40 Years On
Germany Revisited
1945 — 1985

Kathleen & Ray Davey

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A Most Unusual Meeting

Of course almost everybody was aware that this year marked the 40th anniversary of the ending of the war in Europe. The Far East had to wait until August when the cataclysmic results of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought all to an end. It was, however, quite a shock to be asked to go to East Germany as one of the four representatives of the British Council of Churches, to a gathering in Brandenburg and East Berlin of Christians from all the European nations who had taken part in the war.

It is difficult to describe those few days together. It was not like the usual type of conference or Church Assembly or Synod. There was little or nothing in the way of discussion or debate. There were no motions tabled nor resolutions passed. The people who came were both clerical and lay. For the most part they were not church leaders or full-time theologians, but rather those who had some very real experience of the war and its effects. For example, our party was made up of a Jewish Rabbi, the son and the granddaughter of unrelated Christian refugees from Nazi Germany besides myself.

There was nothing in the way of celebration. This was left to the official State events. In these meetings people spoke about their memories and their hurts. There was much honest and frank talking. A Pole, a Norwegian and a Dutchman spoke of how they felt during the Nazi occupation and something of what they had suffered and how they had to work their way through deep feelings of hatred and bitterness. Many of the East German Christians expressed their guilt and shame for what had been done in those years by their people. One of the most unforgettable comments was by a Jewish Rabbi who, after listening to the different people speaking about all they had suffered over the Nazi years, simply said: "But remember, my people have endured this for two thousand years". All that took place in the context of worship, with prayers for forgiveness and healing, and with a very real sense of the One who gives new life and hope for the future.

For us, one of the most unforgettable occasions was a great ecumenical service in the Market Church in Halle. This city is closely linked with the history of German music and the Reformation. It was here that Handel was born, and Bach's eldest son, Friedemann, had been organist in this cathedral church for twenty years. The service on May 8th was packed, and in the congregation of over 1000 a great number were young people. They had come to hear what the Church had to say about peace and the future hope. The sermon was given by the retired Bishop of Saxony, Dr. Werner Krusche. As a young man he had served in the German army and had been in the Russian campaign. His fingers were gnarled and twisted to such an extent that he was unable to drive a car. In his very courageous sermon he spoke of how Christians had to work for reconciliation with the Russians, and then he spoke about the German Christians' responsibility and guilt in the past. He chose the words from Luke 19:40. "I tell you if these (disciples) were silent, the very stones would cry out". He referred to the early days when the Nazis were just gaining power, how few people were willing to cry out against what they were proceeding to do. Jewish children would become absent from school, nobody cried out. Jewish shops were shut and Jewish families began to disappear, but still very few cried out.

This was all most moving and impressive. It provided a fitting prelude for the experiences of the following day in Berlin. Here we left the talking and sharing, and went on pilgrimage. First of all we gathered at what had once been a Jewish quarter in Great Hamburg Street. The place, now a small park with seats and flower beds set round a lawn, is quiet and peaceful, being away from the noise of traffic. It was difficult

Figures

to believe that from here over fifty thousand Jewish men, women and children were collected and transported to extermination in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Teresienstadt. We gathered at the two memorials; one a marble slab on which the grim facts are recorded; the other a group of ten bronze figures, nine women and a child. This I found more emotive than any words that could be uttered. I could not take my eyes away from them. Somehow they spoke of utter powerlessness and weakness, of being lost and forsaken, with no-one to turn to and no-one to speak for them. They are small figures almost doll-like.

Together we read some verses from Psalm 130

"Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!
Lord, hear my voice!
Let thine ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplication!"

This was followed by a short statement by a German pastor. He explained that this place had once been the Old People's Home for the Jewish Community. Then on 23rd May 1942 the SS had burst in and instituted a reign or terror. They turned it into an assembly point for transporting the inhabitants to their death with indescribable cruelty and torture.

Next he went on to ask what the people living close by had done about it. Some admitted that at night they had heard the transport moving in and out; often there were cries and shouts. They had, however, many anxieties of their own. The war was at its height, air raids were frequent, many businesses had been wrecked and the young people were away at the front.

The Pastor ended with these words: "In the shadow of war, in the shadow of night, in the shadow of fear the most inhuman things took place unchallenged. What did we allow to happen?

The monument here speaks of over 50,000 people! 50,000 pilgrimages of suffering! 50,000 experiences of flagrant injustice inflicted!

