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**The Christian Churches in the  
Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR  
1945-1989**

**Dissertation for the degree of M.Phil. (Research)**

**University of Glasgow**

**Department of Modern History**

**Submitted by Sebastian Michael Gehrold**

**October 1997**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation deals with the Christian Churches in the Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR, 1945-1989. It consists of three main sections, with the first part providing background information, the second part focusing on the actual topic, and the third part comparing and analysing the previously reached results.

The first part of the dissertation is sub-divided into three chapters. Chapter one deals with the German churches 1918-1945. The aim of this chapter is to provide insight into the roles Protestantism and Catholicism played before Hitler came to power in 1933. The major changes of the 15 years after the First World War are elaborated and the churches' attempts to accommodate themselves under the various political systems are analysed. The second chapter of part one deals with the Christian churches in eastern Europe after the Second World War. Background information on the Communist governments' church policies is provided and patterns are established in order to allow comparison with the situation in the GDR. The last chapter of this part focuses on the Vatican's eastern policies. The approaches pursued by the various pontiffs and the consequences that the Vatican's policies had on the Catholics in eastern Europe are pointed out. Again, the aim is to establish a background against which the situation in the GDR can be compared.

Part two of this dissertation is dedicated to the churches under Soviet military administration and the GDR. The first chapter analyses the period 1945-1949, when the foundations for the state/church relationship in the GDR were laid. The second chapter elaborates the changes in the GDR government's church policy over the first twenty years (until 1969), and points out the churches' diverse responses. The phase after 1969/70, is tackled in chapter three. This chapter also includes the 1980s, which bring the stagnation of the GDR and finally the collapse of the regime.

The third part of this work, the conclusion, begins with an analysis of the Christians' contribution to the 1989 revolution. This is followed by a section that points out the similarities and differences between the GDR and the other eastern European countries in regard to their church policies. The final chapter also compares the role of the Protestantism and Catholicism in the GDR, and tries to evaluate their responses to the totalitarian challenge.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original piece of work, that the research upon which it is based is entirely my own, and that it has not been accepted in fulfilment of the requirements of any other degree or professional qualification.

Glasgow, October 1997

Sebastian M. Gehrold

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Glasgow, October 1997.

*To my family  
and to the memory of my father.*



# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Topic .....	5
2. Terminology .....	6
3. Literature.....	7
 <b>PART A: Background.....</b>	 <b>9</b>
<b>I. Historical Background: The Churches in Germany, 1918-1933 .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1. The churches and the new state .....	9
2. The churches and the eastern German states .....	10
a. The inherited state control over the Protestant Churches .....	10
b. Concordats and church treaties .....	11
3. The churches and the Third Reich .....	13
a. 1933: <i>Deutsche Evangelische Kirche</i> and <i>Reichskonkordat</i> .....	13
b. The founding of the <i>Deutsche Evangelische Kirche</i> and the Protestant Churches .....	14
c. The <i>Reichskonkordat</i> and the Catholic Church .....	14
d. The churches in the Third Reich .....	17
4. Summary .....	18
 <b>II. The wider Picture: Christianity in Eastern Europe after 1945 .....</b>	 <b>19</b>
1. Christianity in East and West after the war .....	19
a. The revival of Christianity .....	19
b. The West and Communism after 1949.....	20
2. The church policy in Eastern Europe in the Stalin era .....	20
a. The state's attempts to gain control over the churches.....	20
1) Church ministries.....	21
2) The election of bishops.....	21
3) Christian-Marxist dialogue.....	22
4) Rites .....	23
b. Violence .....	23
c. Orders .....	23

3. The Protestant Churches in the Stalin era.....	24
4. The Catholic Church in the Stalin era .....	26
5. The Uniates .....	30
a. Historical background .....	30
b. The Uniates in the Ukraine.....	30
c. The Uniates in eastern Europe.....	31
6. Summary.....	33
<b>III. Ecclesiastical Background: The Vatican's eastern policy .....</b>	<b>36</b>
1. Catholic Church and Communism before 1949: .....	36
a. Principle antagonism .....	36
b. The impact of the situation in Italy .....	38
c. The role of Pope Pius XII. ....	38
2. Church and Communism after Stalin .....	39
3. The 1960s: Paul VI.....	40
4. The Second Vatican Council and Communism.....	41
5. The 1970s: <i>Ostpolitik</i> and mutual acknowledgement.....	42
6. The 1980s: John Paul II.....	43
a. John Paul II's election .....	43
b. John Paul II as pope.....	43
7. Summary.....	44
<b>PART B: The Churches in Eastern Germany.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>I. The churches in zonal Germany, 1945-1949 .....</b>	<b>46</b>
1. The end of the war .....	46
2. The church structure and the division of Germany.....	46
3. The demographic shift in eastern Germany and its impact on the churches .....	48
4. The Declarations of Guilt .....	50
5. The churches in the years of Soviet military administration (SMAD) .....	51
a. The German Communists and Christianity .....	51
b. The Protestant Church in the Soviet Occupied Zone .....	52
c. The Catholic Church in the Soviet Occupied Zone.....	53
6. Summary.....	56

<b>II. The churches in the GDR, 1949-1969.....</b>	<b>57</b>
1. The churches and the foundation of the GDR .....	57
2. The early 1950s: The GDR stabilises itself .....	57
a. The Protestant Church .....	57
b. The Catholic Church: Bishop Weskamm (1951-1956) .....	58
3. The late 1950s: The churches under the established regime .....	59
a. The Protestant Church: intra-church discussions and Dibelius' „Letter on Authority“ .....	59
b. The Catholic Church: anti-Communism under Cardinal Döpfner (1957-1961) .....	61
4. The 1960s .....	61
a. The Protestant Church: The “Thuringian Way” of co-operation.....	61
b. The Catholic Church: The struggle over the diocese boundaries .....	63
5. Summary .....	65
<b>III. The churches in the GDR, 1970-1989 .....</b>	<b>68</b>
1. The 1970s: Collaboration and <i>Ostpolitik</i> .....	68
a. The Protestant Church .....	68
1) The EKD breaks up .....	68
2) The “Church in Socialism“ .....	69
b. The Catholic Church: The <i>Ostpolitik</i> of Pope Paul VI.....	73
2. The churches in West and East Germany .....	74
3. The 1980s: stagnation of the GDR .....	75
a. The Protestant Church .....	75
b. The Catholic Church .....	76
4. Change in Eastern Europe and the churches' role .....	77
a. Economic crisis in eastern Europe .....	77
b. Renewed state church co-operation.....	77
1) Poland: The Church turns away from the regime .....	77
2) The election of John Pope II.....	79
3) National anniversaries as transition points for the state/church relations.....	79
5. The churches and the East German opposition.....	82
6. The 1989 revolution in the GDR .....	82
a. The Protestant Church .....	82
b. The Catholic Church .....	83

7. The GDR churches and the <i>Staatssicherheit</i> .....	83
a. The Protestant Church .....	83
b. The Catholic Church .....	84
8. Summary .....	84

## **PART C: Conclusion..... 89**

1. Christians and the 1989-Revolutions in eastern Europe.....	89
2. Churches in eastern Europe and the GDR .....	90
3. Catholicism and Protestantism in the GDR.....	93

## **Appendix**

### Maps

### Bibliography

# Errata

p. 6, l. 19-20:

instead of	"the religious situation and the other"
read	"the religious situation in the GDR and the other"

p. 12, l. 5:

instead of	"In eastern Germany, a Concordat ..."
read	"A Concordat ..."

p. 12, l. 20:

instead of	"in the preceding before"
read	"in the preceding century,"

p. 16, l. 9-10:

instead of	"Huerten shows ... made to swear:"
read	"Huerten shows that this form of oath was much weaker than that which the bishops had been made to swear before 1918:"

p. 17, l. 13:

instead of	"Totalitarian"
read	"Authoritarian"

p. 17, l. 16:

instead of	"between a Catholic bishop occurred"
read	"between a Catholic bishop and the regime occurred"

p. 19, l. 23:

instead of	"not even in the"
read	"including the"

p. 36, l. 11:

instead of	"fascist-autocratic"
read	"authoritarian"

p. 84, l. 17:

instead of	"the new SPD-led government"
read	"the new SPD-led West German government"

# Introduction

## 1. Topic

This dissertation deals with the Christian churches in East Germany between 1945 and 1989. The role of the churches in the GDR shall be examined, beginning with the end of the war and the years of Soviet administration, ending with the churches' implication in the 1989 revolution. I am focusing on the state/church relation, trying to highlight the different approaches the churches pursued towards the state. These approaches did not only vary between the denominations and even between individual church leaders within a church, but also throughout the four decades of the SED regime.

The Christian churches have traditionally played an important role in German society. In order to illustrate this particular history of state/church relation in Germany, the first chapter is concerned with the German churches 1918-1945. This period is marked by substantial changes in the German political system (from monarchy to democracy to totalitarian dictatorship), the German churches (who had to adjust to the changes) and the German society as such. This background information is essential in order to understand the history of the churches in the GDR.

The second chapter deals with the Christian churches in eastern Europe. German historiography naturally concentrates on the history of the Communist regime in the GDR, and usually lacks the eastern European dimension. I find the way English-speaking historians consider the history of the GDR within an eastern European context particularly revealing. For many Germans, the GDR was not perceived as part of eastern Europe in the stricter sense. The second chapter will analyse the similarities and differences between the eastern European countries and the GDR as far as church policy was concerned.

This second section will, for two reasons, predominantly deal with the Catholic Church. Firstly, the Protestant Churches are minorities in most of the countries in question. Secondly, as this work deals with the relationship between church and state in the GDR, negotiations between the two parties at the highest level played an important role in this relation. The involvement of the Catholic church always meant the diplomatic involvement of the Vatican, albeit to a varying degree; and, by the strong link of the Catholic Church's hierarchy, the position of the Catholic Church in one Communist country was reflected in other countries.

Thus, the situation of the Catholic Church in eastern Europe could have an impact on the Catholic Church in the GDR to a far greater extent than in the case of the Protestant Churches. For this reason, the role of the Pope in the relations between Catholics and Communist regimes in eastern Europe is elaborated further in chapter three of part one. The history of the Catholic Church behind the Iron Curtain cannot be seen without taking the influence of the Vatican into account, as we will see.

In the second part of this dissertation the churches in the Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR shall be examined. The first chapter of part two is dedicated to the period between the end of the war and the foundation of the GDR. In these years many fundamental decisions were made, and these decisions exercised influence throughout the 40 years of the GDR.

The history of the state and the churches in the GDR is split up into two sections, 1949-1969 and 1970-1989. The reason for this is a substantial change in the churches between 1969 and 1972. At this point the attitude especially of the Protestant Church leaders toward the GDR changed. Both churches carried out structural reforms in order to adjust to the political situation, and the focus of the state/church relations in the GDR shifted towards restricted co-operation.

In the conclusion I shall analyse and compare the results of parts 1 and 2. Three questions will be addressed. Firstly, the involvement of the churches in the 1989 revolution. Secondly, the question of whether there was a fundamental difference between the religious situation and the other eastern European countries; and thirdly, the East German Protestants and Catholics shall be compared, in an attempt to reveal significant differences in their roles in the GDR, and to consider the possible reason for such differences.

