

2024 MACDONALD LECTURES  
IN BIBLE & THEOLOGY

# Christians Living Under a Hostile Government

WITH GUEST LECTURER  
DR. MANFRED KOBER

**Tuesday, February 13, 2024**

Plymouth, MN

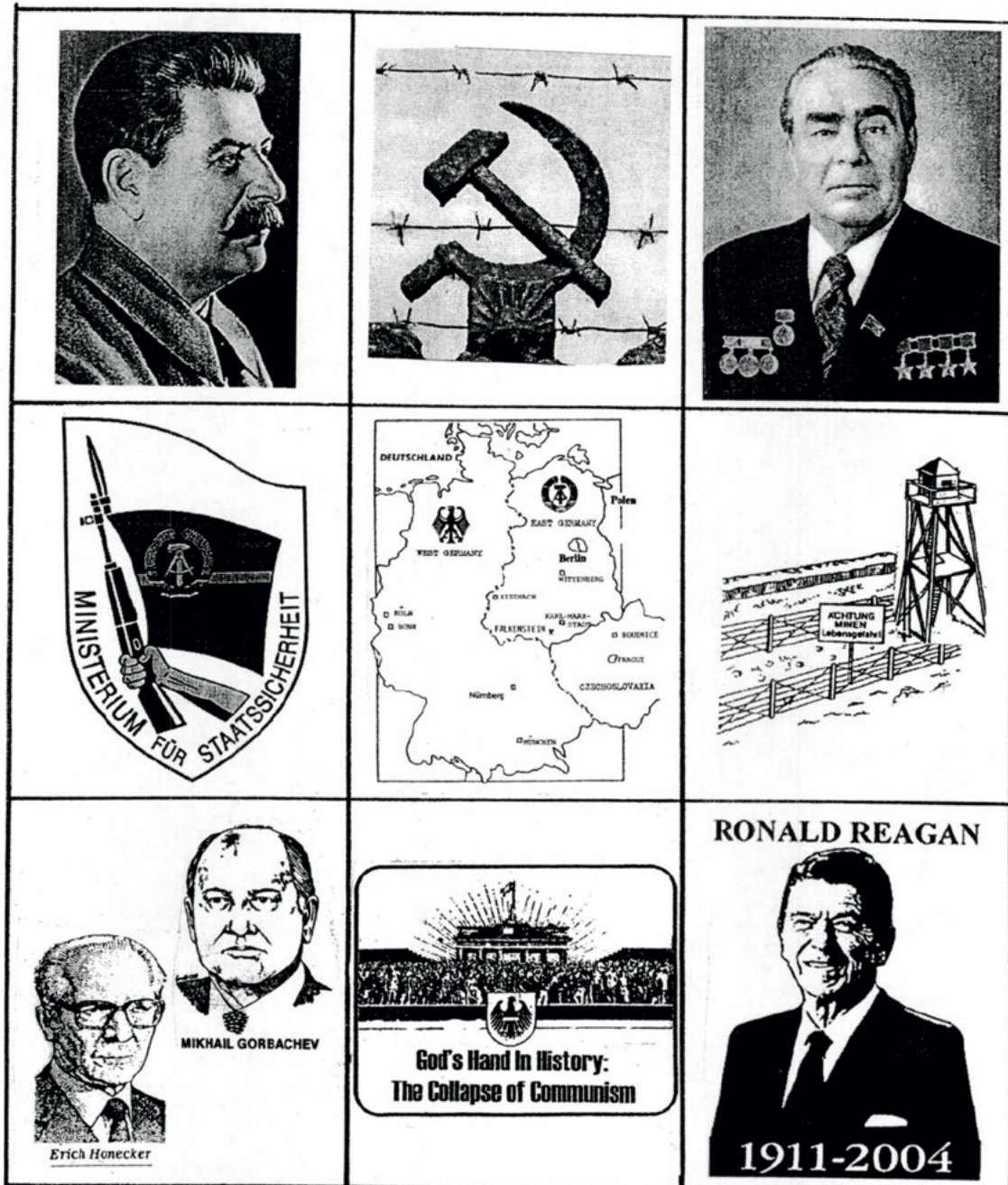




# SESSION 4:

## GOD'S HAND IN HISTORY

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE COLLAPSE OF  
COMMUNISM AND THE IRON CURTAIN



# God's Hand in History:

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM and THE IRON CURTAIN

1A. THE DREADFUL ERECTION OF THE IRON CURTAIN

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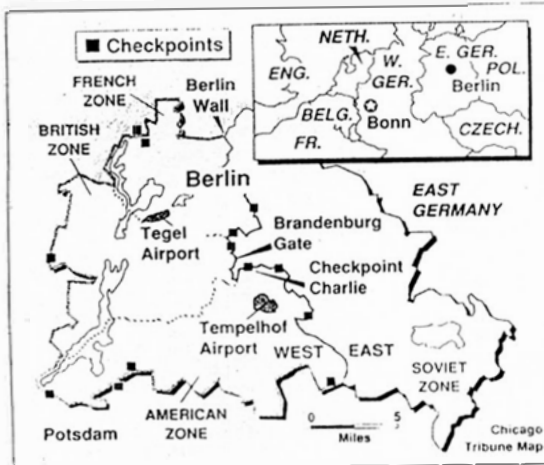
6A. THE DELIGHTFUL EXPLOSION OF FREEDOM

7A. THE DIVINE EVIDENCE IN THE DEMISE OF COMMUNISM

• EASTERN EUROPE  
**An Irresistible Tide**  
*With Moscow's apparent acquiescence, reformers in Bulgaria and protesters in Czechoslovakia follow East Germany in pressing for democracy*



## The Berlin Wall: 1961-89



**WORLD: An irresistible tide is sweeping the East bloc as reformers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia follow the East German lead in pressing for democracy**

Thousands of demonstrators shake the remaining hard-line regimes.