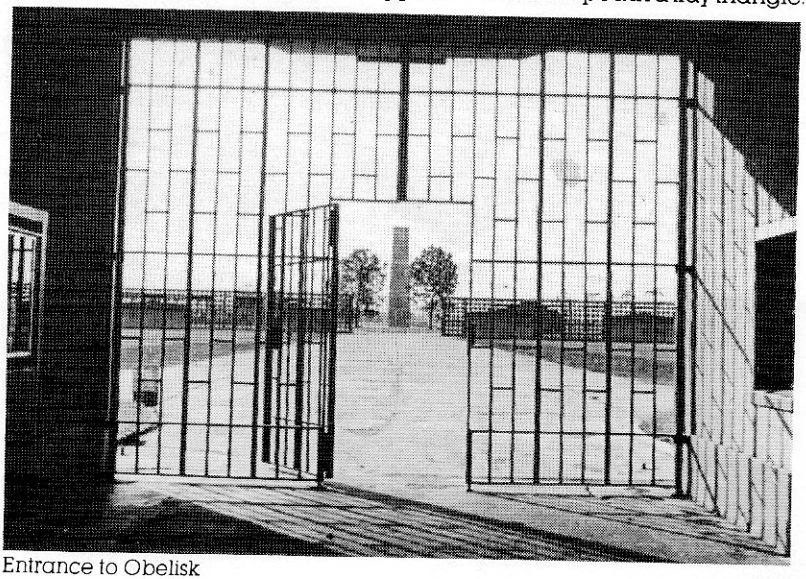
We stand here and remember. We cannot put right the injustice. We

cannot heal the wounds that remain. We can, however, and we will and we must reflect on our links with ' the house of Israel ' and put them in order. This task now lies before us. From our midst people were led forth to die. They experienced closed ears, eyes looking away and backs turned. They experienced a terrible indifference. Left on their own! Fifty thousand times!"

Finally the Jewish Cantor intoned the Prayer for the Dead.

Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp

For the next part of the programme we were taken to the town of Oranienburg,some twenty-five miles from Berlin. As we walked along a pleasant sunny avenue lined with trees, it was quite a shock to realise that this was the approach to the infamous Sachsenhausen Camp. In fact it was just like the entrance to a public park,and many people were coming and going, as it was a public holiday. I was surprised to see how extensive it was. It seemed to be about the size of the Balmoral Show Grounds Complex, but very carefully planned and shaped in a tidy triangle.



Entrance to Obelisk

A massive obelisk stands 40 metres tall in the centre,and reminds all who come here of that great number from so many different nations who had suffered and perished in this camp.

It is impossible to give an adequate description of such a place. One's mind, imagination and emotions are all so busy. I was caught up by so many feelings. There was shock and horror that human beings could have planned and built such a place. Again there was a compelling fascination in hearing of the terrible deeds that had been done there, and done to so many people. Further there was a sense of numbness and inability to absorb and imagine the events themselves. Feelings have a threshold beyond which they cannot go and we just switch off. I believe we can only endure a certain amount of reality.

Still even after forty years a certain deadness pervades the atmosphere. We were well aware of it. Someone said that since those terrible days no birds ever sing in the trees which surround the camp. I could not

verify that, but I could accept it as a fact.

Our visit was planned in a very sensitive way. In silence we made our way on a pilgrimage round seven stations in the camp.

The first was "The Gate". We stood round in a circle in reverent silence. Then one of the German Christians made a brief statement:

"This was one of the first concentration camps that the Nazis installed. It was started in an old brewery at Oranienburg in 1933. In 1936 this camp was built. More than 200,000 passed through these gates; less than 100,000 ever came out.

Just three weeks before the war ended on May 8 1945, 33,000 prisoners were led out by the SS. The plan was to force them to march to the Baltic Sea, embark them on boats, later to be sunk. 6,000 were shot or died of exhaustion on the journey and the rest were liberated by the American and Russian troops, before they reached the coast".

Pause

"I beg God and you the members of this meeting, to forgive my people.

Remembering this way of death I want to invite you to visit some stations of this camp in devout silence."

Station 2 was "The Huts of the Jews".

Here a short statement was made by a Jewish Cantor, who had himself been imprisoned in this place and had been one of the survivors of that terrible march to the Baltic.

"In these huts many Jews were imprisoned and tortured. On the 9th November, 1938, 6,000 Jews were brought here, among them well-known artists, scientists, merchants and workers. They were forced to live in very confined space, they were tortured, the rooms were not heated and the windows were shut. In October 1942 when another 900 were added,they tried to resist, with the result that they were transported for extermination to Auschwitz. One man who had been legal advisor to the Confessing Church was here trampled to death by S.S. guards. This was in February 1937, so the first martyr of the struggle between Church and State was a Jew"

Pause.

"We have abandoned our Jewish fellow-citizens. By human fear we submitted to the Nazi power."

Station 3, "The Camp of the Soviet prisoners", brought home to me something of what the Russians had suffered in the war. In the autumn of 1941, 20,000 of them were brought into this camp. From September to November of that year 18,000 of them were murdered, being shot through the base of the skull.