## 2. Terminology

In Germany there have traditionally been only two significant Christian denominations, the Roman Catholics and the Protestant Churches. The Protestant Churches are organised in *Landeskirchen* (state churches). The Lutheran Church dominates, but some of the *Landeskirchen* are Reformed; in eastern Germany the Church of the Old Prussian Union (EKU) is also present. The Protestant Churches are usually referred to as 'Evangelisch' (Evangelical), but in order to avoid further confusion I will use the term Protestants. In fact, the GDR government

itself does not seem to have made a distinction between the two groups, but rather classified them according to their willingness to co-operate.

### 3. Literature

As mentioned above, the English-speaking literature on the churches in the GDR often considers the GDR church history in the context of eastern Europe. The collections of essays, edited by Ramet (Pedro and Sabrina Petra are one and the same person) are examples of this, and are very useful as overviews of the Christian churches in eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

A good sketch of German literature on the Catholic Church is given by Schäfer, who also outlines the major developments in current historiography.<sup>2</sup> The most important recent publications on the Protestant side are definitely the four large volumes by Besier.<sup>3</sup> Comparable publications on the Catholic Church are currently under production by Martin Höllen, whose first volume was published by himself in small numbers, and will, therefore, probably be unavailable in many libraries.<sup>4</sup> It contains a huge number of extracts from documents and detailed information. Once the following volumes have been published, Höllen's works will presumably become as influential in Catholic Church historiography as Besier's are already on the Protestant side.

Church history, especially modern and contemporary church history, has always been a particularly controversial subject. In Germany, most of those who have influenced the relations between GDR regime and churches (on either side) still play a public role nowadays. Many church activists have entered politics, in various parties.<sup>5</sup> Hence the relations between churches

<sup>1</sup> See the bibliography. The 'fact sheets' at the end of each article give the most important data on the communities in the respective country; they are very useful for quick reference.

<sup>2</sup> Schäfer, Bernd: Selbstbehauptungsstrategie und (Über)lebensmuster der katholischen Kirche in der Zeit des DDR-Staats, in: *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte (=KZG)* 2/1994, pp. 264-278, see 268-270.

<sup>3</sup> 'Pfarrer, Christen, Katholiken' (from 1992) and the three volumes of *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche* (1993-1995). Every historian is probably grateful for the biographical list of the most important characters in Protestant GDR church history Besier has compiled for the appendix of 'Pfarrer, Christen, Katholiken'. See the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Höllen, Martin: "Loyale Distanz?" *Katholizismus und Kirchenpolitik in SBZ und DDR. Ein Überblick in Dokumenten. Vol 1 (1945-1955)*. Berlin 1994.

<sup>5</sup> For instance Manfred Stolpe, now Social Democratic governor of Brandenburg and Rainer Eppelmann, Member of Parliament for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).



and regime (and especially their involvement in the GDR State Security Service) has also been approached by journalists; a fact that does not make research on the subject easier.

However, even before the GDR collapsed, books have been published which can only be used cautiously. It is well-known that GDR researchers in highly political subjects like history could only work and publish if there was no doubt about their commitment to Socialism. In a personal statement, Joachim Heise freely admits that his research before 1989 was influenced by restricted access to certain sources, and therefore partly faulty. It remains to be seen whether GDR historians can detach themselves from their former personal enthusiasm for Socialism and from the way history was written in the GDR.

Over the next years, as access to an increasing number of archives will become available,<sup>6</sup> research on the GDR will continue on a high level, and many details will become known that will enable historians to close at least some of the gaps in GDR church history.

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<sup>6</sup> Especially archives of GDR parties, foremost the SED and the CDU, the government and the authorities such as the Ministry for State Security (*MfS*).

## PART A: Background

### I. Historical Background: The Churches in Germany, 1918-1933

#### 1. The churches and the new state

The collapse of the Prussian-dominated German Empire after the First World War dramatically changed the environment the churches found themselves in. Religious affairs had been subject to the legislation of the principalities, many of whom had state churches favoured by the government. The year 1918 brought a new state and the prospect of a new constitution. This new state was committed to genuine impartiality in religious matters, in many cases even looking for co-operation with the churches. It was also committed to a society based on a federalist structure. The constitutional framework, however, was formed on a national level.

In the general elections of 19 January 1919, the social democratic SPD and its left-wing splinter group, the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) missed an absolute majority in the national convention and, thus, depended on the bourgeois parties. This produced an opportunity for the churches to influence the contents of the constitution; this was especially true of the Catholic Church via the Catholic Centre Party.<sup>7</sup> The SPD now had to rescind its aim of a radical separation of church and state, and although the political parties still looked for a general separation, this had to be modified by certain privileges.

The constitution of August 1919 dealt with the churches and their role in society in articles 135 - 141. Most important for the churches was their status as public corporations, which stressed the public character of the churches and the acknowledgement of this by the state (incorporated in art. 137). On the basis of this status, the right to raise church taxes was also confirmed (art. 137), furthermore, art. 138 guaranteed the existing church property (*Vermögensbestandgarantie*) as well as state funding for the churches.<sup>8</sup> This funding was to be specified by individual states' legislation, since cultural affairs were part of the states' legisla-

<sup>7</sup> The Catholic Church was also involved in the government itself, for instance the priest Heinrich Brauns was minister of labour 1920-1928.

<sup>8</sup> Huber, Ernst Rudolf / Huber, Wolfgang: *Staat und Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Staatskirchenrechts*. Vol I: Staat und Kirche vom Ausgang des alten Reichs bis zum Vorabend der bürgerlichen Revolution. Vol IV: Staat und Kirche in der Weimarer Republik. Berlin: 1988. The articles of the constitution that deal with church affairs are quoted under no. 97, pp. 128-132. The articles in question can be found on p. 129f.

tive sphere, but the *Reich* had set up the basic framework. Under these conditions, the economic base for the churches was secured in the whole country, although tedious negotiations with the (often less church-friendly) state governments had to follow.

## 2. The churches and the eastern German states

### a. The inherited state control over the Protestant Churches

After the First World War, the German princes resigned. Together with their secular power they also left their position as head of the Protestant Church in the respective territories (Summepiscopate) vacant. The new governments therefore also inherited administrative control over the Protestant Churches.

Most diverse was the denominational situation in Prussia. The Protestants here were usually members of the Old Prussian Union that had been founded by King Friedrich Wilhelm III by decree on 27 September 1817<sup>9</sup> in preparation for the three-hundredth anniversary of Luther's 95 theses (21 October 1517). Nevertheless, the Union had always been rejected by some Lutherans, especially later on, in those territories that came under Prussian rule after 1866, such as Schleswig-Holstein, Hesse, and Hannover. The Lutheran Church of Hannover even played an important role in the independence movement of the annexed kingdom.

However, immediately after the First World War, even in Prussia and Saxony, the left dominated governments (led by SPD and USPD) made, at first, only moderate use of this power by means of appointed state commissioners (*Staatskommissare*). The attempt in December 1918 by the Prussian state commissioner to select pastor Ludwig Wessel as a government representative and at the same time to secure him a post in the Church Council of the Prussian Protestant Church failed.<sup>10</sup> The state governments continued their funding of the churches, since the need of a constitutional amendment for cancelling it was acknowledged even by the revolutionary SPD and USPD. In Prussia, however, church supervision over schools was removed in favour of governmental control. In Thuringia, the departure of the princes paved the way for a unified Thuringian republic. Shortly afterwards, the Protestant Churches started

<sup>9</sup> Huber I, no. 259, p. 576f.

<sup>10</sup> See Huber I, pp. 42-47.

forming a state umbrella body, which eventually emerged as the Thuringian *Landeskirche* on 10 October 1924.<sup>11</sup>

## b. Concordats and church treaties

Within the parameters set by the constitution there was need for negotiations between each state and the churches. Indeed, the main fields of co-operation (and potential dissent) between state and church had been left to the state level, thereby expressing the federal structure of the Weimar Republic. The following negotiations between each state and the churches thus sometimes developed in different ways with slightly different results, depending on the state governments' position and the success of the respective church negotiators.

Whilst there had been a long-lasting tradition of concordats between state and Catholic Church, the Protestant Churches (under the rule of the respective head of state) had been subject to state control and state legislation. When the Protestant Churches had set up constitutions and adjusted their administrative structure,<sup>12</sup> talks between Church and state began in order to settle the remaining questions; these concentrated on the education of, and payment for the clergy, religious education in schools, and the theological faculties. The government's aim was predominantly to prepare the ground for fruitful co-operation with both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, based on parity (even in the states that were traditionally dominated by one denomination, such as predominantly Catholic Bavaria).

However, some of the eastern German state governments were sometimes less co-operative. The struggle over details, such as the amount of the state contributions, prolonged the conclusion of negotiations. In Thuringia, it took until 1929,<sup>13</sup> in Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Schwerin until 1930,<sup>14</sup> and the Prussian church treaty (between the state and eight *Landeskirchen*), was only concluded in May 1931.<sup>15</sup>

The Catholic Church had, in the early years of the Weimar Republic, carried out negotiations with the government with the aim of the conclusion of a Concordat. Nevertheless, agreement could not be reached on issues like the appointment of army priests, and due to the mounting problems the German government had to face in the years 1922-1923 (reparations, inflation,

<sup>11</sup> Huber IV, no. 291, pp. 652-659.

<sup>12</sup> See Huber IV, pp. 535-670.

<sup>13</sup> The documents are given in Huber IV, nos. 301 and 302, pp. 692-696.

<sup>14</sup> The documents are given in Huber IV, nos. 303 and 304, pp. 697-700, and no. 307, pp. 704.

<sup>15</sup> See Huber IV for the treaty itself (no. 309, pp. 709-711) and further documents (nos. 310-313, pp. 711-722).

increasing domestic tensions), negotiations were never concluded.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the Vatican pursued the aim of Concordats with several states with a large Catholic population, which matched the needs of the traditionally federal structure of German Catholicism<sup>17</sup> just as well, if not better. In southern Germany, this led to Concordats with Bavaria (March 1924)<sup>18</sup> and Baden (October 1932)<sup>19</sup>. In eastern Germany, a Concordat was concluded with Prussia in June 1929.<sup>20</sup> The Prussian government had insisted on leaving the issue of the confessional schools aside (as opposed to the Catholic dominated and church-friendly Bavarian government five years earlier); however, it agreed to re-confirm the status quo of the constitution. The Concordat also re-arranged the diocese boundaries in Prussia, paying tribute to the territorial changes since the early nineteenth century:<sup>21</sup> The church province of Cologne was considerably enlarged by the dioceses of Aachen, Limburg and Osnabrück; Paderborn (formerly under the Metropolitan of Cologne) was raised to an arch-bishopric (with Hildesheim and Fulda as suffragan dioceses), as was Breslau with the bishoprics Ermland and the newly created diocese Berlin as part of its church province. The *Praelatura nullius* Schneidemühl was created, consisting of the German parts of the arch diocese of Posen-Gnesen and the diocese of Kulm, which were now in Poland, and also put under the Metropolitan of Breslau. As a result of these re-arrangements the Vatican considerably strengthened the position of the Archbishop of Cologne (traditionally the advocate of the Catholic Rhineland since it came under Prussian rule in 1815), and established a very influential see in Breslau (not Berlin), presumably deliberately after the capricious experiences with the Prussian government in the preceding before (including the *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s and 1880s).