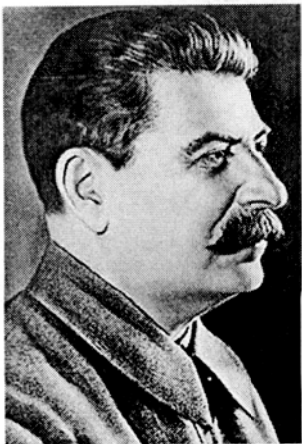
## **GOD'S HAND IN HISTORY:** THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM

In this age filled with turmoil, terrorism and tragedies, many Americans are fearful about their own destiny, that of their country and the world. Instead of facing the future with fear and doubt, the believer should face the future with fortitude and confidence. Though it might not seem that way at times, God is very much in control of the course of human history, as He is of our personal destiny.

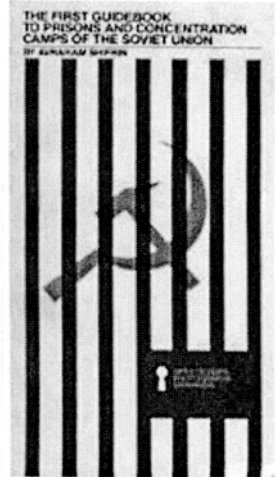
One of the most splendid proofs for God's sovereignty in human affairs is afforded by the dramatic disintegration of world Communism. The sudden and unanticipated liberation of millions of enslaved people serves as a vivid illustration of the ability of God to reverse totally and suddenly a most dreadful situation as He worked out His sovereign plan and that, apparently, in response to fervent prayers. The dramatic and complete collapse of Communism serves as an illustration of God's firm control of world events. Be the human condition or world situation ever so bleak or desperate, God is able to reverse a seemingly hopeless situation at any time He so chooses. God is concerned what transpires in our life and nation and is competent to act. This allows us to have faith in the future. The untold story of the collapse of Communism fortifies that faith.

### 1A. The Dreadful Erection of the Iron Curtain

In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviet Union, an ally of the United States during the war, became a major world power. Its military enslavement of Eastern Europe resulted in the formation of a monstrous empire with the aim of exploiting its satellites for slave labor.



The oppressive Communist regime of Stalin continued the state terrorism of Lenin and made an effort to eradicate all opposition. Whole nationalities such as the Kazakhs, Kulaks and Tartars were eliminated. Under Khrushchev, 10 million Ukrainians died of starvation when their fields were burned. Scattered over the vast country were concentration camps, penal institutions and psychiatric hospitals for that vast segment of the population considered to be enemies of the State. Avraham Shifrin, who was incarcerated in a number of these penal institutions, wrote an important volume, *The First Guidebook to Prisons and Concentration Camps of the Soviet Union*, demonstrating that there were over 2,000 concentration camps. At one time or another, some 65 million Soviet citizens suffered in these camps. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn wrote from personal experience and prodigious



Alexandr Solzhenitsyn



research about his experiences in his acclaimed work on penal camps. His horrifying three-volume *Gulag Archipelago* became an immediate best-seller.

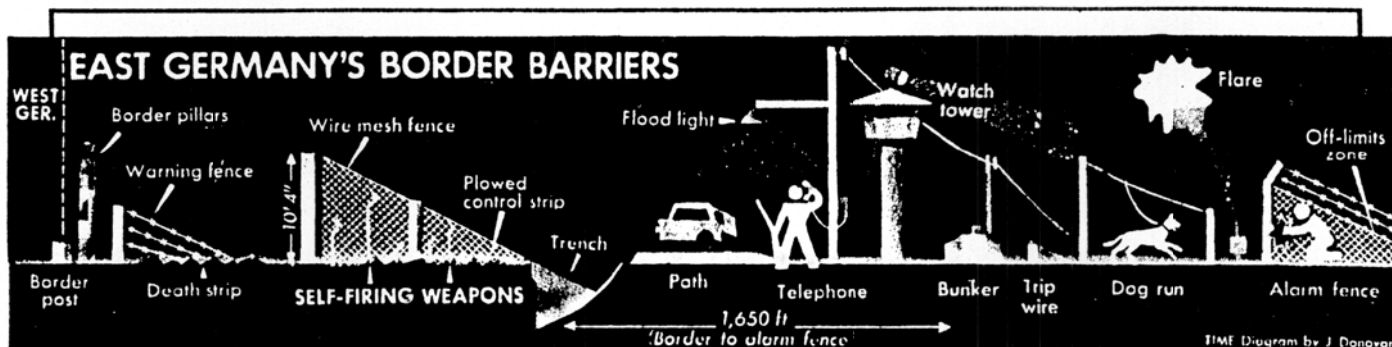


Internally, Khrushchev and his successor Brezhnev repressed any form of dissent. Outwardly they expanded the Communist empire to ever more countries, especially the African continent. Many of us remember the adage concerning Khrushchev: "Khrushchev is a man of peace, this we all recall; a piece of this and a piece of that, until he has it all!" We further recall his shoe-banging temper tantrums in the United Nations and his threats against the United States of America, vowing that our grandchildren would live under Communism.