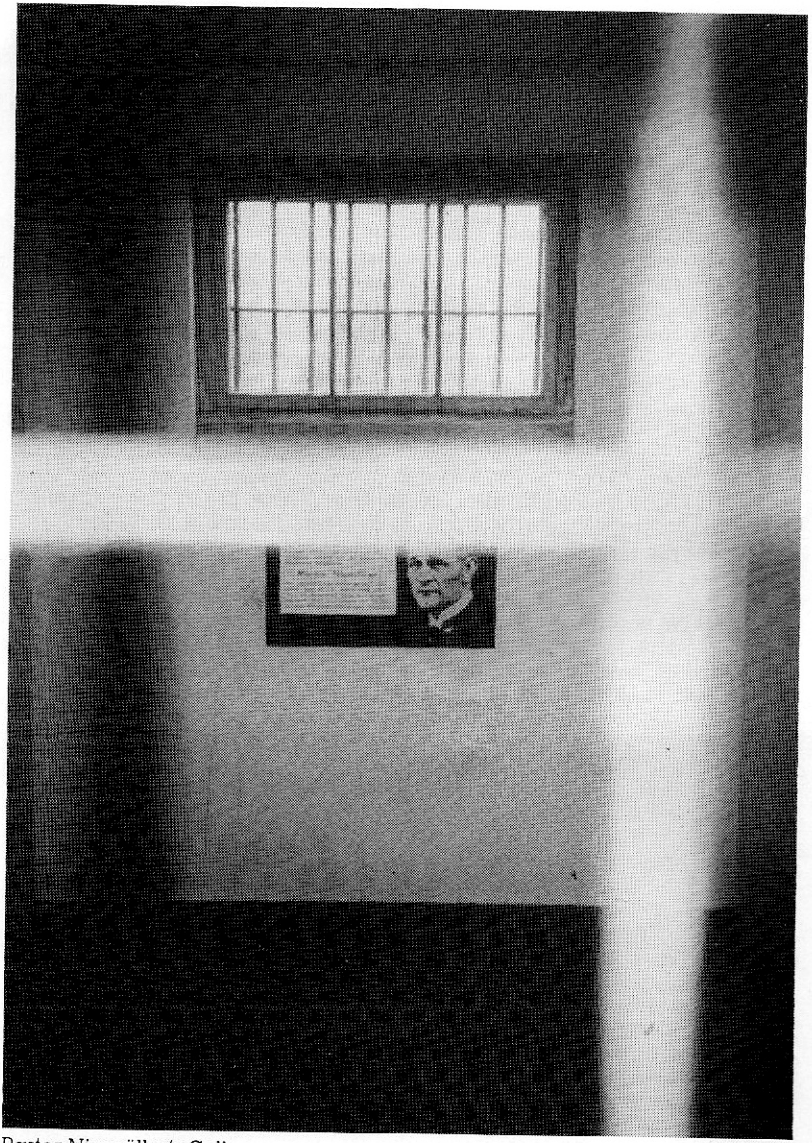
Victims of the bombing-attack of March 15, 1945, on Oranienburg were, besides many others, 382 women prisoners, many from Poland and Russia. They were not allowed to take shelter and only a few escaped.

Station 4 —"The Cages"

In these cages were imprisoned the most important and the most hated prisoners. They were called on to suffer specially terrible cruelties.

Here Pastor Martin Niemöller was imprisoned in March 1938 as Adolf Hitler's personal prisoner. When he was brought to this camp the Christians in Friedrichsthal and Sachsenhausen pleaded for the prisoners in the camp. Every evening the church bells would ring for prayer and the prisoners were able to hear them.

One day another imprisoned pastor, called Grüber, saw Martin Niemöller passing. They were not allowed to speak to each other. Grüber greeted his friend by quickly writing in the sand in Latin just the words — "HE LIVES"



Pastor Niemöller's Cell

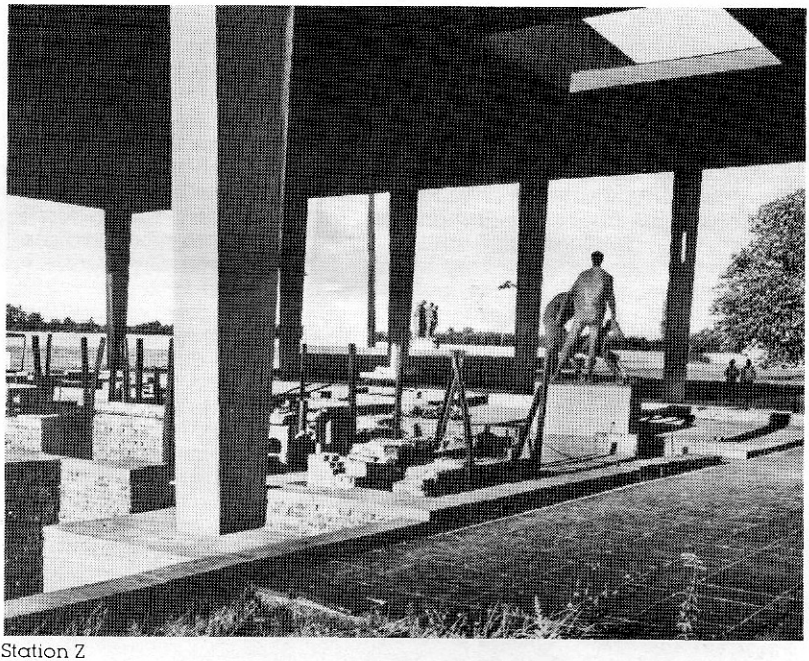
We certainly won't forget Station 5 described as "The Gallows for Execution beside the parade ground.". Here a great number of public executions took place. We were rather shattered when we were told that when Christmas came round, the Camp Commandant had the gallows removed and a Christmas tree, complete with star and angels put in its place. It is sobering to realise that many of the SS officers would in their private lives be very moral men, good husbands and fathers and cherishing the customs and standards of a civilised society, yet in their official roles could perpetrate the most appalling crimes.

