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## Albrecht Schönherr: ... aber die Zeit war nicht verloren: Erinnerungen eines Altbischofs

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**Schönherr, Albrecht. . . . *aber die Zeit war nicht verloren: Erinnerungen eines Altbischofs*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993. 432 pp.**

Albrecht Schönherr's autobiography covers the period from his childhood in Neuruppin in the years of the First World War and the Weimar Republic to the collapse of the SED in 1989. Schönherr studied theology in Tübingen and Berlin and came into close contact with Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was one of his teachers. During the Second World War Schönherr served as a soldier. In the GDR he first became Head of the Brandenburg Seminary, and in 1972 Bishop of the Eastern Region of the Evangelical Church in Berlin/Brandenburg. He thus came to prominence at a turbulent time in the history of Church-State relations in the GDR. His autobiography provides detail of the SED's mistreatment of the *Junge Gemeinde* in the 1950s, of the Evangelical Church's opposition in the 1970s to the introduction of premilitary training as a new subject in schools, the tension and distance between Church leaders and the membership, and the rise of the independent peace movement in the GDR. Students of opposition and dissent in the GDR will find this detail pads out the stark facts which are already known. Schönherr has surprisingly little to say on the Stasi infiltration of the Evangelical Church, stating that he only found out for sure that there were Stasi informers in the Church after the collapse of the GDR.

Schönherr is an important witness because he was involved with many of the figures who attempted to offer moral guidance for Christians and non-Christians who lived through the major events of contemporary German history. The outstanding figure in this respect is Dietrich Bonhoeffer to whose theology and moral code Schönherr frequently referred for guidance in his own work. Schönherr's thoughts inevitably feed into the current debate about guilt and responsibility for forty years of repression in the GDR. His thoughts do not amount to any radically new perspective. They are not a philosophical treatment of moral issues by a detached observer, but rather an account of how an individual found his own imperfect way through a moral maze.

It is not only the fact that the GDR and its censorship mechanisms no longer exist that has prompted a rash of autobiographies of this kind from East Germany, but also the urgent need to review one's role in an authoritarian society. Schönherr actually considers this motivation a danger when he explains that he has written his memoirs in order to understand the past, but acknowledges that they could be taken as an attempt to justify his actions.

Schönherr argues that anyone wishing to understand the Evangelical Church and church people in the GDR must take the trouble to understand the years before the GDR existed. This is reminiscent of the dissident mentality which explains an early willingness to overlook undemocratic methods in the GDR by stressing the need to overcome the legacy of National Socialism. Schönherr goes on to reject the term *Unrechtsstaat* to describe the GDR, and he points to social mobility, the right to a job and a place to live, and assistance for working women. These "GDR values" were subjected to critical scrutiny in the run-up to unification, however, and they were judged to be inextricably linked with their opposites—privilege, underemployment, a run-down housing stock, and a heavy burden for women.

Schönherr's autobiography is more useful when he discusses moral issues, and here his sometimes contradictory statements are a useful reminder that there were no simple resolutions to the dilemmas he and many other public figures faced. Schönherr was drawn into Dietrich Bonhoeffer's circle as Bonhoeffer started to speak out against Hitler and the *Deutsche Christen*, the organisation pushing the Church towards *Gleichschaltung*. Schönherr sees the failure of the Confessional Church to speak out against the boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933 as its greatest omission, and he quotes Niemöller's criticism of the Church as guilty for knowing what was coming and not speaking out. Yet he also quotes Karl Barth's point that although the Church offered minimal resistance to the Nazis, things would have been different if everybody had done as much.

Schönherr was called up to the military in 1940, and he explains that refusal to serve would have resulted in his death. He comes to be ashamed of his failure to refuse military service, but his account of his role in the war is curiously lacking in the moral reflection one might expect from somebody who spent the 1930s in the company of the opponents of National Socialism. When he hears that Bonhoeffer has been arrested in April 1943 Schönherr wonders whether he has made too many compromises, but news of Bonhoeffer's execution does not prompt further soul-searching: it is dealt with in a single paragraph.

Schönherr's Stasi files tell of his "schwankende Haltung" (189), and this seems to sum up a dilemma for many GDR citizens. On the one hand Schönherr quotes Bonhoeffer's conviction that the Church had to be a "Kirche für andere" and thus recalls the debate in the Church in the mid-eighties on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of Bonhoeffer's birth: while *Neues Deutschland* commemorated this anniversary

by presenting Bonhoeffer as an anti-fascist who favored co-operation with the communists, the Evangelical Church emphasized Bonhoeffer's role as a pacifist and conscientious objector. Heino Falcke had argued at the time that the concept of a Church for others meant that it should not restrict its activities to the religious sphere, but should rather take up the problems of those who were not in the mainstream of the Church. For Schönherr this meant representing fellow citizens who had no voice when dealing with the state in the GDR. On the other hand Schönherr describes how he was accorded a place of honour when he accepted an invitation to participate in the public celebrations of the thirtieth anniversary of the GDR. He decided it would be an affront to refuse his seat on the platform behind Brezhnev, but he wonders whether the seating arrangement was designed to honour or compromise him. Schönherr certainly came in for criticism when the celebrations were broadcast on GDR television, but he defends himself by arguing that he used the occasion for some "straight talking" with state leaders.