In the Soviet satellites the puppet regimes, all under the thumb of the slave masters in the Kremlin, made sure that the disenfranchised citizens were unable to

leave their "worker's paradise." To prevent the escape of citizens from the Communist to free nations, Soviet puppet regimes began building around 1949 a formidable barrier, extending between slave and free nations. This border, some 2,500 miles in length, dubbed by Winston Churchill the Iron Curtain, was deadliest between East and West Germany.

The city of Berlin provided the only escape route for East German citizens as they walked from the eastern part of the city, under Russian control, to the western part of the city, occupied by American, French and British forces. In 1961, because of ever more repressive measures of the Communist regime, a veritable flood of escapees, numbering 2,500 per day, voted with their feet for freedom. To stop this hemorrhaging to West Berlin, an island of freedom located inside a Communist sea, the so-called German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik) began building the infamous Berlin Wall. The construction of this barrier effectively closed off the last escape valve from this Communist prison.



**B**Y far the most visible and redoubtable monument to the cold war remains the 840-mile barricade of barbed wire, minefields, watchtowers and armed police that has constituted the frontier between divided Germany for two decades. In spite of the political *détente* that is expected to arise from the recent state treaty signed by the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, East German authorities are reinforcing the deadly barrier. In recent months, for example, workmen have been methodically replacing the barbed wire fences with new gratings; their mesh is too fine to climb.

Such grim improvements in the barrier are clearly designed to discourage East Germans, 871 of whom escaped last year, from interpreting *détente* as a license to flee to the West. Other recent innovations will relieve East German border guards of any problem of conscience they might have. Although guards are under orders to shoot to kill would-be escapees on sight, some have apparently looked the other way or deliberately avoided hitting their

compatriots. The East Germans have now equipped sections of the barrier with automatic self-firing weapons, mounted on three levels so that anyone seeking to jump the fence will trigger a shower of bullets.

Where there are no self-firing weapons, second and third fences have been laid behind the frontier barrier with buried mines and a deep concrete-plated ditch between them. This type of fortification is intended to prevent a favorite escape maneuver: crashing through the barricade with a heavy car. Along certain sections of the border, the fences farthest away from the frontier are now equipped with electrified barbed wire that, when touched, alerts nearby border-control posts by optical and acoustical signals. Floodlights along populated sections of the frontier have long afforded West Germans a permanent panorama of escape attempts. Although such attempts have become suicidal, they are expected to continue. From now on, however, the new double barricades will help hide the spectacle from Western eyes.



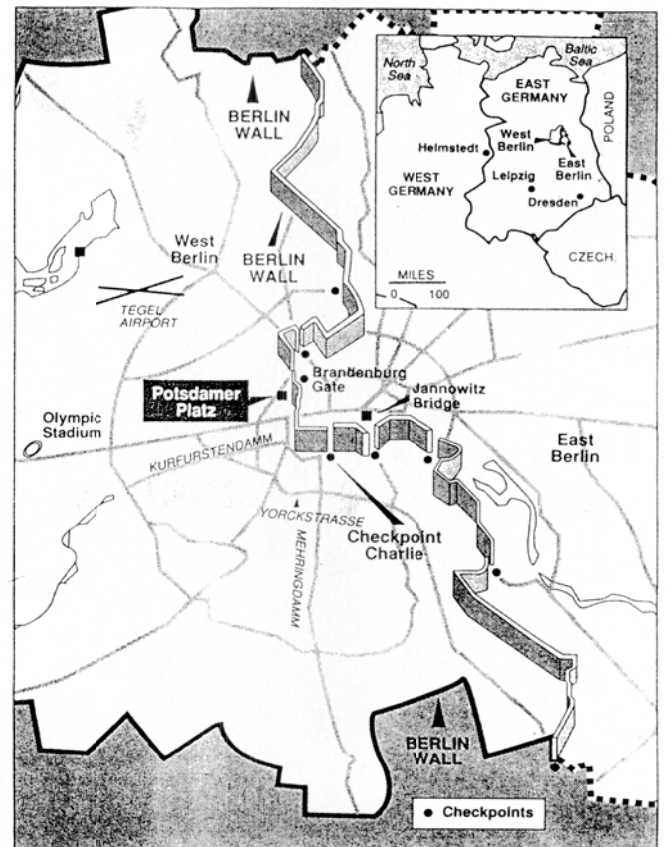
## 2A. The Deadly Efficiency of the Formidable Barrier

In subsequent years the Berlin Wall, as well as the 800-mile-long barrier between East and West Germany, were fortified more and more. Despite this deadly barrier, desperate individuals still attempted to escape their Communist slave masters. Many times their valiant efforts resulted in death. At least 380 individuals lost their lives in this fashion, either along the 35-mile barrier separating East and West Berlin or the 840-mile-long border, like an ugly scar disfiguring the German countryside.