We have already spoken of Station 6—"The Obelisk" so we move on to the last one—last in every sense and very appropriately called Station Z —"The Crematorium".

Some of the ovens have been preserved. This is the place of death. Around 107,000 passed out of this life here. Here we were reminded by what we saw, of that demonic evil that had devised the destruction of so many lives. Here we were made aware of what so many of our fellow humans had endured at the hands of their fellow men.

That was not, however, the total picture. The architect who had designed the high canopy roof that covered this awful and awesome place, had been able to see beyond the evil and darkness. He had devised a great open space in the canopy that let in the light,revealing a sculptured group of figures, who through their indescribable suffering have learnt, even in the face of death, the meaning of solidarity, unity and support one for the other. As I recall that place the words of St. John's gospel came to me:

"The Light shines on in the darkness and the darkness has never quenched it".



Station Z

Going back to Dresden

Forty years ago I had lived in a prison camp, located in an ancient castle. This Burg dominated the little mountain village of Hohnstein, close to the River Elbe and just a few miles from the Czech border. The district is very popular with holiday makers and is appropriately called "the Switzerland of Saxony". The Burg was the headquarters for Stalag IV A, a network of prisoner work-camps covering the whole Dresden area to a radius of 30 miles. There was a large staff of German officers and soldiers living in Hohnstein, responsible for the operation of the entire Stalag. They worked through a small staff of prisoners representing each country that had prisoners at work. Thus the community in the Burg

was a veritable League of Nations including Poles, French, Dutch, Belgians, Americans and Russians as well as British.

So it was on a fine May day that we went back to Hohnstein almost forty years to the day since I had left it for freedom. As we drove up the long serpentine road that wound up and up from the valley, the wayside bushes and trees were alight with cherry blossom just like that other day. We parked the car in the small village square and slowly walked up to the entrance to the Burg, now transformed into a Youth Hostel. The first shock was to see a huge poster portraying the liberation of the camp in 1945. In it a Russian soldier is leading out a prisoner, dressed in the striped uniform worn by inmates of a concentration camp. All I could say was, that we had liberated ourselves with the connivance of the German guards, and that no one in the Burg was dressed in this way, not even the Russian prisoners. A prisoner of war camp and a concentration camp were very different things. Indeed I have always been profoundly grateful that we were under the Wehrmacht, the German army, and not the SS or the Gestapo who were responsible for the concentration camps. It is only right and just to pay tribute to the fairness and humanity of those in charge of our camp.

So once again I walked through the "Tunnel" that leads in to the inner security of the Burg, and as I listened to what one of the wardens of the Youth Hostel said about the history of the place, I realised how little I had known about it. Indeed there were many parts of it I had never seen. There was the law of silence-things that were not spoken about. There was a certain intangible atmosphere of mystery which we could never explain, and the German soldiers we had to deal with, were also strangers to that district. Even so, it was quite a shock to learn that it had been one of the first concentration camps in the country, and had been opened in 1933. Over 6,000 anti-Nazis had been imprisoned there. Torture and murder were very frequent and we saw one dungeon-room in the depths of the castle that had been used for the torture of women prisoners. The courtyard where our twice daily roll-call was held, was bounded on one side by a parapet wall, beyond which there was a sheer drop of two hundred feet into the valley. One corner of this wall bore a monument to five young anti-Nazis, who had jumped to death rather than face what was in store for them in the Burg. The camp was shut before the war and later became a prisoner of war camp.

The Burg Hohnstein

So many memories came back as I stood on that compound. I remembered the day when everybody was assembled for roll-call and suddenly a voice came from the fourth storey. All eyes looked up and saw a Russian prisoner, who was in solitary confinement, climb out of his window and stand on the sill. There he made an impassioned speech in Russian, and shouting "Heil Stalin", dived headfirst to instant death in the courtyard below.

