

Caution Characterizes Protestants in East Germany

Berlin — (RNS)—Four hundred and fifty years ago this October Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation. Yet because Luther's town of Wittenberg is in East Germany, the commemoration of that significant event will hardly have the international or church character commensurate with its historical importance.

This is one of the many retaliations the Communist regime of Walter Ulbricht can invoke without actually being accused of "suppressing" the Protestant Church in East Germany.

The Protestant bishops in West Germany took a chance and apparently lost when earlier this year they agreed that despite the existing difficulties with the authorities in the Soviet zone of Germany, the Lutheran anniversary should be celebrated in Wittenberg.

They proposed 450 names representing the Protestant community in Germany and in the Free World. The East German regime hand-picked only 80 of them who would be allowed to come "under certain conditions."

Among these conditions is their personal "recognition" of the East German government as one representing an "independent state," and their personal condemnation of the United States' involvement in Vietnam.

Also demanded is their approval of the Communist stipulation that the Allies accept, once and for all, the present border between Poland and Germany rather than waiting for an Allied peace treaty with Germany to settle the issue.

Protestant leaders here and in Bonn do not know at this point how many of the 80 invited dignitaries will be willing to celebrate the anniversary under these conditions.

They feel that whatever the number the event will not be celebrated with the spirit it deserves. (They do not doubt that retired West German Pastor Martin Niemöller, 75, and recent recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize will be there without many compunctions about the terms.)

Interviews with various West German Protestant officials testify to the fact that the Free Church in the West knows the limitations of its influence, and the even greater limitations of the "Silent Church" in the East under prevailing circumstances.

Dr. von Ritzberg, a spokesman of the Protestant Church Council in Bonn, said that "the church in East Germany is surviving in fairly good health, despite all difficulties."

She said that, at least outwardly, the organization of the church in the Soviet zone has remained intact, although it is undermined through debilitating pressures and by normal attrition.

Only one out of ten Protestant bishops is reported to cooperate openly with the Communist regime. On the other hand, Dr. von Ritzberg admitted that the church leadership in East Germany "accepts the regime there to a great degree."

The bishops rebelled when the Communists started to interfere with the Ten Commandments. The church must, however, stand in silence when the state fights for the allegiance of the youth.

There are many reasons and practical considerations for a careful approach to this problem.

Of the 35 million German Protestants, 15 million live in the East. That in fact represents an overwhelming numerical majority of the entire East German population which is 17.8 million.

Dr. von Ritzberg frankly acknowledged the fact that of this number only about five or ten per cent are "firm and steady believers."

As a result, she added, "when our Protestant brethren in the East remain silent on a ticklish political issue, we in the West also tone our comment. You can therefore say that our action in West Germany is often heavily influenced by the repercussions we fear our 'normal' behavior or course would invoke with the Communist authorities."

There are other considerations, including the question of the physical survival of the Protestant Church in East Germany.

In the West, people pay direct church taxes — between seven and ten per cent of their income — from which the Bonn government then pays the salaries of the clergy, maintains church buildings and seminaries and supports other church functions. Nevertheless, the West German government has absolutely no control over the Church, either Protestant or Catholic.

In East Germany, the church lives from charity. The Communist government pays salaries of the pastors and priests, but they are one third to one fourth of those earned by their Western counterparts. There is no government money for church repairs, denominational hospitals or religious youth hostels.

There is help from the West. Some Protestant leaders declined to talk about it, but other responsible sources said that money does reach a bank in East Germany where the hard currency is converted by the government into the local "soft money" and passed on to the Protestant churches for their local needs.

This money is the result of a voluntary "one per cent cut" from the salaries of all Protestant pastors in West Germany. The total amount of the contribution was not disclosed but officials said it was "modest" in terms of the actual needs of the East German churches.

Such "brotherly help" is quietly tolerated by the Communists who badly need the hard currency. They also can always use the publicity of being "tolerant" to religion.

The Ulbricht regime is absolutely opposed to the existing concept of "one German Protestant Church" that is still officially pursued in the West. It is the only existing link between the two Germans.

While the Roman Catholic Church is governed by independent dioceses, which in some cases spill over political borders, the Protestant Church has managed to maintain the technical appearance of one single all-German unit. The idea does not exist in fact.

Ever since the Communists built the "Wall of Shame" in 1961, the 40 East German delegates to the 120-member German Protestant Synod are not allowed to attend meetings in West Germany. The West German delegation is not permitted to enter the East in its full number.

The Governing Council of the Synod has 11 members from the West and 4 members from East Germany. They can remain in touch only through correspondence and even that is spotty and superficial.

There is an uneasy status quo between church and state in East Germany, in the opinion of the observers here. Neither side feels strong enough to test the strength of the other. Neither can really afford to conduct a conclusive fight.

The church realizes its power limitations and the state is conscious of the usefulness of the church in the community and its utility in international relations.

As a result, the church leadership maintains that there is only one Protestant Church in Germany. The government insists that there are only independent Protestant church branches in various parts of East and West Germany.