In Berlin, the crude wall initially constructed of concrete blocks was replaced with a 10-foot-high wall comprised of concrete slabs and crowned with a round pipe, effectively preventing a hand-hold for anyone attempting to scale the wall. In fact, a second parallel wall, some 100 yards inside East Berlin, made it impossible for anyone to approach the westernmost wall. Individuals found within the space between the two walls, an area brightly illuminated at night, would be shot by ruthless border guards.

As noted earlier, West Berlin was an island of freedom surrounded by a Communist sea. Berlin was actually located 118 miles eastward of the border separating West from East Germany. The wall separated the two parts of the city itself, but the rest of the free city of West Berlin was also surrounded by formidable fortifications comprised of fences, mine fields and watch towers.

The formidable barrier separating the two parts of the country became ever more impenetrable, expanded to a three-mile-wide no-man's land protected with fences, dog runs, watch towers, bunkers, booby traps and mine fields. On the actual border fence for extensive stretches, automatic self-shooting weapons were installed at head level, belly level and leg level.

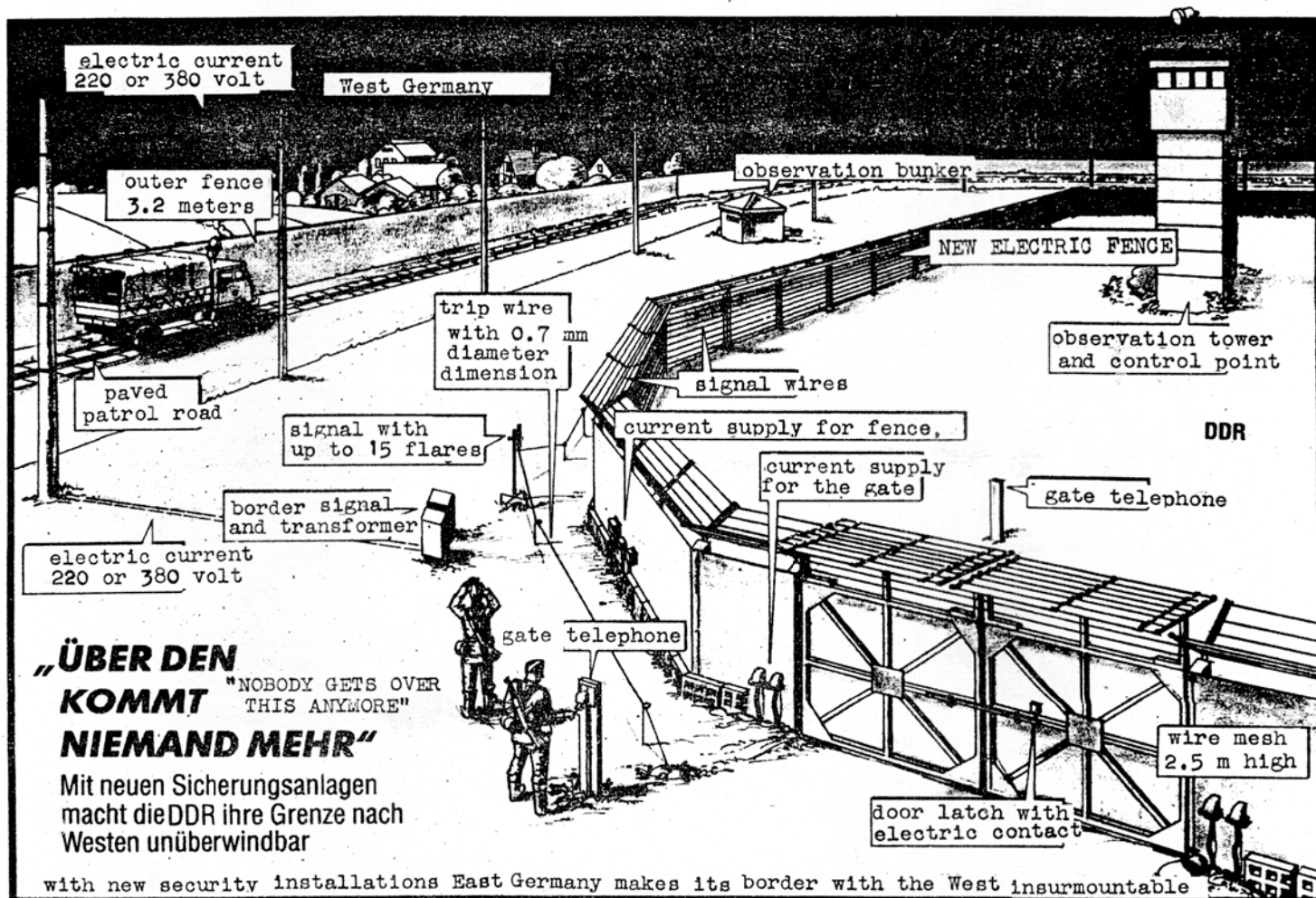
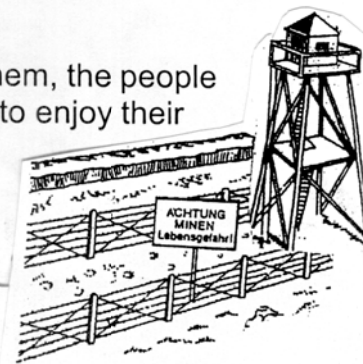