The SPD-led Saxonian government pursued a more state law-based approach; it was aiming for two parallel treaties with the churches (the Lutheran Church of Saxony and the diocese of Meißen), only settling the issue of state funding. The treaties were accompanied by a law regulating the remaining areas of co-operation. This procedure did not only, on the Catholic side, leave the Vatican out of the negotiations (the Bishop of Meißen would probably have

<sup>16</sup> See Huber IV, pp. 179-181.

<sup>17</sup> The diocesan bishops had always been the religious (and, if necessary, also political) leaders of the church itself, and political Catholicism was represented by the federal Centre Party, which was founded on the network of Catholic clubs and organisations.

<sup>18</sup> See Huber IV, no. 174, pp. 299-305.

<sup>19</sup> See Huber IV, no. 193, pp. 354-358.

<sup>20</sup> See Huber IV, no. 183, pp. 322-328.

<sup>21</sup> After the Napoleonic Wars and the secularisation of church property in Germany in 1804, a fundamental re-organisation of the German dioceses was required, and was carried out by means of the bulls *De salute animarum* (1821) for Prussia and *Impensa Romanorum Pontificum* (1824) for the Kingdom of Hanover (annexed by Prussia in 1866).

taken a very practical approach to the many day-to-day problems, although he surely was in close contact with the Vatican nuncio during the negotiations), but also stressed the state's claim to have the prerogative in state/church relations and gave it an advantage in settling many details. However, the attempt to ratify the result of the prolonged negotiations failed, when in 1929 the German Constitutional Court declared the 1926 elections for the Saxonian parliament invalid. After the next elections, only minority governments could be formed, and the opposition majority of NSDAP and the radical left opposed the treaties, agreement never being reached.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The churches and the Third Reich

#### a. 1933: *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and *Reichskonkordat*

The year 1933 saw a change in the German government which was later revealed as a fundamental shift. For now the national socialistic idea of 'national rebirth' was the driving force even in the field of cultural and religious affairs. The national maelstrom reached its peak, within less than a year wiping out the federal structure of the Weimar society, and building a new society, characterised by all-German mass organisations. These were soon brought into line and organised according to the Nazi *Führerprinzip*.

This had a dual effect as far as the churches were concerned. Firstly, their own federal structure came under mounting pressure. Many of the Presbyterian Protestant communities fell to the intra-church Nazi movement *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians) as did the unions and other organisations of professional representation (teachers' and employers' associations, student and sports clubs). Pressure on Catholic organisations also increased. Secondly, the churches now dealt with a government that was aiming for centralisation in order to exercise stronger control over them. It was within this context that the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* was founded and the *Reichskonkordat* between the Catholic Church and the German government was concluded.

<sup>22</sup> The draft for the treaty between the state of Saxony and the diocese of Meißen is given in Huber IV, no. 189, pp. 346-348.

## b. The founding of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* and the Protestant Churches

The Protestant Churches had, throughout the Weimar Republic generally refrained from public political statements. They continued this publicly impartial position towards the national-socialist movement. However, in 1932, the German Christians emerged and in the same year succeeded in a number of church elections. The German Christians pressed for an united national Protestant Church (*Reichskirche*). After Hitler had been appointed Chancellor, most of the *Landeskirchen* followed the maelstrom of the "national rebirth" and adopted the *Führerprinzip* by vesting the bishop with strong executive powers.<sup>23</sup> The national church now seemed to be the unanimous aim of German Protestantism.<sup>24</sup> With strong support from Hitler, the German Christians even managed to dominate the unification process, carrying through their candidate as *Reichsbischof*, the pastor Ludwig Müller, a representative of Hitler.

By the end of 1933, however, the „Pastors' Emergency League“ was founded, and by January 1934, nearly half of the Protestant clergy had joined. The famous Barmen Declaration, set up by a synod in May 1934 started from a distinctive doctrinal basis, and (put together under the strong influence of the Swiss reformed theologian Barth) was even supported by the conservative Dibelius (up to then opposed to Barth's theology) and some southern German Protestants. However, those *Landeskirchen* that had remained comparatively free from German Christian influence were even more determined to run their own affairs, and the Confessing Church was despite its numbers never unanimous enough to be a substantial factor.<sup>25</sup>

## c. The *Reichskonkordat* and the Catholic Church

After the failed Putsch in 1923, Hitler and the national-socialist movement, for some years, were not considered a potent political threat. In the 1928 (20 May) general elections the NSDAP won only 2.6 % of the votes and 12 parliamentary seats. Nevertheless, the worsening economic situation and the increasing social tensions of 1929 and 1930 resulted in an unexpected success of the NSDAP in the general elections on 14 September 1930. They gained 18.3 % and 107 seats, now becoming the second largest parliamentary party behind the SPD. In February 1931, the Freising Committee of Bishops (consisting of the Bavarian bishops)

<sup>23</sup> See Huber IV, nos. 387-399, pp. 836-842.

<sup>24</sup> For the constitution of the German Evangelical Church (11 July 1933) see Huber IV, no. 412, pp. 861-865.

<sup>25</sup> See Ward, W. R.: *Guilt and Innocence: The German Churches in the Twentieth Century*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (June 1996), pp. 398-426, p. 408.

issued a statement applying the same condemnations to national-socialism as it had done to Communism and Socialism in the early 1920s. The bishops of the church provinces of Paderborn, Cologne and Freiburg followed this step in March. It was stressed that the racial ideas of national-socialism (with the Germanic *aryans* as the superior race) were incongruent with the teaching of the Church. Nevertheless, the rise of the NSDAP continued and reached a new high in July 1932, when 37.4 % of the electorate voted for Hitler's party in the general elections. With 230 parliamentary seats the NSDAP was now by far the strongest party (the SPD coming second with 133 seats). The German bishops (i.e. the Fulda Committee of Bishops, consisting of the German bishops outside Bavaria) now publicly renewed their fundamental condemnation of national-socialism in a warning statement on 17 August 1932.<sup>26</sup> Although the strict regulations concerning Catholic national-socialists were hardly carried out, the Catholics seem to have widely stayed away from voting for Hitler. The Centre Party gained seats between 1928 and summer 1932, and generally maintained this strength even after the ban on the national-socialist para-military corps SA (*Sturmabteilung*) and SS (*Sicherheitsstaffel*) had been lifted in June 1932 (with intimidating effect on the election campaigns of 6 November 1932 and 5 March 1933).<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the other bourgeois parties lost ground with the two liberal parties, DDP and DVP, nearly vanishing in 1932.

The conclusion of the *Reichskonkordat* on 20 July 1933 is one of the most debated events in modern Catholic church history. The motives on the Church's side can only be summed up briefly at this point:<sup>28</sup> Apart from the upheaval of 'national rebirth', which to an extent also infected the Catholics, national-socialism had at this point not yet fully revealed its totalitarian aims. As previously stated, the bishops had publicly attacked the national-socialist-ideology before 1933, and even in the period after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor most of the bishops were hardly impressed by his friendly approaches. However, Hitler had legally come into office, and the bishops felt that a certain loyalty towards the head of state was appropriate. Furthermore, Hitler's conditions (which he, of course, never intended to keep) seemed to be better than anything, a democratic government had ever offered during the previous

<sup>26</sup> See Morsey, Rudolf: *Die katholische Volksminderheit und der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus 1930-1933*, in: Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980, pp. 9-24, p. 11-15.

<sup>27</sup> May 1928: 62 seats, September 1930: 68, July 1932: 75, November 1932: 70, March 1933: 73. See also the maps attached to the back cover of Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980. They show that the greater the proportion of Catholics in a constituency was, the less successful was the NSDAP (the results of the elections in July 1932 and March 1933 are given). See also von Fiehl, Ulrich: *Das Kirchenvolk im Dritten Reich*, in: Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980, pp. 93-119, especially pp. 93-96.

<sup>28</sup> For details see Volk, Ludwig: *Nationalsozialistischer Kirchenkampf und deutscher Episkopat*, in: Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980, pp. 49-92.



decade. This led to a momentary change in the bishops' policy in 1933 and made way for the quick conclusion of the Concordat. In any case, the *Reichskonkordat* was seen by the Church as a means to fortify their own position, and indeed it did for most of the Third Reich.<sup>29</sup> The Catholic Church indeed remained the only institution that was not forced into line.<sup>30</sup>

Some historians have claimed that the Concordat had on the contrary weakened the bishops' position by preventing them from publicly speaking out against the regime. The oath of loyalty which every bishop had to take to the German state and the German people is said to have tied them to the regime.<sup>31</sup>

Hürten<sup>32</sup> shows that this form of oath<sup>33</sup> was much weaker than that which the bishops had been made to swear: Not only was particular obedience to the common laws not mentioned; reference to the current leaders of the country was also omitted.<sup>34</sup> To the bishops (amongst those, who swore this oath in 1933 and 1934 are von Galen and von Preysing, who later on were the most outspoken opponents of the regime) this formula meant nothing more than what they considered to be their duty anyway.<sup>35</sup> However, the Concordat did achieve the de-politicisation of German Catholicism, especially with respect to the Catholic organisations (although the connection between Concordat and the self-dissolution of the Centre Party is still heavily debated). However the continuing violation of the Concordat by the state authorities left enough room for the German episcopate to speak out against the regime, by referring to the agreements of the Concordat.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, the bishops were often impressively supported by the faithful.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For details see also Lill, Rudolf: *NS-Ideologie und katholische Kirche*, in: Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980, pp. 135-150, on the *Reichskonkordat* especially p. 143f.

<sup>30</sup> See Albrecht, Dieter: *Der Hl. Stuhl und das Dritte Reich*, in: Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980, pp. 25-48, see pp. 27-30.

<sup>31</sup> This view is expressed particularly by Klaus Scholder in his various works: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich, Vol. 1: Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918-1934*. Frankfurt/m. 1977, p. 652. Aretin, Karl Otmär von / Besier, Gerhard (Eds.): *Die Kirchen zwischen Republik und Gewaltherrschaft. Gesammelte Aufsätze von Klaus Scholder*. Berlin 1988, p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Hürten, Heinz: *Der katholische Episkopat nach dem Reichskonkordat*, in: Heydemann, Günther / Kettenacker, Lothar (Eds.): *Kirchen in der Diktatur. Drittes Reich und SED-Staat*. Göttingen 1993, pp. 109-125.

<sup>33</sup> The core part of the oath is quoted in Hürten, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Hürten, p. 112f.

<sup>35</sup> Hürten, pp. 113-115.

<sup>36</sup> Hürten, pp. 116-118.

<sup>37</sup> See von Hehl, *Kirchenvolk*, pp. 100-104, and Hürten pp. 120f.