Again I relived that very warm Sunday night in the Summer of 1944 when I was taking a service in the main assembly room, which looked out on the compound. The windows were wide open and a group of Russian prisoners had gathered at the parapet wall. I came to the sermon, and just about the same time away below the Russians began to sing. It was in a very slow phlegmatic tempo, and I at least recognised the tune of the Volga Boat song. On and on it went and like that other river, they "just kept rollin' along". I should make clear that it was in no way an attempt to sabotage the service. They did not know it was on and most likely with the language barrier would not have known what it was about. Even so, we were glad for them that they had the spirit and morale to sing, because they received very harsh treatment even from the German army.

The time was speeding on, and I had just been told that one family I had known in the village were no more there. Indeed both the Weisheit parents were dead. I had kept in touch with Frau Weisheit for some 10 years after the war, but had been informed that receiving letters from abroad might compromise the family in the eyes of the authorities. I am sure that information was wrong, but we accepted it at the time and thus lost contact with them. She was the village dentist and her husband the school-master. I had only met her and her 15-year old daughter. Her husband had been called up and her son of 18 years sent to the Russian Front, from which he never returned. Like other chaplains and medical personnel I was treated as a protected person and allowed to go for short walks round the village, and in this way I came to know the family. In spite of all her own troubles she had always time for others, and she frequently welcomed me to her home. She had always been anti-Hitler and felt that her country had been betrayed by the Nazis. She enabled me to hear BBC News Bulletins, an extremely risky thing to do. She was the Church organist, and one day her daughter suggested that she sing Bach's beautiful Chorale "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring". I am sure you can understand my feelings when she did so, as I had often heard it sung by our choir at home in Dunmurry.

So it was very natural in the heat of the afternoon in Hohnstein to go into the beautiful Lutheran Church, which I never had the chance to visit before. In the quietness, aware that this was where she and her family had worshipped and where she had played the organ, I remembered her with deep gratitude and also those many others I had met who spoke to me across the barriers of war and division, a word of comfort and encouragement.

As I sat there in the coolness and peace, those timeless words of gratitude and adoration came to me: "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of thy glory".

During the last months of 1944 and the early weeks of 1945 my life was drawn more and more to Dresden. I was still allowed to make visits round the camps, but now increasingly I was called on very short notice to take funerals of British prisoners who had died. Some as the result of air raids, and others from exhaustion after forced marches from eastern camps.

These raids dominated the lives of Dresdeners. If they wanted to make

even a small journey across the city or out to the suburbs, they would listen carefully to learn just where the latest raids were taking place and in what direction the bombers were flying. Rubbing shoulders with the people of Dresden in the very slow trains and grossly overcrowded trams, as well as waiting countless hours at various railway stations, enabled me to pick up much of how the people felt. There was increasing anxiety about the future, as the Red Army moved nearer and nearer and they wondered what would happen to them. Above all, however, was the immediate anxiety about the raids. There was constant speculation as to whether Dresden would be attacked or not. Reasons for and against were debated all the time. Was not their city famed for its art and culture and known as "Florence on the Elbe"? It was also a great centre for music. Bach, Handel and Telemann had lived here for part of their lives. Several of Wagner's operas had first been performed here. Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen and Dostoyeski had all lived here. Again it was a city of little industry and little strategic value. Surely no Anglo-American bombers would come here! The atmosphere in the city grew more and more tense as the Eastern Front crumbled and German families in desperation took the road to Dresden as refugees, to such an extent that in February 1945 the inhabitants had increased by 300,000, an increase of 60 per cent on the normal population.

The unforgettable night

I don't remember much about the morning of the 13th February 1945, except that I had been in the city for a week and was due to return to Hohnstein during the day. I had been staying at the camp attached to the city Slaughter House,where some 150 British prisoners had lived and worked. I realised that with the increasing number of prisoners arriving in the city, utterly exhausted by the long forced marches they had to make from the east, that I would be far more use there with them. I suggested this to my guard.