The New York Times/Nov. 13, 1989

The most closely guarded points along the border were the crossing points from West to East Germany for automobiles and trains, three of each. Regular visitors to East Germany, like this writer, could observe the increasingly deadly nature of the border fortifications, making any escape attempt a suicidal venture. Virtually

the only East Germans permitted to visit the free western part or Federal Republic of Germany, were citizens who had reached the coveted retirement age, which was 60 for women and 65 for men. They were readily granted visas to visit friend or relatives for three weeks. All the young people, longing for a taste of freedom, had figured out how many years, months and weeks were left until they could make their first trip to free West Germany, a place they only knew from television programs.

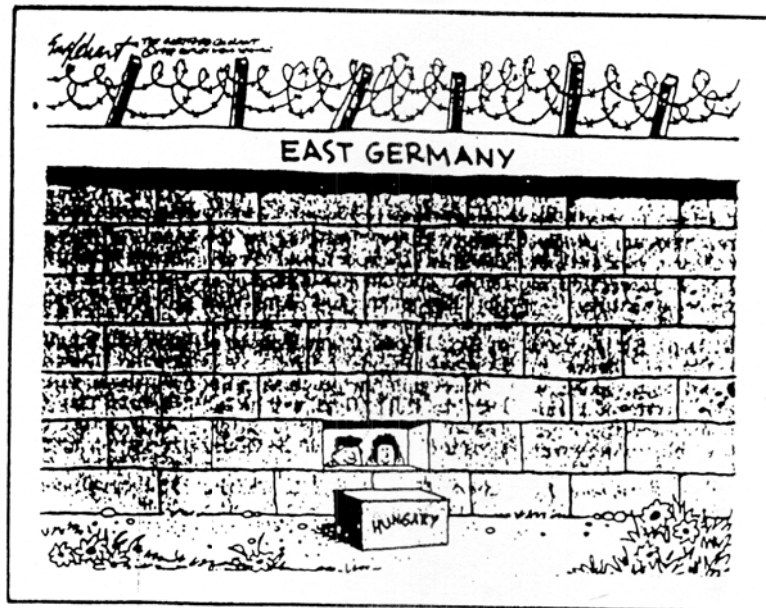
Once the state had exacted from its serfs the labor deemed due them, the people could leave, though many, broken in body and spirit, were unable to enjoy their few weeks of freedom.





### 3A. The Dramatic Exodus of East Germans to the West

In the summer of 1989, while the German Democratic Republic was preparing to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Communist government of Hungary did something that altered the status quo in Europe in a dramatic way. Having always imposed less stringent travel restrictions on its citizens than did other countries in the Communist camp, the Hungarian government decided, much to the horror of its Communist neighbors, to remove the border posts and barbed wire fences on their western border to Austria. As the Austrian television news filmed, the brave Hungarians removed the hated barrier with wire cutters. As the amazing events unfolded on West German television, East German young people immediately began a virtual migration southward. The East German young people were suddenly overcome with an inordinate desire to vacation in Hungary. Obtaining a tourist visa from their government, they started a mass migration to the Hungarian/Austrian border. Who can blame them for making a break for freedom?



Driving mostly their diminutive Trabant cars, (known as the “car of the philosopher. . .because you think you have a car”), they drove directly to the opening in the Austrian/Hungarian border and leaving their precious cars, for which the average waiting time had been fifteen years, they walked to freedom in

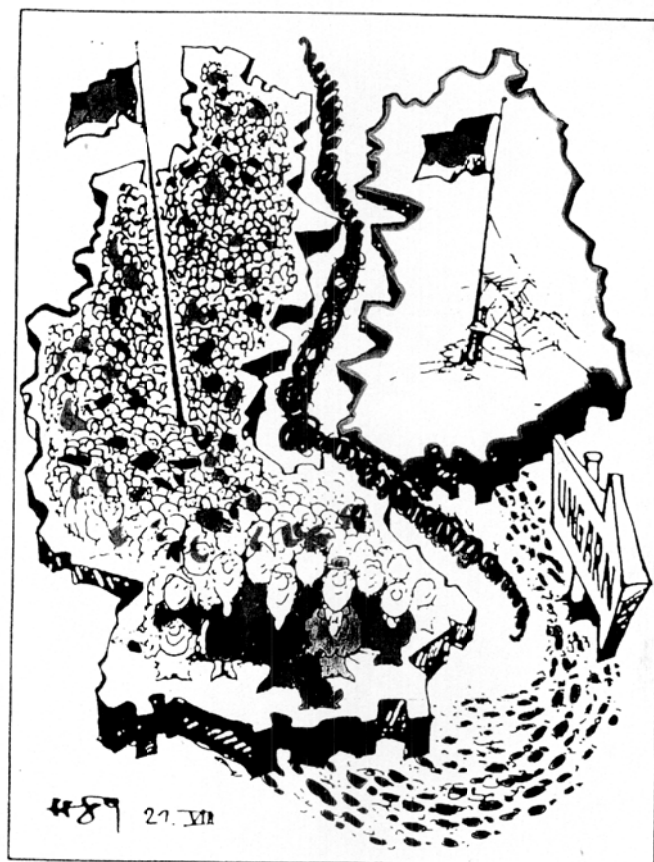


### Refugees stream into Austria

Austria. Even as the Hungarian side of the border became the world's largest parking lot, East German young people were given quick and safe passage through Austria on their way to West Germany. Within hours, many were in the free part of Berlin just hundreds of yards away from their vacant apartments in the eastern part of the city.