Both sides, in the meantime, continue their quiet struggle for the souls of the people. The



Astronaut, Prelates Honored

Philadelphia — (RNS) — Mrs. Edward H. White 2nd accepts in behalf of her late astronaut husband the annual St. George's Award from Methodist Bishop Fred Pierce Corson of Philadelphia. Looking on at center is John Cardinal Krol, Catholic Archbishop of Philadelphia. The award was presented by the Old St. George's Methodist church to mark its bicentennial. The Philadelphia church also gave its first John Wesley Ecumenical Award to Bishop Corson and Cardinal Krol. Col. White died in the flash fire aboard the Apollo spacecraft at Cape Kennedy, Fla., in January. He was cited for his outstanding activities as a Methodist layman.

Anniversary Stresses Unity

New York — (NC)—With one long leap — a joint announcement outlining combined theological discussions — Lutheran and Catholic leaders cleared what looked like a big ecumenical hurdle: this year's commemoration of the Lutheran Reformation.

Although Lutheran leaders have been making plans for the anniversary for several years, Catholic participation was assured only last April. It was then that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved cooperation under the leadership of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA).

The official discussions, as well as less formal celebrations planned on local levels, will mark the religious revolution begun in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg's castle church.

Because the discussion will be scholarly rather than popular, they will be centered in cities having facilities for intensive research into Catholic and Lutheran theology. Cities suggested for the dialogues include Austin, Tex.; Atlanta; Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Columbus, Ohio; Denver; Detroit; Minneapolis; St. Paul; New York; Philadelphia; St. Louis; San Francisco and Seattle.

Topics chosen for the discussions include "The Biblical Concept of Faith," "The Church's Life in Worship," "The Role of the Bible in the Church," and "The Nature of the Church." Scholars will also probe Reformation issues from the perspective of contemporary society and are expected to explore the possibility of closer cooperation among churches to meet common challenges.

Commenting on the invitation extended by the Lutheran Reformation anniversary committee to Catholics and asking them to take part in the commemoration, Bishop John J. Carberry of Columbus, Ohio, said:

"Our committee responds most prayerfully and sincerely to the very cordial and prayerful invitation of the representative

tives of the Lutheran Churches and it recommends proposed conferences and ecumenical prayer gatherings to be conducted under the guidance of the local Lutheran and Catholic authorities and in the spirit of the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council."

Bishop Carberry, who is chairman of the BCEIA, added that the commemoration coincided with the Year of Faith declared by Pope Paul VI and concluded: "It is our sincere prayer that the observance of these occasions will hasten the fulfillment of our Lord's own prayer 'that all may be one.'"

In a joint statement issued with Dr. Malvin Lundeen, chairman of the 450th Reformation Anniversary General Committee, Bishop Carberry commented:

"These discussions are to be based on the Scriptures as the basic authority and on the historical doctrinal confessions of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches."

"As befitting followers of Jesus Christ, participants in these discussions are to meet their tasks with attitudes of Christian love and patience, intellectual honesty, confessional loyalty, doctrinal integrity, and openness to the power and guidance of the Spirit of God as He bestows these gifts through His word."

Pointing to the role played by

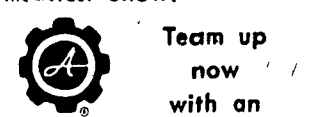
laymen in the life of the 16th-century Church, the two men continued: "In line with this historic precedent, we encourage our Roman Catholic and Lutheran clergy and laity (under the direction of local authorities) to plan and conduct similar dialogues in their local communities."

"For this purpose guidelines have been prepared to enable our people to give witness to the degree of unity that already exists and to explore in a responsible manner and in Christian love and integrity those topics of particular significance for them."



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URBAN KRESS

Appointed to City Council Northeast District in April. Manager of Account Analysis Dept., Lincoln Rochester Trust Co., Member, Hudson Ave. Area Assoc., Knights of Columbus, Holy Name Society St. Andrews Church. Wife: Teresa, three children: Sister M. Michael, a missionary nun, Florence, a senior at Nazareth College and Urban, Jr., a student at RIT.



TOM FREY

Candidate for Council South District. Associate Corporation Counsel, City of Rochester, Graduate of Princeton and University of California School of Law. Member Monroe County, New York State and American Bar Assoc. After Law School, he worked in the office of the Comptroller General, Washington, D.C., served in the Marine Corps for 2 years following high school. Resides with his wife, Kathleen, and 2 children at 308 Merchants Rd. Member of St. James Church, Holy Name Society.



TOM RYAN

Candidate for Council, East District. A lawyer, he has served three terms as supervisor, 18th Ward. Member 18th Ward Businessmen's Assoc. and Public Market Improvement Committee. Graduate Aquinas Inst., St. Bonaventure University and Syracuse Law School. Served in U.S. Marines, Member of St. Ambrose Church. Currently serves as counsel to the Minority on the County Legislature.



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