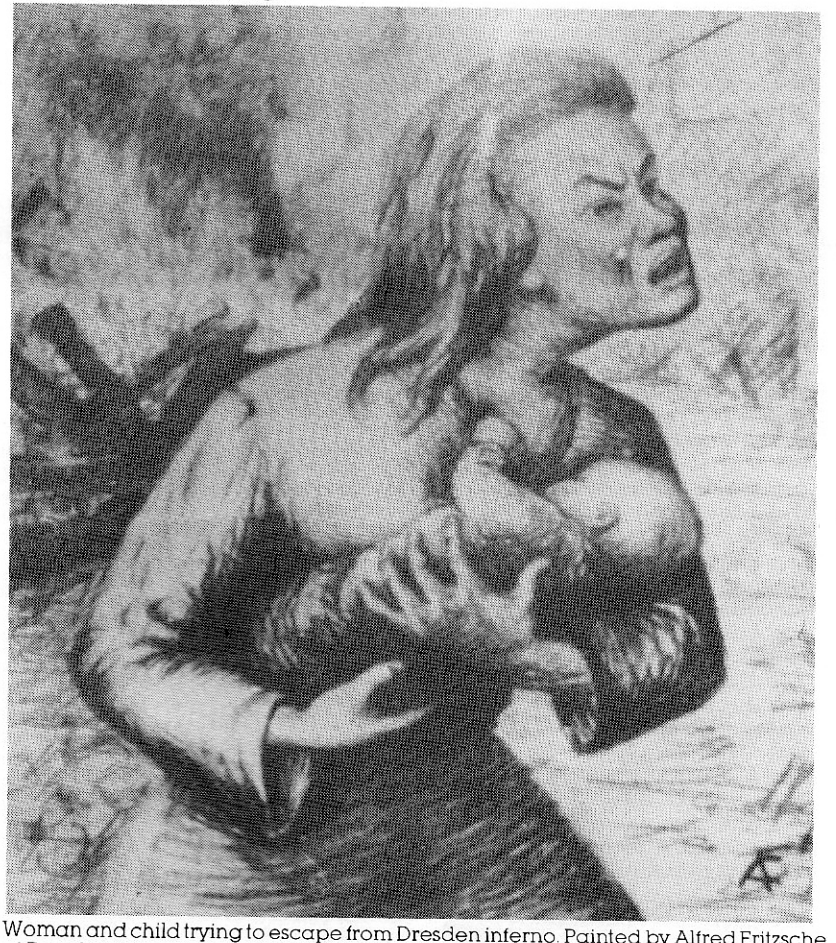
He immediately replied, as I expected, that we had to obey orders, and so it was back to the Burg. We left from the Central Station in the

The Frauenkirche or Luther Church remains as a symbol of the destruction of Dresden

early afternoon and so escaped the events of that terrible night by eight hours. The first raid of what was later described as the "triple blow" struck the city about 10.30 p.m., followed by another an hour later and then a third at midday on the 14th.

The facts of those two days and the death and devastation are now part of history. They are still discussed and debated 40 years on, and it is right to say that the consciences of many folk on both sides of the Atlantic are still greatly exercised by this devastating attack so late in the war and clearly directed at the civilian population.

I must be content merely to record the bare facts as I read them in a Church leaflet in Dresden a few weeks ago. "On February 13th and 14th, 1945, Dresden, the great city of culture was destroyed. At least 35,000 were killed and many estimates are much higher, as there was no record of the vast refugee influx. In the Central Railway Station 16,000 were killed. 175,000 dwellings were destroyed, 40 hospitals, 35 schools, 75 cultural buildings, and 27 churches." These are but the cold clinical facts. Who can describe or quantify it in terms of human suffering and loss, that still lives on even after 40 years?



Woman and child trying to escape from Dresden inferno. Painted by Alfred Fritzsche of Dresden

All I can add is that I visited the city several times after the raids, and I still remember the numbness and shock of those who survived, and the devastation and ruin that stretched for miles and miles across the central residential part of the city. I still remember the day I was called in to the city to take the funeral of a prisoner. My soldier escort had known the city well. Nonetheless, when we did try to make our way through a district that he had been through many times, he very soon became confused and seemingly lost. He had to resort to digging and scraping with his boot to find out if there were tram lines, and in this way establish his bearings.

You can appreciate something of what I felt, as I went back to Dresden after 40 years. I wondered what it would be like and what sort of a reception I would find. I had no idea of what would happen and what we would do. I just felt strongly that I would like to go back and I was very pleased when Paul Östereicher of the British Council of Churches arranged this part of our trip with the Church authorities in Dresden. We will never forget the welcome we received from Superintendent Christof Ziemer of the Kreuzkirche and the most careful and sensitive way in which he planned our five day visit. We stayed at the Diakonissenhaus. This is run by Lutheran Sisters, and includes a general hospital of 270 beds, and an old people's home, and provides services for other groups with special needs. Since the end of the war it has developed close links with Coventry Cathedral. Both had suffered from very severe bombing and in this way were drawn together and have become symbols and indeed pioneers in Christian reconciliation throughout the world.

At the Kreuzkirche

Christof Ziemer arranged for us to meet several different groups of church people, including a parish meeting, a women's rally, a young adults' discussion group and a pastors' monthly gathering. All were intensely interested in Ireland and our church life, and the questions flowed in sessions lasting two to three hours. We were both deeply impressed by the character and quality of those we met. There is a certain gentleness, joy, strength and simplicity about them. They seem to have something of the flavour of the Early Church. These people are powerless in their communist society. They have nothing in the way of wealth, prestige or influence. They have few if any of the luxuries that we take for granted. Officially they are looked on as the remnants of a society that is gradually withering away. Any sort of advancement, training for the professions or fulfilment in work is usually all but impossible, if you are a Christian. To be a follower of Christ is a costly decision. Yet in those days, as we came to know them, Paul's words became very real as we thought of them and how they lived "as having nothing, yet possessing all things".