#### d. The churches in the Third Reich

Under the Nazi regime the churches faced various attempts to force them into line. The Presbyterian structured Protestant communities were more vulnerable than the hierarchical Catholic Church. Resistance from parts of the churches (clergy as well as laymen) led to the persecution of a large number of lower clergy<sup>38</sup> and the parishioners. Among the higher church leaders in both churches, the attitudes towards the regime were not unanimous, even when, in 1937, the Pope denounced the continuing violations of the Concordat in an encyclical. This public attack on the regime caused intensified church struggle. However, the Nazis postponed the definitive solution of the 'church problem' until after the war, and there can be little doubt that unlimited persecution of clergy and faithful would have led to many more victims. The model of a future state as displayed by the violent Nazi church policy in Poland and in the *Warthegau*<sup>39</sup> gives credence for the worst assumptions. It was only military defeat that prevented the Nazis from carrying this policy out.

Totalitarian regimes ruled most of Europe by the mid-1930s, but the racial policy of the Nazis (including first the sterilisation, later the killing of the mentally handicapped) made the Third Reich particularly unpalatable to many Christians. It is significant that the first public row between a Catholic bishop<sup>40</sup> occurred on this matter in August 1941.

A lot of structural damage was inflicted upon the church hierarchies by the seizure of property and through persecution (many clergy and laymen died in prisons and concentration camps or were executed). Parts of both churches were corrupted and divisions were deep (especially in the Protestant communities) when the Nazi regime collapsed at the end of the war. Nevertheless, segments of the churches (chiefly faithful driven by their faith and their ethical views, but also members of the lower clergy) had also been essential components of resistance groups.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> On the Catholic Church see von Hehl, Ulrich (Comp.): *Priester unter Hitlers Terror. Eine biographische und statistische Erhebung*. Mainz 1984.

<sup>39</sup> The former Polish territories incorporated into the Reich in autumn 1939.

<sup>40</sup> Count Clemens August von Galen, Bishop of Münster who with this step left the policy of private interventions that had been pursued by German bishops.

<sup>41</sup> See Scholder, Andreas: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich. Vol. I: Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918-1934*. Frankfurt M. 1977. *Vol. II: Das Jahr der Ernüchterung 1934, Barmen und Rom*. Berlin 1985, on the Catholic Church especially the essays in Gotto, Klaus / Repgen, Konrad (Eds.): *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*. Mainz 1980.

#### 4. Summary

As we have seen, as the German government changed in 1918, this changed the environment the churches found themselves in. However, they adjusted quickly, benefiting from the new state's ideological neutrality. The governments of the Weimar Republic were willing to let the churches participate in society and left room for them to restructure themselves.

After 1933, the exact opposite was the case; the Nazis strove to force the churches into line as they did with the other socially relevant groups. Thus, the churches were under constant pressure, defending themselves against attack. Whilst the Protestant churches, as a result of their Presbyterian constitution, fell partly under Nazi influence, the hierarchic Catholic Church remained mostly monolithic. The resistant parts of both churches consolidated under the pressure, with many Christians becoming involved in various forms of resistance against the regime. The legacy of the Third Reich, however, especially the experience of a ruthless and in terms of its policies (racism) immoral totalitarian regime, would pursue the churches for some more time.

## II. The wider Picture: Christianity in Eastern Europe after 1945

Before we examine the churches in East Germany, a look shall be taken at the churches in other eastern European countries. The aim is to establish a pattern of church policy that holds true for the Communist regimes across Europe. This will provide the background for comparison with the situation in the GDR.

In huge parts of East Europe, the predominant Christian denomination is Orthodox, a denomination effectively not present in Germany. Therefore, the Orthodox Church will only be mentioned as far as either the relationship to the Protestant and Catholic Churches (this includes the Uniates, too), or the governments' general church policy is concerned. In some of the Balkan countries, as a legacy of the Ottoman Empire, Islam is the dominating religion.

### 1. Christianity in East and West after the war

#### a. The revival of Christianity

The aftermath of the Second World War was marked by a revival of Christianity. People all around the world felt the need for ethics in society and a certain amount of moral responsibility in politics: "First the iniquity of the Nazis and [then] the irreligion of the Soviet system, which threatened the West, helped to generate religious strength in Europe and America."<sup>42</sup> This revival would not last very long though, but at that point, Christianity seemed a weapon against totalitarianism. It was seen as the motivation for resistance in Germany; it was even proclaimed the key to the Allied victory by General MacArthur. President Truman added that Christianity and democracy were based on the same principles. Protestant pastor Martin Niemöller, who had survived eight years of Nazi concentration camp, claimed, the "world saw the Protestant Churches of Germany ... to be the only hope for the future of Germany."<sup>43</sup> Nowhere in the West, not even in the surviving dictatorships in Portugal and Spain, was Christianity questioned as the basis of society.

<sup>42</sup> Chadwick, Owen: *The Christian Church in the Cold War*. London 1992, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Chadwick, p. 3.

In eastern Europe, however, officially atheistic governments were in power. Chadwick rightly says: "Never before in its long history had Europe been divided in quite this political way over religion."<sup>44</sup>

#### b. The West and Communism after 1949

In Western Europe, there was much sympathy for Communism in the first years after the war. The Soviet Union had helped to win the war, and thereby saved Europe from Nazi tyranny. Communism was seen as an alternative to American capitalism which was believed to be an unjust system of wealth distribution. People had not forgotten the Depression of the 1930s, and capitalism was blamed for the suffering. Thus, all over Europe there was a shift to the left. In Great Britain the Labour Party was elected, in Italy, the Communists nearly won the first post-war elections (free elections as opposed to those carried out in eastern Europe). In Germany, the 1947 Ahlen programme of the 'conservative' *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU) favoured collectivisation of key industries.

Even parts of the Catholic clergy were attracted by the Communist ideals of a 'better society'. For instance the case of members of the order of the Dominicans in France, predominantly with a background as so-called 'worker priests', and close to the Communist-dominated unions, clashed with Church officials and were eventually forced to quit their secular jobs in factories by Pope Pius XII in 1953. Three provincial heads were dismissed. In the late 1960s it was again French clergy (spreading from the theology faculties) who joined in with student and worker groups that publicly admired Mao and Fidel Castro and demanded a 'class struggle' against the 'capitalists' in power. However, they were widely ignored by the higher clergy and the Vatican.

## 2. The church policy in Eastern Europe in the Stalin era

#### a. The state's attempts to gain control over the churches

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<sup>44</sup> Chadwick, p. 4.

Despite a time of uncertainty directly after the war, when the Communists had “still an interest in demonstrating a relatively tolerant religious policy”,<sup>45</sup> clashes between state and churches soon manifested themselves. From the late 1940s onwards, the Communist governments developed various means to control the churches.

### 1) Church ministries

There was a church ministry in each of the Communist states. This was not always a new development, as in Russia, there had been one under the tsars. In Germany, the Prussian government had institutionalised the state/church co-operation in this way, and even Hitler kept this ministry. Whilst these church ministries had been means to organise co-operation between state and churches, the newly founded offices had the single goal of controlling the churches and restricting their activities as far as possible.<sup>46</sup>

### 2) The election of bishops

The elections of bishops worked relatively well in the predominantly Orthodox countries where the church was used to state approval. As to the Protestant Churches, in Estonia and Latvia, there were frequent clashes, whereas the East German government respected the Protestant constitution and did not interfere with Catholic appointments either. However, it was obvious that the churches would face considerably more difficulties if the electors decided in favour of an anti-Communist bishop.

The election of Roman Catholic bishops was sometimes regulated in Concordats (for instance in Poland, 1925, and in Germany, 1933). However, the Communist governments denied the Concordats' validity and demanded the right of veto in the appointment of Catholic bishops. This led to continuous clashes, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In Hungary, by 1970 there were only two bishops left; being the only survivors since 1940 when there had been twelve Hungarian bishops. In Czechoslovakia, at times there was no bishop in office at all, and the dioceses were usually rather poorly run by clerical administrators who had been approved by the government. In Poland, Croatia and Slovenia the system worked compara-

<sup>45</sup> Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 262, see also below.

<sup>46</sup> The GDR ministry for church affairs, in the early years staffed with church-friendly CDU members, remained an exception for several years. See below.

tively well for the Catholic Church, especially since the 1960s when various compromises had been worked out.<sup>47</sup>

As a principle, the Communist governments tried to cut the ties between the national churches and their international umbrella organisations (the Pope in Rome, the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople and the Protestant World Council of Churches). On the other hand, the Vatican soon realised that it alone could not achieve political change and focused on pastoral care. The Catholic Church was even prepared to set up an underground structure, if necessary, although these attempts were not very successful.<sup>48</sup>

There was a general need for bishops to be friendlier to the state than their priests or pastors. Later on, this would sometimes result in a rift between the two. It was usually easier for Orthodox and Protestant Churches to co-operate with the state. The Pope's public statements on Communism as well as the ethical views of the Catholic Church on divorce and abortion made it more difficult for the Catholic faithful to establish dialogue with the state. In Poland and Czechoslovakia the Catholic Church also became involved in the struggle over collectivisation on the side of the peasants.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the Orthodox Church was used to co-operating with unpredictable regimes, whilst the Protestant Churches had traditionally been subject to state control, and had amongst them a school of Christian Marxism which in some cases established dialogue with Marxist intellectuals. The governments' attempts to found Christian associations that were willing to co-operate with them were, however, in the long run hardly successful.<sup>50</sup>

### 3) Christian-Marxist dialogue

In some countries the momentary promising attempts to establish a Christian Marxist dialogue failed. In Poland for instance, Count Boleslaw Piasecki tried to reconcile Christianity and Communism, a system he considered best for just shares in a country's wealth. He chaired a movement called *Pax*, but the influence of this group remained restricted, and the government still had to deal with the official Catholic Church. In 1955, a book by Piasecki was placed on

<sup>47</sup> See Chadwick, p. 34f.

<sup>48</sup> See Stehle, Hansjakob: *The Eastern politics of the Vatican, 1917-1979*. Athens, Ohio / London 1981, p. 253 and Stehle, Hansjakob: *Papal Diplomacy and the Vatican apparatus*, in Ramet, Pedro (Ed.). *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*. Durham / London 1990, pp. 314-355, see p. 348.

<sup>49</sup> See Lewis, Paul G.: *Potential Sources of Opposition in the East European Peasantry*, in: Tökes, Rudolf L. (ed.): *Opposition in Eastern Europe*. London: Macmillan 1979, pp. 263-291, p. 268f.

<sup>50</sup> See Chadwick, p. 36f.

the Index of forbidden books by the Vatican, expressing the Church's disapproval.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, imprisonment of bishops and excommunication of collaborating priests made a dialogue more and more *difficult*; and when co-operating priests were finally elected bishops, it was merely because the capitals had given in to the state pressure.

#### 4) Rites

When the governments realised that the people were reluctant to give up their traditional Christian celebrations (especially on the occasion of baptism, confirmation, wedding and funeral), the Communist rulers invented secular rites intended to replace the Christian celebrations, with varying success. Most successful was the East German *Jugendweihe* (Youth-Consecration), for a while even carried out with co-operation from the Protestant Church.