During that fateful summer of 1989, thousands of Germans, mostly well educated young people and professionals, made this trek to freedom. Sometimes the consequences for East Germany were catastrophic. This writer's nephew, just beginning his medical studies, was called upon to work in a hospital where, rightly or wrongly, every doctor and nurse had opted for freedom.

The German government was enraged because of Hungary's unilateral decision. Hungary, in turn, refused to close the border to Austria but instead sealed its border with Czechoslovakia. The East German government also sealed its southern border with Czechoslovakia, thus trapping tens of thousands of East Germans within Czechoslovakia. They could not return to their homes in East Germany, nor could they continue to Hungary and thence to freedom. The western news media portrayed their desperate plight. By the thousands they attempted to scale the fence at the West German embassy in Prague while frustrated Czech policemen tried to hold them back. Soon the number of refugees exceeded five thousand, with



**Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung**

standing room only in a small area, the torrential rains turning the embassy grounds into a muddy mess.

With world attention on the heart-wrenching scenes in Prague and East Germany desperately trying to save its face as its 40-year anniversary festivities were approaching, the East German government sent so-called "freedom trains" to Prague, which transported the refugees to West Germany.

**Waves of East German refugees toast freedom as Hungary opens gates**



DDR-Flüchtlinge in der Bonner Botschaft in Prag 1989: „Das Politbüro hat gewußt, wie tief es in dem Sumpf sitzt!“





Rather than selecting the shortest route, the devious East German officials insisted that the trains go through Eastern Germany, with secret police boarding the trains to confiscate everyone's passport and identification papers. Thanks to the presence of West German government officials on the trains, brutal acts by the Communist bullies were kept to a minimum. As the trains slowed down in major East German cities, numerous alert young people climbed aboard, making for considerably crowded and

unsanitary conditions. After an agonizingly slow ride of 24 hours, the trains arrived in Hof, West Germany, where thousands of West Germans welcomed their brothers and sisters from the east, showering them with food and drink, of which they had been deprived for days.



As soon as the first freedom trains left Prague, thousands of other individuals sought refuge in the West German embassy. Thus other freedom trains were dispatched to take another 5,000 refugees to West Germany. As the train slowed down again in cities such as Dresden and Chemnitz, and individuals were anxious to climb aboard as at the first time, Communist police were waiting for them and beat them mercilessly to the ground. Large puddles of blood on the train platform testified to the brutality of the Communist goons against individuals whose only crime was the desire to be free.

When the last freedom train crossed the border into West Germany, the Iron Curtain seemed to close permanently. The Communist dictator Erich Honecker defiantly declared that the Berlin



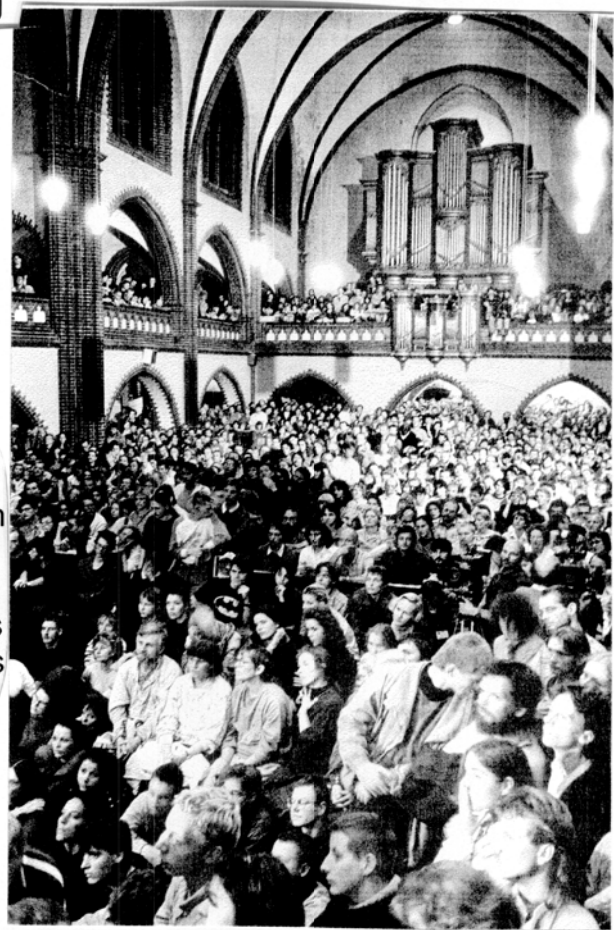
Wall would stand for another hundred years. Little did he know that God would soon intervene in a marvelous way and secure freedom for millions of oppressed people.