The Kreuzkirche or Cross Church where Christof Ziemer and his colleague, Michael Müller, are pastors, is the oldest and best known church in the city. Non-Presbyterians will forgive me, if I describe it as "First Dresden". It is famous for its Boys' Choir which has been in existence for 750 years. I may say that we both immediately felt at home with these two men and we realised very quickly that they were very special people, not only in intelligence, but in sensitivity and perceptiveness. It was Rogation Sunday and Christof invited us both to take part in the morning service. Kathleen had to read one of the scripture passages for the day. I had to speak about our visit, help in the distribution of communion and share in the prayer of intercession. For both of us it was to be the most unforgettable and meaningful experience of all, and

The Sign of Peace

surely the reason why we were enabled to come on the trip.

I spoke very simply and directly as to how I felt about being back, how the last time I had been a prisoner and indeed an enemy in their city. I described something of the pain and hurt we prisoners had felt at the loss of those many of our comrades, who had died because of forced marches from the east, and others who had been cruelly treated. Then I went on to describe how I and my fellow prisoners had felt about the terrible air raids and all the death and suffering that followed. But now today we were meeting at the one table and sharing the one bread and were mutually forgiven and reconciled by the one Lord. I quoted Paul's words in Ephesians which summed it all up for each one of us: Christ is our peace who has broken down the dividing wall of hatred, guilt, bitterness and resentment and made us one people.

I felt very much that I was not only speaking for myself, but for all my fellow prisoners who had been with me away back forty years ago. But it wasn't only for them but also for all those in our own country who today pray and yearn for peace and healing among nations. I believe that we in that service together were being visible signs of that peace and reconciliation and oneness that God wills.

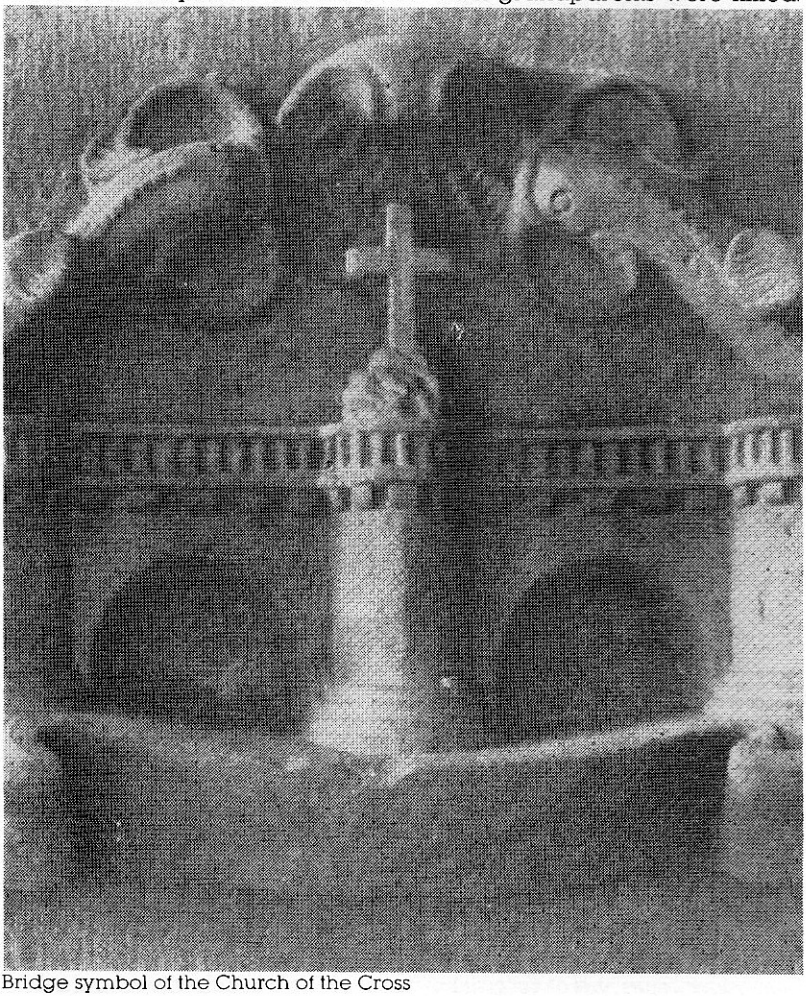
As we shared the peace that we had experienced, I gave Christof an Irish cross, and he gave me a simple glass plaque with the black silhouette of the destroyed Luther Church and across the top the rainbow that spoke of God's covenant of grace and hope. Our hearts were very full with thanks that we had been privileged to take part in such a service and, I'm sure, the angels were not very far away.