#### b. Violence

Apart from the Uniate Churches (see below) the Communist regimes usually refrained from open violence against the Churches (with the exception of Albania). Still, many priests and bishops were arrested for obscure reasons and received long sentences. A typical Stalinist method to damage the Church leaders' reputation amongst their faithful, as well as in the West, was the show trial. The governments across eastern Europe made regular use of them.

#### c. Orders

Whilst in the predominantly Orthodox countries orders were allowed (albeit under some pressure), in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, for example, houses were dissolved, members of the orders driven out, and the recruitment of new members prevented. As a result, there were no monks left in Czechoslovakia in 1975 (although some 8,000 nuns remained working in hospices and hospitals). In the 1980s, the Hungarian government allowed the Catholic Church to found a new order of nuns to make up for the losses in charity institutions. In Poland, the orders were increasingly driven out of the educational system, but the Catholic Church had deep roots within the people and there was still a fair number of monks and nuns. In contrast, the East German government enforced no legal restrictions on the orders.

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<sup>51</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 292.



### 3. The Protestant Churches in the Stalin era

The Protestant Churches have traditionally not been very strong in eastern Europe. Although the Catholic Habsburg dynasty had been opposed to Protestantism under its dominion, the former areas of the Habsburg Empire (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Romanian region of Transcarpathia), are the only eastern European countries where significant communities of Protestants can be found at all. This also holds true for the western parts of Poland, where German and Austrian influence was present. Indeed the GDR was the only East European country where the Protestant Church is the majority church.

The fate of the Protestant Churches across eastern Europe was mainly determined by their membership numbers. The situation in these countries was usually very diverse due to the ethnic shifts over the past two centuries, and ethnic aspects have constantly interfered with religious policies. In Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, there is hardly any Protestantism,<sup>52</sup> and in Russia, the small and diverse Protestant Communities in the Soviet Union were easily destroyed even before the war.<sup>53</sup> In 1944, Stalin allowed the founding of the 'All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists' (AUCECB), probably in order to gain better control over what had remained (which he and his successors indeed achieved) and to utilise it for the war efforts.<sup>54</sup>

In Poland, Protestantism had been oppressed for centuries. In the Habsburg and Russian parts of the country, Catholicism and Orthodoxy were the denominations favoured by the rulers. It was only in the Prussian part of Poland before 1918 that Protestantism was allowed to grow, and the Polish Protestants, especially the Lutherans, were usually ethnic Germans. Thus, Protestantism was seen as a predominantly German denomination.<sup>55</sup> As a result of the expulsions

<sup>52</sup> See Mojzes, Paul / Shenk, N. Gerald: Protestantism in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia Since 1945, in: Ramet, Sabrina Petra (Ed.): *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia. The Communist and Postcommunist Eras*. Durham / London: Duke University Press 1992, pp. 209-236, especially p. 210 and pp. 219-221.

<sup>53</sup> See Sawatsky, Walter: Protestantism in the USSR, in: Ramet, Sabrina Petra (Ed.): *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia. The Communist and Postcommunist Eras*. Durham / London: Duke University Press 1992, pp. 237-275, especially pp. 240-243. According to the data, Sawatsky gives on p. 274f., in 1990 the Protestant denominations in the USSR altogether summed up to less than one million, the 'Union of Evangelical-Christian Baptists' (itself, since 1944, a merger of several communities and the in 1990 re-named "AUCECB") being the largest group with just over 200,000 members.

<sup>54</sup> Cf Révész, László: *Staat und Kirche im 'realen Sozialismus'. Recht und Wirklichkeit*. Bern / München 1986, pp. 38f.

<sup>55</sup> See Bock, Paul: Protestantism in Czechoslovakia and Poland, in: Ramet, Petra Sabrina (Ed.): *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Durham / London 1992, pp. 73-106, p. 76

after the Second World War, the Lutheran community lost nearly all its German members.<sup>56</sup> In public statements, the Protestant Church's general attitude towards Socialism was rather friendly. When the Solidarity movement emerged, the Protestants supported it, but withdrew when they realised the union's strong affiliation with the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup>

In Hungary, but also in Czechoslovakia and Romania, Protestant communities were fairly large.<sup>58</sup> In Romania, however, Protestants were chiefly Hungarian and as ethnic minorities more likely to be subject to additional discrimination.<sup>59</sup> In Czechoslovakia, Marxism and Protestantism seemingly found a common base for co-operation. Josef Hromádka, who, under the influence of German liberal Protestantism, taught systematic theology at Prague University for fifty years, founded and chaired the so-called Christian Peace Conference.<sup>60</sup> However, the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968 destroyed his vision of the Christian good in Communism and co-operation came to a sudden end. Soon afterwards, Hromádka died.

A closer look shall briefly be taken at the Hungarian Reformed Church, being the largest Protestant community behind the Iron Curtain (apart from the GDR). The Calvinist Reformed Church had been the dominant community in Hungary after the Reformation, but was attacked by the Habsburg counter-reformation until the agreement of 1867.<sup>61</sup> As a result of the First World War, the two Protestant Communities (Calvinists and Lutherans) lost nearly two thirds of their members who now lived outside the Hungarian borders in Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.<sup>62</sup> Under Communist rule, the Protestant Churches in Hungary were the first targets of the crusade against religion. Under strong pressure, they signed 'agreements' with the regime that made them subject to state control.<sup>63</sup> They were regarded as "relatively good ... under the circumstances. The problem was that some ... basic provisions were disregarded by

<sup>56</sup> The figure dropped to 270,000 in 1946 and 120,000 in 1963. Many of the remaining ethnic Germans left Poland as a result of the treaties with West Germany in the early 1970. Less than 80,000 Lutherans (in 1976) were left behind, see Bock, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> See Bock, p. 80-94.

<sup>58</sup> See the following fact sheets: Pungur, Joseph: *Protestantism in Hungary: The Communist Era*, in: Ramet, Sabrina Petra (Ed.): *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Durham / London 1992, pp. 107-156, pp. 153-156, Bock, p. 105f and Pope, Earl A.: *Protestantism in Romania*, in: Ramet, Sabrina Petra (Ed.): *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Durham / London 1992, pp. 157-208, p. 207f. Hungary: 1.9 million Reformed Protestants, 430,000 Lutherans; Czechoslovakia: 1.2 million Protestants in four churches, the Czech Hussites with 500,000 members as the largest; Romania: 900,000 Reformed Protestants and several smaller communities.

<sup>59</sup> See Pope, pp. 166-174.

<sup>60</sup> According to Chadwick, "the only Christian body behind the Iron Curtain to exercise influence in the West", p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> See Pungur, p. 107f.

<sup>62</sup> See Pungur, p. 111.

<sup>63</sup> See Pungur, pp. 113f., 116-119 and Mojzes, Paul: *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Before and after the Great Transformation*, Boulder / New York 1992, pp. 235-239, 243-245. The Lutherans proved more resistant than the Reformed Protestants. Two church leaders had to be arrested before they agreed to co-operated, see Pungur, p. 123f.

state authorities.”<sup>64</sup> The Reformed Church was forced into a close alliance with the regime. Pungur judges, it “behaved as if it wanted to be a party auxiliary and state collaborator.”<sup>65</sup> In 1956, divisions within the Reformed Church surfaced. A group set up a declaration called the ‘Confessing Church of Hungary’ (analogous to the Confessing Church of Germany’s Barmen Declaration in 1934), from a theological point of view criticising the regime and the Reformed Church leader’s obedience. This group was about to take control of the Reformed Church of Hungary, but its activities were halted after the collapse of the uprising and the old leaders were re-instated.<sup>66</sup> For the next two decades, the Reformed Church remained in “unconditional support of the state”,<sup>67</sup> declaring a theology that strictly limited itself to pastoral care.

#### 4. The Catholic Church in the Stalin era

The relationship between any state and the Catholic Church has always been determined not only by the local Church’s actions, but to a great extent by negotiations at the highest level: between the Vatican and the respective government. Therefore, the Vatican’s policies towards the Communist regimes shall be examined at length later.

The Communist regimes’ religious policy towards the Catholic Church chiefly followed political necessity, as in the case with the Protestants. This usually meant attempts to force them into line or destroy them if possible. Destruction was the fate of the small Catholic Church in the pre-war Soviet Union. After the war, the expanded Soviet Union suddenly incorporated some additional 14 million Catholics (6.5 million Roman Catholics in the Western Ukraine, 2.5 million in Lithuania, 500,000 in Latvia, 4 - 4.5 million Uniates in the Ukraine and Transcarpathia and 20,000 - 30,000 Uniates in Byelorussia). In the Baltic states, the church hierarchy was immediately destroyed. From the 1960s, the Vatican with the approval of the Soviet government appointed some apostolic administrators, but very often even they were removed after a short time in office.<sup>68</sup> In Latvia, the Catholic Church survived the (especially ideological) pressure from the Communists better than other denominations. Once outnumbered by the

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<sup>64</sup> Pungur, p. 119.

<sup>65</sup> Pungur, p. 123.

<sup>66</sup> See Pungur, p. 128-130.

<sup>67</sup> Pungur, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> See Chadwick, p. 106f.

Protestants, by 1986 it was the largest religious community with 500,000 members (out of 2.5 million inhabitants).

In Albania and Yugoslavia, religion divided the country, which fostered anti-religious policy. In Yugoslavia, the oppression of the (mainly Croatian) Catholics was justified by their alleged links to the Italian fascists. The first (on 16 October 1946) and one of the most famous show trials of the Communist regimes against a church leader in eastern Europe was that of the Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac (1895-1960).<sup>69</sup> In December 1952, Tito finally broke relations with the Vatican by ordering the nuncio to leave the country.<sup>70</sup>

The Catholics in Romania who celebrated in the Latin rite were almost without exception Hungarians in Transylvania and subject to ethnic discrimination. After the war, there were some 1.2 million of them.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, a strong opposition from the Orthodox Church towards any dialogue between the regime and the Catholic Church, as well as the problem of the suppressed Uniates, made progress nearly impossible.<sup>72</sup>

The church policy of the Czechoslovakian regime has been exhaustively summed up in an article by Ramet.<sup>73</sup> The government effectively enforced state control in its efforts to restrict the Catholic Church. It issued licences for priests to read Mass, controlled the current administration of the dioceses, and had influence over the education of priests to an extent that the two seminaries were, "in effect state-run institutions".<sup>74</sup> Candidates for the seminaries were refused by the state authorities, effectively reducing the number of priests. The government also had to approve hierarchical appointments (a prerogative dating back to the time of the Habsburg dynasty). It tried to ensure appointments of priests who were members of the association *Pacem In Terris*, a strictly pro-government organisation that (as a result) only consisted of hardly more than 5 percent of the countries clergy. The strategy of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime was quite similar to that of other East European governments. Hardly anywhere else were the measures carried out so thoroughly (the short rule of the Dubcek government had no lasting effect), with the effect that, by the early 1980s, the position of the Czechoslovakian Catholic Church was weaker than that of any other Catholic Church in eastern Europe (with the exception of Albania).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> See Chadwick, p. 62-66.