#### 4A. The Dedicated Evangelicals at Prayer

With the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the East German dictatorship approaching, and no hope in sight for an end to the Communist regime, despite the temporary exodus of tens of thousands of their countrymen, evangelical Lutheran young people gathered at the impressive St. Nikolaikirche in Leipzig, the church where Johann Sebastian Bach was organist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Every Monday night they came together for a prayer vigil, asking God for a change of government. Then with lit candles they solemnly walked around the inner ring of Leipzig. Returning to the church, they vowed to return for prayer the following Monday, if God had not yet granted their request. As the young people gathered each Monday, their numbers swelled, so that they also occupied the neighboring St. Thomaskirche, with loudspeakers communicating the announcements and prayer service to the multitude in the square between the churches.

In numerous other cities throughout the country, individual prayer vigils were held. What started as an effort by evangelical Lutheran students and pastors soon encompassed a large segment of the population. This writer's brother was a pastor in Stollberg at the time, leading the people in his city in a prayer vigil. According to his parishioners, when he spoke, virtually the entire town gathered inside and outside the Lutheran church. Some of the folks reported to this writer that the thousands of listeners were so attentive that one could hear a pin drop.

Each Monday vast numbers of citizens met for prayer. They took comfort and courage from each other but many wondered how their government would respond to their ever-swelling numbers.



#### 5A. The Desperate Effort of the East German Government

The many thousands gathered for prayer vigil each Monday knew it was only a matter of time before the government would respond with force to this peaceful challenge. This writer was in the heart of Leipzig in July of 1989. As my family and I were waiting for my brother to finish a business matter, we watched the busy pedestrian traffic, noticing that virtually every other person who passed was



a Russian soldier, German soldier or policeman. When we related our observations to our Leipzig friends over Kaffee und Kuchen, they assured us that the civilian individuals were probably plainclothes policemen. There was great tension in the air. Everyone felt that something dreadful was about to happen.

The Monday night vigils continued and an ever-increasing number of peaceful protesters from all over East Germany traveled to Leipzig Monday night. As the first Monday of October approached, reliable reports suggested that in Berlin directives had been given to the German and Russian army and police to end the vigils once and for all by shooting the protesters. Further, it was known that thousands of wooden coffins had been shipped into the city. All meat lockers had been emptied to make room for the anticipated human corpses. As the masses from throughout the country emerged from the bus and train stations that afternoon, they noticed that along every street leading to the two churches in the center of town, military personnel were stationed. Tanks and troop transport vehicles then moved in on the center of Leipzig where, by some accounts, 50,000 individuals had gathered for prayer. German and Russian police and soldiers, as well as paratroopers, formed a tight cordon around the calm crowd. Most individuals packed into the churches and town square, assumed that when they finished their prayers and began their weekly march with lit candles around the inner city ring, they would probably face their executioners. They sensed that few might leave the city alive that night. After all, they had heard what the Red Chinese had done just a few weeks earlier to the peaceful protesters at Tiananmen Square in Peking.

While thousands of individuals prayed, something occurred for which no one has found an adequate explanation. Someone in Leipzig countermanded the directive from Berlin to shoot to kill. It is unclear who it was that disobeyed the deadly directive. As the worshipers lit their candles to face those who placed a military noose around them, they noticed their executioners had vanished. The military vehicles had been removed. They were free to go on their accustomed circular walk, and then they returned to their homes. The following morning they heard the good news that their prayers of the previous evening, indeed the prayers over the months





Erich Honecker



Egon Krenz

and years, had been answered. During the night their dictator, Erich Honecker, had been replaced. Egon Kreuz, a far less brutal apparatshik, was put in his place. A sovereign God in heaven granted them their fervent request. Little did anyone know how soon and how spectacularly total freedom would come for them.

#### 6A. The Delightful Explosion of Freedom

With the exodus of many thousands of individuals to West Germany by way of Hungary and the freedom trains in the summer of 1989, the desire for the freedom to travel outside the Communist camp became ever greater. The government, always anxious to stay in control, deliberated over how to release the accumulated pressure from a veritable pressure cooker. To counter the unrest among the populace, the government reached a decision to ease travel restrictions. On the evening of November 9, 1989, the government spokesman and member of the Politburo, Günter Schabowski, spoke in a live broadcast international news conference about the decision of the GDR government that day, to allow free travel for East German citizens. "We have decided today to implement a regulation that allows every citizen of the German Democratic Republic to leave the GDR through any of the border crossings." When Schabowski was asked how soon this would go into effect and whether a passport would be needed, he laconically read from the official paper:



Applications for travel abroad by private individuals can now be made without the previously existing requirements (of demonstrating a need to travel or proving familial relationships). The travel authorizations will be issued within a short time. Grounds for denial will only be applied in particular exceptional cases. The responsible departments of passport and registration control in the People's Police district offices in the GDR are instructed to issue visas for permanent exit without delays and without presentation of the existing requirements for permanent exit (*Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13, 157).

Schabowski had providentially misunderstood the Politburo decision which stipulated that the law would go into effect the following morning, but citizens still had to secure an exit permit at the local police station.