Referring to his non-confrontational approach in his dealings with the GDR authorities, it is entirely reasonable for Schönherr to quote a West German newspaper: "Die Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der Leute, die jetzt im trockenen sitzen, von anderen verlangen, sie sollten Kopf und Kragen riskieren, ist erstaunlich" (349). Yet he has to admit that he was deluding himself when he thought that his gentle calls for liberalisation of the system might reach and influence key politicians. Instead they seem to have done no more than provide the authorities with a fuller view of where he stood.

At one point Schönherr declares that on balance the Church in the GDR should be proud of what it achieved: it gave spiritual guidance as well as practical help. Yet elsewhere he expresses his unease at any such glib assessment, realising in retrospect that the Church's many appeals to Christians in the GDR were misconceived and reflected the remoteness of Church leaders from the everyday concerns of the people they claimed to represent. Schönherr's autobiography does not present a balanced account of the Evangelical Church's role in the GDR. Indeed, it has been criticized elsewhere for glossing over the Church's failures. Yet the tensions contained in Schönherr's account of his own life provide a vivid illustration of the ambiguity with which anyone who sought to play an active part in GDR society had to come to terms.

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**Schütz, Helga.** *Heimat süße Heimat. Zeit-Rechnungen in Kasachstan. Tagebuch.* Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1992. 179 S.

Schriftsteller-Tagebücher entstehen aus verschiedenartigen Anlässen, oft auf Reisen. Helga Schütz (1937), namhafte Erzählerin und Drehbuchautorin, veröffentlichte 1992 das Buch *Heimat süße Heimat. Zeit-Rechnungen in Kasachstan*. Die Eintragungen (14.6.91-14.7.91) betreffen sowohl in der ehemaligen DDR als auch in Kasachstan in der zerfallenden UdSSR eine Periode einschneidender Umbrüche.

Warum fährt eine Frau 1991 ausgerechnet in einen so entfernten Weltwinkel? "Um nicht total unter die Räder des deutschen Wendegeschäfts zu geraten" (150)—mag allenfalls ein Nebengrund sein. In der Hauptsache geht es um ein Filmprojekt, begonnen schon vor Herbst 1989. Nach den noch ungedruckten Lebenserinnerungen von Helmut Damerius, eines Deutschen, der 18 Jahre in Lagern und in der Verbannung "in Taiga und Steppe" hatte zubringen müssen, wollte Helga Schütz einen Spielfilm machen, sicher auch, um das Andenken derer zu bewahren, die, wie Damerius, in der DDR zu ihren Lebzeiten über das ihnen angetane Unrecht nicht hatten reden können.

Wie das dem Buch beigegebene knappe Exposé "Kasalinsk" zeigt, ist der Autorin daran gelegen, sich im Stoff frei zu bewegen, eine Film-Geschichte mit einer an das Urbild angelehnten erfundenen Figur namens Daniel zu entwickeln. 1991 erhielt Helga Schütz den Stadtschreiber-Literaturpreis des ZDF und der Stadt Mainz. Die Filmförderung in Bonn finanzierte als Drehbuchförderung die Reise eines vierköpfigen Filmteams nach Kasachstan. Erwartet wurde ein "elektronisches Tagebuch," sprich Dokumentarfilm, der unter dem Titel "Hinterm Vorhang sieht man einen Schatten" realisiert und gesendet wurde. Die Erlebnisse während der zum Teil abenteuerlichen und mühevollen Dreharbeiten auf den Spuren ihres Helden Daniel über Moskau und Alma Ata bis zum "magischen Zielort Kasalinsk" und weiter sind Gegenstand der Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen. Bei dem Versuch, sich dem Stoff aus den 40/50 Jahren anzunähern, stößt die Autorin, nicht völlig unvorbereitet, ("vorgewarnt" auch durch Romane des Kirgisen Aimatow und des Kasachen Nurpeissow) auf alarmierende aktuelle Notstände.

Der Titel *Heimat süße Heimat* mutet befremdlich gemütlich an. Er entpuppt sich als Sarkasmus, sowohl was im Filmexposé das Schicksal des Verbannten, als auch die Lebens- bzw. Überlebensprobleme der Menschen betrifft, mit denen das Filmteam konfrontiert wird. Zunächst mit den Wolgadeutschen,