<sup>70</sup> See Stehle, Eastern politics, p. 260.

<sup>71</sup> Stehle, Eastern politics, p. 247.

<sup>72</sup> See Stehle, Papal Diplomacy, p. 352.

<sup>73</sup> Ramet, Sabrina P: *The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia 1948-1991*, in: *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 4/1991, pp. 377-394.

<sup>74</sup> Ramet, S., Czechoslovakia, p. 379.

<sup>75</sup> The Catholic Church still remained the only church that could rely on a broad base of support when the revolution eventually came. In 1993, 40% of the Czechs claimed membership of the Catholic Church; in contrast,

Two cases of state/Catholic Church relations in the post Stalin era shall be examined more closely: The unique partnership between Catholic Church and Communist regime in Poland; and the case of the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty as an example for open confrontation between state and Church.

"The position of the Catholic Church in Poland has no equivalent in any other East European country," states Rupnik.<sup>76</sup> This claim is well-founded: Even after the Polish state as such had vanished (in the late eighteenth century), the Polish Catholic Church was the dominant body in public life. It still represents more than 80% of the Polish population. Hence, it took the Communist government several years longer than in other countries to implement the usual measures. In 1953, all church appointments had to be approved by the authorities; in 1954-55, theological faculties were closed, religious education at elementary schools abolished, and the property of religious orders seized. However, the Catholic University of Lublin still existed (albeit dependent on church funding), being the only one in all eastern Europe after 1950. Furthermore, orders were not made illegal.<sup>77</sup>

In 1956 (under the influence of Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalin), the Polish government changed. Gomulka, a Communist but known for his rather anti-Russian views, became head of state. When, in 1956, Hungary was invaded by the Red Army, Gomulka feared a similar fate for Poland. Thus, he ordered the release of Cardinal Wyszyński of Warsaw, who had disappeared three years earlier (he had been under house arrest in a monastery). Gomulka wanted Wyszyński to help calm the people in order to prevent a Russian invasion. This was the beginning of an unique co-operation between the Catholic Church and a Communist government. In the Vatican, this agreement was not wholeheartedly appreciated, but the Pope also saw the opportunities emerging from this development.<sup>78</sup>

This *modus vivendi* lasted for the following twenty years until the mid-1970s, and was publicly defined by Cardinal Wyszyński in 1968 as: "the Episcopate takes a public stand only in the indispensable defence of religious life, Catholic education, Catholic culture, and the right

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the number of the other Christian denominations has dropped down to less than five percent altogether. In Slovakia, Christianity could maintain its position even better, and is still considered a "mass phenomenon". See Luxmoore, Jonathan: Eastern Europe 1994: a Review of Religious Life in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, in: *Religion, State and Society* 23, no. 2 / 1995, pp. 207-212, p. 218.

<sup>76</sup> Rupnik, Jacques: Dissent in Poland, 1968-78: the end of Revisionism and the rebirth of the Civil Society, in: Tökes, Rudolf L. (ed.): *Opposition in Eastern Europe*. London: Macmillan 1979, pp. 60-112, p. 86. Very helpful in understanding the unique position of the Catholic Church in Poland (especially in comparison to the other Eastern European countries) is Monticone, Ronald C.: *The Catholic Church in Poland. Forty Years of Church-State Relations*. New York: 1986, especially the *Introduction*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>77</sup> See Chadwick, p. 103.

<sup>78</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 298f.

of the Catholic institutions to develop to meet the demands of the believers.<sup>79</sup> The meaning of this (rather restrictive definition) became clear in crisis situations, such as those of 1968 and 1970. The Church protested against repression and police brutality while on the other hand using its authority to preserve domestic peace; at the same time, the Church demanded (and received) greater freedoms.<sup>80</sup>

In Hungary, the struggle between state and Catholic Church was predominantly the struggle between the state and the Primate of the Hungarian Catholics - Jozsef Mindszenty. Appointed Bishop of Esztergom and Primate of the Hungarian Church on 16 September 1945, Mindszenty was rather hot-tempered for a task that required a considerable amount of tactical and diplomatic skill, and his character precipitated tension.<sup>81</sup> From the early stage of the Communist regime, Mindszenty was not prepared to give in to the regime's mounting pressure. Consequently, he was arrested in December 1948 and, in 1949, sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>82</sup> In spite of negotiating and signing a far-reaching agreement with the state in 1950,<sup>83</sup> his successor as primate, Archbishop Jozsef Grösz was also prosecuted in 1951, and sentenced to 15 years in a hard labour camp (this sentence, however, was suspended after five years, and Grösz was again recognised as Hungarian Primate).<sup>84</sup>

The 1956 uprising developed out of a memorial service for a former Communist minister executed by the regime. Mindszenty simply left his cell, as public order momentarily collapsed. When the Russian tanks rolled in, Mindszenty fled to the American Embassy, refused to leave the country and therefore stayed in the embassy for fifteen years. Hindering Paul VI's attempts to improve relations to the Hungarian government (even after Mindszenty had eventually moved to Vienna) and hanging onto his post as bishop, Paul VI finally declared the see of Esztergom vacant (February 1974) and nominated an apostolic administrator.<sup>85</sup> Paul VI was strongly criticised by Hungarians and Catholics in the West for the way he treated Cardinal Mindszenty. On the other hand, "the high-handed act of Pope Paul VI in dismissing him helped the plight of the Catholics in Hungary. From the disappearance of Mindszenty, Rome and Budapest found talking a little easier."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Polish newspaper *Slowo Powszechne*, 11.01.1968, quoted in Rupnik, p. 87.

<sup>80</sup> For details see Rupnik, p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 257.

<sup>82</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 269.

<sup>83</sup> Some weeks earlier, the regime had sent 3,000 monks and nuns to concentration camps and thereby broken the Church's resistance. See Pungur, p. 125.

<sup>84</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 282f.

<sup>85</sup> See Chadwick, p. 71.

<sup>86</sup> Chadwick, p. 72.

## 5. The Uniates<sup>87</sup>

### a. Historical background

The Uniates are Roman Catholics who are allowed the use of many eastern rites (such as a married clergy), but share full communion with Rome. In 1596, at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Orthodox Christians in the Habsburg part of the Ukraine (i.e. the Metropolitan of Kiev) founded an union with Rome leaving the Orthodox Church, in the so-called Union of Brest. In 1646, an even closer union was formed between Rome and the Orthodox Christians in Transcarpathia.<sup>88</sup> From 1698 onwards, several Romanian Orthodox bishops followed into the union, also attracted by the privileges the Catholic Church in the Habsburg Empire enjoyed in spite of a general policy of religious impartiality.<sup>89</sup> The traditions of the Uniate Churches differ considerably throughout eastern Europe, for they were influenced by the amount of co-operation with the Orthodox or Catholic Churches (very often also by the need to define their own liturgy as "different" from the Orthodox or Catholics) as well as by pressure under different governments.<sup>90</sup> By the end of the Second World War, the Uniate communities in eastern Europe were located in the former Austro-Hungarian parts of the Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania (i. e. Transylvania), and Hungary. Small Uniate communities were also found in Yugoslavia (50,000) and Bulgaria (10,000 - 15,000).<sup>91</sup>

### b. The Uniates in the Ukraine

The Uniates suffered the most under the Stalinist regimes of eastern Europe. The newly established governments tried to cut the Uniates' links with the Vatican and forced them back

<sup>87</sup> They are also called Greek-Catholics, see Keleher, Serge: The Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, in: *Religion, State and Society* 23, no. 1/1995, pp. 97-108. I shall, however, in order to avoid further confusion, use the term "Uniates", as Chadwick, Stehle and others do. Besides, the Bulgarian Uniates refuse to be called "Greek-Catholic" for ethno-political reasons and refer to themselves as 'Orthodox-Catholics', see Keleher, Serge: Orthodox and Greek-Catholics in Eastern Poland, in: *Religion, State and Society* 23, no. 4/1995, pp. 365-372, p. 370, footnote 8.

<sup>88</sup> See Keleher, Romanian, p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> See Keleher, Romanian, p. 98.

<sup>90</sup> See Keleher, Eastern Poland, p. 365f.

<sup>91</sup> See Chadwick, p. 51f.

into the collaborating Orthodox Churches. Also, the Uniates' faith was often linked to national identity, which gave the Communist rulers another reason to oppress the Uniate communities. This was especially the case in the Ukraine, where the Uniate Church of the Ukraine was part of the national dissent from Russia. After a short period of hesitation (while the loyalty of the Ukrainians was still needed for the war efforts),<sup>92</sup> the Uniate Church was simply dissolved in March 1946, and the Uniate synod in Lvov was forced to unite with the Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan Slipyj had been arrested earlier, and remained imprisoned until 1963. All four of his bishops were killed, and an underground church emerged.<sup>93</sup> When Slipyj was finally released to Rome, it was on the condition that he remained silent. However, in 1971, when Pope Paul VI strengthened the Vatican's relations with the Brezhnev regime, Slipyj broke his silence and accused the Pope of sacrificing the Uniate Church; many Uniates felt the same.

Pope John Paul II, however, had a lot of sympathy for the Uniates in the Ukraine. He made the oppressed church a public issue again, and his support encouraged the faithful in the Ukraine (as well as non-religious human rights activists), whilst it damaged the relationship to the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow.<sup>94</sup> The Orthodox Church repeatedly declared that a restoration of the Uniates was not up for discussion.<sup>95</sup>

### c. The Uniates in eastern Europe

The Uniate community of some 300,000 faithful in Czechoslovakia also suffered badly. The Ruthenian (i. e. Ukrainian) minority in Czechoslovakia was mainly situated in the very east of Slovakia, just across the Soviet (Ukrainian) border. The Stalinists had an interest in destroying the Uniate Church in Czechoslovakia in order to reduce the diverging national forces within the country. Hence, the regime acted as recklessly in Czechoslovakia as the Soviets had done in the Ukraine. Under Dubcek, the Uniate Church was restored and received some of its confiscated property back, which had been given to the much smaller Orthodox Church (that only had some 35,000 members in the whole country after the war) 20 years before.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> See Solchanyk / Hvat, p. 55.

<sup>93</sup> For details see Solchanyk / Hvat, pp. 59-61.

<sup>94</sup> See Solchanyk / Hvat, pp. 75-85.

<sup>95</sup> See Solchanyk, pp. 88-90.

<sup>96</sup> See Chadwick, p. 55f.