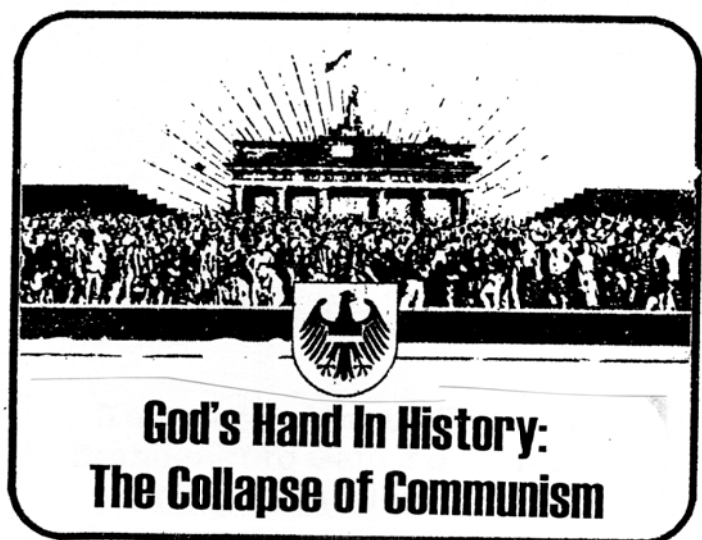
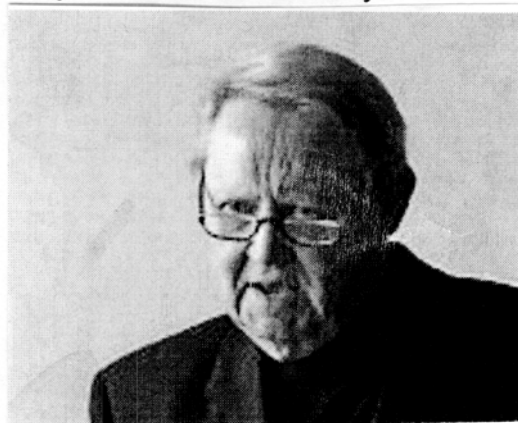
East German citizens heard him say that the law went into effect immediately and failed to realize that an official exit visa would still be required. And so it was that tens of thousands of people immediately went to the Berlin Wall, where border guards had no knowledge of the new decree. Frantically, they called their



German commander, who could not be reached. Likewise, the Russian official in charge of East Berlin was unreachable because of a malfunctioning car phone. Vastly outnumbered by the thousands approaching the three checkpoints in the wall, the border police was told by a lower ranking official to step aside. Border barriers were removed, the crowd surged through to freedom, scaling the wall and commencing a tearful victory celebration. The dramatic scenes will be etched in the memory of anyone old enough to remember. Thus on that fateful November 9, without a shot being fired, without any blood being shed, the wall crumbled.

Günter Schabowski is credited with accidentally beginning the destruction of the GDR border system. It should be noted that Schabowski remains the only high-ranking GDR official to renounce his country's Leninist-style Socialism as fatally flawed. He deeply regretted his own actions:

What upsets me the most is that I was an accountable representative of a system under which people suffered, also under which repression was aimed at individuals, who were persecuted because of their oppositional stance. Their position was the right one. My position was the wrong one. We were not capable of democracy, but rather tried in the absence of better arguments to get rid of the other opinion with direct violence ([http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/G%C3%BCnter\\_Schabowski](http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/G%C3%BCnter_Schabowski). Information accessed 12/16/2006)



## 7A. The Divine Evidence in the Demise of Communism

Little did President Ronald Reagan know of the ensuing dramatic developments when he viewed the Berlin Wall and threw out this challenge, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" He is credited by many to have started the steam roller that weakened the Soviet system and did not end until German reunification on October 3, 1990. By steadily strengthening the military might of the United States, he forced the Soviet state to spend itself into bankruptcy.

Ronald Reagan, Günter Schabowski, the Hungarian government, millions of praying Christians around the world and thousands of East German young people in their Monday night prayer vigils all were God's providential means to accomplish something that seemed impossible: the destruction of Communism and the resulting freedom for untold millions of enslaved individuals. Who would have imagined early in 1989 that by year's end the wall would be gone?

Erich Honecker intoned in January 1989 that the wall would "stand for another 50, or even 100 years!" He was totally oblivious to God's sovereign working. Many believers in Iron Curtain countries, indeed Christians around the world, prayed for freedom for those enslaved by Communism. After 40 years God graciously and sovereignly answered their prayers.



Believers in America have prayed for decades that God would change the spiritual and moral decline of their beloved country. America began as a Christian nation. Its foundations have been undermined by theological and political liberalism, by secularism, nihilism and paganism, as well as hosts of other isms. Is it too late for America? Not at all. We are commanded to pray for our nation and its leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-2), just as Israel was asked to pray for God's help. The direct precept of Second Chronicles 7:14 is to pray. The divine promise is that God would hear. If God is well-pleased, He can answer our prayers for the United States just as suddenly and dramatically as He did in behalf of those living in Communist regimes. Let us pray for His intervention in our nation's moral and political decline, as we trust Him for His daily interposition in our own lives.







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# KEEP IN TOUCH



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