians, in the Federal Republic who profess to see a 'socialist' church, wholly involved in GDR society, parroting Marxist values and lacking the courage to speak the truth.¹⁰ On the other hand, GDR Roman Catholic spokesmen occasionally administer rebukes to the Protestant Church for losing sight of the Gospel, for allowing its buildings to be used by agnostics, and for holding 'intercession services' which are political demonstrations rather than occasions for the worship of God.¹¹ As has been said already, state spokesmen have recently been on the offensive, stressing that religion is free in the GDR, and that churchmen would have no problems if they avoided political, social and economic issues and kept to their proper role.¹² Nor should one forget the attitude of numbers of more traditionally minded members of congregations, who are exceedingly worried by their churches being invaded by people they see as oddly clad feminists, drug addicts, punks, homosexuals and the like — not repentant 'publicans' but dissatisfied citizens who attend church simply because they can express their views nowhere else.

The ship of the GDR Protestant Church has indeed a difficult course to follow. There is constant fire from both Left and Right; from the front as well as from the rear. Shots across the bows come from friends, while the bitterest of foes sometimes signal messages of encouragement. During the hours of darkness occasional pirates slip on board, protesting their devotion to the ship's mission. Some of the crew criticise the captain bitterly, and threaten rebellion. Yet there is no clear sense of purpose among the mutineers; they are divided among themselves. All the time many of the crew profess

¹⁰This attitude to the GDR Protestant Church is well represented by — *inter alia* — the journal *Christen drüber* (Bonn: Brüsewitzzentrum).

¹¹Gordon, 'Major Church Events', *KNS* and *RCL*.

¹²'Herr Stolpe und der Idealfall', *Neues Deutschland*, 11 January 1989.

complete confidence in the ship's officers, and faithfully carry out their tasks.

We should be thankful that, even if the ship's officers are not always in agreement about the exact course to be followed, the GDR church has such a clear sense of direction, and that its witness to the Gospel is so evident.