The Uniates in Romania (with some 1.5 million members) faced the same fate as the Uniates nearly everywhere in eastern Europe. After the government had cancelled the Concordat of 1927, which had guaranteed their existence, they were, in 1948, forced into the Orthodox Church, which also took over all the churches and other properties from the Uniates.<sup>97</sup> The six Uniate bishops, since none of them would collaborate, died in prison or labour camps. Nevertheless, an "effective underground organization"<sup>98</sup> was set up which provided pastoral care, and Keleher claims that the Uniate Church even increased in number.<sup>99</sup>

Currently, the Uniate Church in Romania is being revived, but faces severe problems. The Orthodox Church, originally (in the enthusiasm of the revolution in 1989) having declared that all property seized in 1948 would be handed back, now refuses to keep this promise. The discrimination against the Uniates by the Romanian government continues, accompanied by a "smear campaign from both the government and the Romanian Orthodox Church"<sup>100</sup> The continuing tensions between Hungary and Romania increase the difficulties experienced by the Uniate Church in Romania.<sup>101</sup>

In Poland, the Uniates remained legal, but the more than 200,000 Uniates were Ukrainian and insisted on being non-Polish. After 1945, many Uniates were expelled from eastern Poland to settle down in the former German areas in the west of the country. Their churches were mostly used by Roman Catholics,<sup>102</sup> sometimes by the Orthodox, were converted into secular buildings, or just vanished. From 1947 onwards there was no Uniate bishop in Poland.<sup>103</sup>

The Uniate community in Hungary consisted of some 200,000 members. They were not made illegal, but were too small to have public influence.<sup>104</sup> There were only 50,000 Uniates in Yugoslavia and 10,000- 15,000 in Bulgaria. They, too, were never made illegal and were treated in a similar way to the Catholics.

<sup>97</sup> See Keleher, *Romanian*, p. 100.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, Janice: *The Catholic Church in Romania*, in: Ramet, Pedro (Ed.): *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*. Durham / London 1990, pp. 207-231, p. 229.

<sup>99</sup> See Keleher, *Romanian*, p. 100.

<sup>100</sup> Keleher, *Romanian*, p. 101. See pp. 101-103 for details.

<sup>101</sup> See Keleher, *Romanian*, p. 103f.

<sup>102</sup> The Polish Catholic Church had always put enormous pressure on the Uniates, in order to encourage them to convert to Roman Catholicism (in the 1920s as well as after the Second World War). For details on this very complex story of shifted borders and changed denominations between Poland, Russia and the Ukraine during the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Keleher, *Eastern Poland*, pp. 367-370.

<sup>103</sup> See Chadwick, p. 58f.

<sup>104</sup> See Mojzes, *Religious Liberty*, p. 236.

## 6. Summary

After the Second World War and the experience of the Nazi terror, people looked for the re-introduction of ethics into politics and society. Christianity seemed to be the answer to the atrocities, the world had seen during the previous decade. Socialism as a concept also gained support in the West and even among Catholic clergy. In any case, western style capitalism had become suspect in the eyes of many.

The Communist regimes, striving for domestic stability, started to push the churches out of public life as they were considered possible sources of dissent. From the late 1940s onwards, the regimes' hostility towards the churches increased across Europe. The regimes regularly violated the rights they had recently granted in the constitutions and acknowledged by signing the UN Charter. By the means of church ministries they tried to control the churches, interfering with the elections of bishops and as a result preventing most of them from taking place. Later, organisations were founded to utilise those Christians and clergy who were willing to commit themselves to Socialism (usually few), and in some cases substitute rites for traditional church celebrations were offered. Apart from countries with an Orthodox or Catholic majority (such as Poland), orders were also suppressed, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It has to be stressed that the GDR remained an exception concerning the little pressure over church appointments and orders.

The Protestant Churches have traditionally been very small in eastern Europe. Therefore, it was very easy for some Communist regimes to destroy the Protestant communities nearly altogether. In Poland and Romania, the Protestants' standing was additionally affected by the fact that the Protestants were ethnic minorities (Germans and Hungarians respectively). Significant Protestant Churches were found in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In Czechoslovakia, momentarily promising attempts for dialogue (pursued by the theology professor Hromádka) came to a sudden end with the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968. In Hungary, resistance was soon broken, and the Protestant Churches formed a close alliance with the regime, provoking inner-church rifts in 1956. The example of the Hungarian Reformed Church shows that even a big church did not necessarily succeed in maintaining its independence; on the contrary, since it provided a potential base for opposition, it was often even more subject to state pressure.

The Catholic Church had its strongest east European basis in Poland. There, despite the state's pressure in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it could still maintain its structural independence, although it had to compromise and to refrain from public criticism. The Church formed a

partnership with the government that cannot be compared to the forced collaboration that took place in other countries. The Church's structural and also ideological independence made it possible, later on, to encourage and support the opposition movement Solidarity and foster political change in Poland. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, the Catholic Church faced enormous pressure as the regimes tried to apply various means of state control. In Hungary, the firm resistance of Cardinal Mindszenty led to public attention in the West, but prevented improvement on diplomatic level between Church and state. Paul VI eventually sacrificed Mindszenty for the sake of an overall easing of the relations between the Vatican and the Hungarian government. In the Soviet Union and the south-east European countries, the rather small Catholic communities led an existence as oppressed minorities.

The fate of the Uniates was particularly harsh. They were dissolved in the Soviet Union as sources of ethnic tensions, and Uniate bishops were killed and synods voted under pressure to leave Rome and "re-unite" with the Orthodox Church. This was the beginning of underground churches in eastern Europe. The same happened to the Uniate communities in Czechoslovakia and Romania. The Orthodox Churches supported the forced re-unions and prevented any improvement of the Uniates' situation. In Poland and Hungary, the Uniates were not outlawed but especially in the former, their members were pressed to join the Catholic Church. Stalinist violence ruined the chances for a peaceful re-union of the Uniates and the Orthodox Church. The role the Orthodox Church leaders played was often a very dubious one, as they willingly assisted the suppression of the Uniates.

As we have seen, the measures carried out against the Christian churches were often similar. Their intensity varied from country to country and from denomination to denomination, according to the extent of resistance and co-operation the respective community gave, but the basic pattern can be found again and again. The measures carried out usually included:

- (1) Destruction of the churches' infrastructure;
- (2) Seizure of the remaining church institutions;
- (3) Atheisation campaign in schools and public life;
- (4) Division of the churches from each other;
- (5) Division of the churches' hierarchy from the lower clergy.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> This pattern is established by Ramet with respect to the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, see Ramet, S., *Czechoslovakia*, p. 381. The various ways these oppressive policies were carried out, are elaborated on pp. 381-386. Ramet claims that the government had failed in achieving these aims, provoking resistance, the establishment of underground institutions and even ecumenical sympathy, see p. 393.

The most important of these policies were overall quite successful across eastern Europe. By the early 1950s, the regimes had usually seized all the churches' property and either arrested church leaders or forced them into collaboration. Whilst many Catholic leaders served prison or labour camp sentences, it was generally easier to find collaborating individuals in the Protestant Churches. The atheisation campaigns, however, did not always bring the desired result. Inner-church rifts did not appear immediately, but became increasingly apparent the friendlier the respective church leaders were towards the regime. The traditionally strong Catholic hierarchy proved especially difficult to break up, and only occasionally, did the regimes provoke divisions (for example in Poland).

Overall, the Communist regimes in eastern Europe applied a lot more pressure and exercised more violence than the GDR government ever would, as we will see later. In fact, only one country shows similarities in its state/church relations. This is the partnership between state and Catholic Church in Poland which can be compared to the co-operation between the Communist regime and Protestantism in the GDR.

### III. Ecclesiastical Background: The Vatican's eastern policy

As we will see, the Pope himself played an important role in relations between <sup>the</sup> Catholic Church and Communism, and a new pontiff often meant a fundamental change in the Vatican's policies towards the Communist governments. Being part of the world-wide body of the Catholic Church was a great advantage for Catholics in many cases, but it has, at times, also left the local bishops in the unfortunate position of being left out of the negotiations that concerned their day-to-day pastoral care. The nuncio would then carry out the negotiations, working in close consultation with the Pope. The results very often caused disruptions within the Church.

After the pontificate of Benedict XV (1914-1922), it was Pope Pius XI (1922-1939), who had to face the rise of totalitarianism in Europe. The USSR stabilised itself after the civil war, and fascist-autocratic dictatorships were established all across southern and eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>106</sup> Pius XII (1939-1958) remained neutral during the Second World War, but was known for his anti-Communist views.

#### 1. Catholic Church and Communism before 1949:

##### a. Principle antagonism

In 1864, the Pope declared that Catholic faith and Communism were incompatible. A number of the basics of Marxist philosophy (the nature of society is class war, and religion as such is anachronistic) were by definition hostile to the Church. On top of that the Catholic Church had always upheld its belief in certain freedoms, such as the right to private property. Although the Church did address the social problems of the time (Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* encouraged social thoughts amongst Catholics), for more than a century no Catholic could possibly be a *Marxist*.

<sup>106</sup> Autocratic regimes had been established in the Soviet Union (1917), Italy (1922), Turkey (1923), Spain (between 1923-30 and in 1938) Bulgaria (between 1923-30 and in 1934), Albania (1925) Poland (1926), Portugal (1926), Lithuania (1926-29 and in 1936), Yugoslavia (1929), Estonia (1934), Latvia (1934), Greece (1936), and Romania (1938). See Kinder, Hermann / Hilgemann, Werner: *The Penguin Atlas of World History. Vol. 2: From the French Revolution to the Present*. London 1995, p. 138f.

Ever since the Bolsheviks had come to power in the USSR in 1917, the relationship between the Vatican and Moscow was very difficult. From the early stage of Communist rule, the churches were oppressed in the USSR.<sup>107</sup> Various attempts by Pope Pius XI to enter negotiations with the Soviet government (carried out with the help of the German government via Berlin or the German embassy in Moscow) failed.<sup>108</sup> Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor in 1933 finally increased the chances for an anti-Bolshevik 'crusade' and made it easier to abolish the frustrated policy of co-operation.<sup>109</sup> In 1937, Pius XI renewed the solemn condemnation of Communism in the encyclical letter *Divini Redemptoris*.<sup>110</sup>

The Communists, on the other hand, were determined to overcome religion wherever they took power. Furthermore, after the Second World War, newly formed and insecure Communist governments saw religious communities as potential sources of dissent and disloyalty.

However, this was not actually orthodox Marxism, which defines religion as a private affair. According to Marx, attacking religion directly would be "a waste of effort."<sup>111</sup> Besides, after the Second World War, most of the Communist states subscribed to the UN doctrine of human rights. Thus, religion was usually permitted in church buildings, but outside, the governments kept a tight grip on any religious activities, hindered them wherever possible, and fostered atheism (sometimes scientifically disguised<sup>112</sup>). Christians, who would later take up dialogue with Communists, sometimes argued that a human Communism could be reached if atheism was removed. For Communists, however, atheism was inevitable if a truly Communist society was to be achieved. This was for political and cultural reasons: Firstly, religion would always lead to institutionalised churches and thereby threaten the complete institutional monopoly of the Communists. Secondly, religion stood in the way of the Stalinist concept of an universal Communist culture, in other words, in the way of Socialist totalitarianism.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>107</sup> For details see Révész, pp. 23-37.

<sup>108</sup> See Stehle, pp. 347f.

<sup>109</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern Politics*, p. 148f. For details see the first five chapters of his book: pp. 11-198.

<sup>110</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. Vol 29, no 4, pp. 65-106.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, Roland: *The Church in the German Democratic Republic*, in: Childs, David (Ed.): *Honecker's Germany*. London 1985, pp. 66-82, p. 66.