After the service Christof told me that it was very appropriate that this service should have been held in the Kreuzkirche. He went on to explain that the symbol of the Church was sculptured in the stone-work; the Cross on the bridge. For centuries there has been a very close link between this church and the bridge across the Elbe. Indeed the church had raised money to build it and maintained and repaired it. In this service we have been building a bridge between our two nations.

How aptly it described the task of the church in our broken world and divided societies, the church of the cross on the bridge, spanning all the

hatred, the fear and the different ideologies.

Another sequel to that service will live with us always. Later on in our visit our hosts somehow or another managed to procure tickets for the opera. The famous Opera House had been very badly damaged in the raids and had just been re-opened on February 13th, the 40th Anniversary of its destruction. On that fateful night 40 years ago Carl von Weber's opera, "Der Freischutz" was being played. Now we were watching the same opera in the same place! Anyway, during the first interval a lady sitting next to Kathleen began to talk to her. She started by saying that she had been with her husband at the service in the Kreuzkirche and recognised us both. She went on to explain just how much it had meant to her husband and herself. They had come over from Munich in West Germany on a four-day visit and had decided to go to the Kreuzkirche, because her husband had been confirmed there. At the time of the raids her husband, although he was only sixteen, was in the army and staying in barracks. The night of the first two raids his mother, his six-year old brother and both grandparents were killed.



Bridge symbol of the Church of the Cross

Ever since, he had been filled with hatred and bitterness against the British and Americans and simply could not forgive. But being present at that service and seeing what happened,, he felt something speak to him and he broke down in tears and realised that now he could forgive.

Questions that remain

This whole experience with so much happening in such a short time has left us with many questions. That is why we have decided to write down something of what we experienced,so that you can share it with us.

It has, for instance, made us as Christians think very much of our relationship with the Jewish people. Is there not a great need for us to be much more aware of them than we are? Just think of what they have been through in the life-time of many of us! Let us remember how many millions of them were eliminated and with such incredible cruelty and inhumanity. How much we need to recognise anew what we owe to the "House of Israel". As the Bible is the great unfolding drama of God's people through the ages, so their history is ours and their story is ours. We are the one family and we need each other. As Luther said, "the Old Testament is the cradle of Christ". We have to begin to learn from each other, to work with each other and to cherish each other.

Furthermore we have both been forced by our days with the German Christians in East Germany to think again about our responsibility for world peace. It seems that here in Ireland this question is very low in our priorities. This is certainly not so in both parts of Germany. They know from experience in a way that few here do, the grim realities of war. Furthermore it is chilling to grasp the potential for destruction available among the nations. One warhead from the latest missile has a destructive power at least 500 times greater than the Dresden attacks with so called conventional weapons!

Let it be sufficient to quote two passages from a statement made by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic and the Evangelical Church in Germany on the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

"As churches in the two German states we both declare that a war must never start from German soil again. We call for a stop to be put to the arms race. We are both convinced that lasting peace cannot be achieved by the system of nuclear deterrence, and that it must be replaced at all costs. We both advocate a European peace order. We both remind the industrialised countries of their responsibility for creating a life worth living for the people of the Third World." And the other passage is:

"We call upon the Allies of the Second World War" (and that means us) "Renew your efforts to achieve mutual understanding as you work together towards the joint aim of peace and justice. Strive to take further steps which will make it possible to abandon all nuclear weapons. Stop producing new weapon systems. Introduce new initiatives into the negotiations on conventional arms limitation and confidence building measures. Promote cultural, economic, and scientific co-operation, and contacts between people living on different sides of the borders. Be guided by the insight that security for one can only be found today in security for all".

Should we in Ireland not put this much higher on our agenda? Should we not devote much more time, thought, discussion, teaching and action to world peace?

There is for us here in Ireland, however, one more question that we cannot avoid. It goes back to that most memorable sermon given by the German Bishop in the packed cathedral church in Halle. He quoted

Christ's words on his way to Jerusalem, when the Pharisees wanted him to rebuke the disciples, when they were shouting out their Hallelujahs: "I tell you if these disciples were silent, the very stones would cry out". The Bishop went on to speak very frankly how the German Christians did not speak or speak up for the Jews. As we listened, our thoughts were back in Ireland and the same question is being asked of us in our time and in our situation. How much have we spoken out when there has been blatant sectarianism and discrimination? Have we cried out when there has been idolatry, and the Lordship of Christ has been made subservient to loyalty to a political creed? Have we spoken out when human rights or social justice have been in jeopardy or denied in any quarter and to any person in our community? Have we cried out when there have been campaigns of intimidation and threat against individuals who have tried to move forward? Is it not time for us to begin to speak out and speak out together? For if we don't cry out, the stones of future history and generations to come will cry out against us — in more senses than one!

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