<sup>112</sup> In the GDR, there were even university chairs for 'Scientific atheism'. See Dähm, Horst: *Wissenschaftlicher Atheismus in der DDR*, in: Basse, Ottokar (Ed.): *Kirche im sozialistischen Gesellschaftssystem*. Zollikon 1986, p. 101-114, p. 105.

<sup>113</sup> See Ramet, Sabrina Petra: *The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia 1948-1991*, in: *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 4/1991, pp. 377-394, p. 377.

## b. The impact of the situation in Italy

After the war, many Catholics had to live under a hostile Communist rule for the first time (Soviet Russia of the early 1920s hosted only a million Catholics altogether). Thus, the Vatican was reluctant at first to repeat publicly the antagonism between Christianity and Communism as it had done before. However, the threat of a Communist government in Italy made the Vatican's course firm, as a Communist government in Italy could have robbed the Church of its international base in the Vatican. Between 1944 and 1946 more than 50 priests were murdered by Italian Communist partisans, and the Vatican had to prevent a Communist victory in the general elections by any means. The Holy Office (nowadays the Congregation of Faith) therefore issued a ruling that was confirmed by Pope Pius XII on 2 July 1949, saying:

"It has been asked whether

(a) it is lawful to subscribe as members of a Communist party? No.

(b) it is lawful to publish or write articles etc. advocating Communism? No.

(c) it is lawful to priests to administer sacraments to those who do (a) or (b)? No."<sup>114</sup>

The ruling avoided saying that no Catholic could be a Communist; but it prohibited membership of the Communist party and public campaigning, and "was understood in eastern Europe to be a reassertion of the doctrine that no Catholic can be a Communist and a (further) proof that the Vatican was an enemy of all Communist states."<sup>115</sup> On top of their hostility towards religion *per se* this ruling gave them further material for the propaganda war against the Church.<sup>116</sup>

## c. The role of Pope Pius XII.

Eugenio Pacelli came into office as Pope Pius XII in 1939. He had been Cardinal-state secretary before, and earlier in the 1920s had served as nuncio in Germany. Although being considered very spiritually focused, Pius XII also dedicated himself to politics. During the period of the redistribution of power and high diplomatic activity after the war, Pius XII took the opportunity to increase the Vatican's international influence substantially. From 1948 on-

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Chadwick, p. 15f.

<sup>115</sup> Chadwick, p. 16. Even stronger Stehle, who observes that it had "a sharp effect as a political weapon in Eastern Europe" in the hand of the Church opponents. (p. 271).

<sup>116</sup> On the subsequent public row between Communist newspapers and the Berlin church paper „Petrusblatt“ (von Preysing's "mouthpiece", as Höllen calls it), see Höllen, pp. 187-189.

wards, the Vatican's situation was as comfortable as it had been since the French Revolution. For the first time since Italian unification in 1870 there was a Pope-friendly government

in Italy. In addition, the Pope had the opportunity to strengthen the Holy See against potentially hostile Italian governments by improving its international position, because of its strict anti-Communism shared with the Western democracies and with the Iberian dictators. As Pius XII had served as nuncio in Germany and the Vatican's Cardinal-state secretary during the struggle with Hitler's totalitarian regime, his position towards totalitarian regimes was firm. In the emerging Cold War, the Pope and with him the Catholic Church became an ally of the democratic West and an almost natural opponent of the Communist bloc. As a consequence of Pius XII's efforts to make the Vatican more international, the *number* of Italian cardinals decreased considerably. More than half of the cardinals were Italian when Pius XII acceded; when he died, it was just a third. As Chadwick comments: "This was a historic change in the constitution of the Holy See."<sup>117</sup> However, the last years of Pius XII's rule were characterised by stagnation due to his age and illness. This weakened the Vatican substantially during the height of the Cold War and the process of de-colonisation.

## 2. Church and Communism after Stalin

When Stalin died, some attempts to establish dialogue between the Vatican and the Soviet regime were made. They were, however, cautious and reluctant and seemed to have come to end as soon as 1956, when Soviet tanks conquered Budapest.<sup>118</sup> Yet, the tone on both sides gradually softened, especially after the election of Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli as Pope John XXIII in 1958. Despite the building of the Berlin Wall in summer 1961 and the Cuba Missile Crisis of 1962, simple steps like Khrushchev's congratulations on the Pope's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in November 1961 opened the way to, at least, indirect negotiations.<sup>119</sup> When Giovanni Battista Montini was elected Pope as Paul VI in 1963, the ground was prepared for a change in the Vatican's eastern policies.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Chadwick, p. 17.

<sup>118</sup> For details see Stehle, Eastern politics, p. 285-297.

<sup>119</sup> For details see Stehle, Eastern politics, pp. 300-310.

<sup>120</sup> See Stehle, Eastern politics, p. 310.



### 3. The 1960s: Paul VI<sup>121</sup>

Paul VI's motive for his attempts to improve the atmosphere between the Vatican and the Communist regimes was pastoral care for Catholics in eastern Europe. He referred to the tradition of Pius XI who, in 1929, had declared, the church would even deal with the devil himself in order to save a few souls.<sup>122</sup> Stehle points out that (as opposed to the Protestant Churches) the Catholic Church needs an established hierarchy in order to consecrate bishops who can consecrate priests who can deliver sacraments, without which no soul can be saved. Therefore, for the Catholics there was no alternative to continuous attempts to achieve some *modus vivendi* with the Communist governments.<sup>123</sup> A decisive step in this direction was Paul VI's strict and successful resistance against a condemnation of Communism by the Second Vatican Council in 1965.<sup>124</sup>

In 1964, for the first time since the war, an official document was signed between the Vatican and an eastern European country - Hungary. It contained, amongst other things, arrangements for the joint appointment of bishops; five of them were immediately installed, another four in 1969 (plus four, who had been appointed apostolic administrators in 1964, and were now named residentary bishops).<sup>125</sup> This and the following period of constantly improved relationships between the church and the Hungarian state<sup>126</sup> occurred despite the strict resistance of Cardinal Mindszenty and his numerous attempts to obstruct this policy from Budapest and, later, Vienna. Mindszenty died on 6 May 1975; only one year later, all eleven Hungarian dioceses were "properly occupied with bishops loyal to Rome."<sup>127</sup>

In 1964, negotiations with Yugoslavia also started, finally leading to regular diplomatic relations in August 1972.<sup>128</sup> As Stehle points out, this relationship was, however, always seen to be a "special case" rather than a "model" for other Communist countries.<sup>129</sup> As regards to Ro-

<sup>121</sup> On the structure of the Vatican hierarchy involved in the Church's Eastern European policies (with the cardinal-state secretary as its head), see Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, pp. 342-345.

<sup>122</sup> See Stehle, Hansjakob, *Papal Eastern Diplomacy and the Vatican Apparatus*, in: Ramet, Pedro (Ed.): *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*. Durham / London: Duke University Press 1990, pp. 341-355, p. 341.

<sup>123</sup> See Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, p. 346.

<sup>124</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 312.

<sup>125</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, pp. 314-116.

<sup>126</sup> For details see Mojzes, *Religious Liberty*, pp. 252-256. The achievements of this decade laid the foundation for further progress in the late seventies and throughout the eighties, see pp. 257-263.

<sup>127</sup> Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 322.

<sup>128</sup> See Stehle, *Eastern politics*, pp. 323-326 for details.

<sup>129</sup> Stehle, *Eastern politics*, p. 326.

mania, the question of the Uniate Church (forced into the Orthodox Church) could not be solved. Until the late 1970s, only *hardly any* progress could be made.

#### 4. The Second Vatican Council and Communism

The topic with the highest importance to eastern Europe amongst those discussed at the Second Vatican Council was the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. The traditionalist party (mainly consisting of the Italian and the Spanish delegation) wanted to maintain the Catholic doctrine that religious liberty was only applicable to Catholics, since there could be no 'right to teach wrong', i.e. non-Catholics could be not be given the right, even by a government, to encourage their religion. Nevertheless, a strong group of convinced democrats from America claimed religious liberty for everyone, since this followed from a democratic and pluralistic society which they believed to be morally superior. They were backed by the eastern European delegations, where the demand for religious liberty for everyone was a necessity for the Catholic Church itself. Many of the speakers from eastern Europe had been imprisoned for practising their religion and their voices were influential on the Council. Amongst them were the Uniate Cardinal Slipyj, who had served many years in Russian prison, Cardinal Beran of Prague, who had just been released after 16 years imprisonment and Cardinal Wojtyla of Cracow, the future pope. On 19 November 1965, the Declaration on Religious Liberty was finally accepted. The vote was 1954 to 249 - a considerable *opposition*. This declaration "expressed the biggest change in Christian attitudes wrought by the Vatican Council."<sup>130</sup> It transformed the possibility of friendship between Catholics and Protestants, and also directly affected the conditions under which the Churches worked with Marxist governments.

The other declaration that was linked with the problem of Christianity and Communism was *Gaudium et Spes*, a pastoral constitution dealing with the role of the Catholic Church in the modern world. After some divisions the solemn condemnation of Communism of 1949 was not repeated. The majority of the Council did not want to preclude further dialogue. This time, it stood against Italian and American bishops and some clergy from the Communist bloc living in exile. Again the influence of the East European delegation (particularly the weighty influence of Cardinal Wojtyla) decided the argument in favour of a moderate tone.

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<sup>130</sup> See Chadwick, p. 121.

## 5. The 1970s: *Ostpolitik* and mutual acknowledgement

In the 1970s, for various reasons Christianity in eastern Europe declined, as it did in Western Europe. Still, by the mid-1970s, many Communist regimes realised that they had not realised a religion-free society. Censuses and opinion polls show that all over eastern Europe (with the exception of Poland) religious practice decreased, but many people (even amongst the youth) still had some faith. And the main theses of "scientific atheism" (that the existence of God had been proven impossible or religion was for poor or very simple people only) were usually denied by a majority, even those who had been brought up under Communist rule.<sup>131</sup> In some cases, the population had even turned to some forms of superstition as a substitute for the prohibited Christian worship. Hence, the state sometimes changed its policy to a more pragmatic attitude rather than repressing, aiming to control the churches.

These tendencies were concurrent to Paul VI.'s attempts to ease the atmosphere, playing his part in the dominating policy of *détente*. This caused some arguments within the Church, and again brought up the question to what extent compromise with the Communist regimes was opportune.<sup>132</sup> Paul VI's attempts to re-structure the East German Catholic Church (thereby giving in to the East Berlin government's pressure to cut off the links between West and East German Catholics) especially led to despair in the Berlin Committee of Ordinaries.<sup>133</sup>

Yet, the Vatican did not back down in front of the Communist governments. The Pope successfully spoke out for religious freedom as a human right for everyone at the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975.<sup>134</sup> John Paul II continued this policy (including personal appearance) at the three CSCE Verification Conferences in 1977-78, 1980 and 1987.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Sometimes (for instance in Byelorussia) a link between nationality and religious practice was found. On the exact figures for the Communist countries see Chadwick, pp 73-75. The various censuses and opinion polls show, that all over Eastern Europe (with the exception of Poland) religious practice decreased. However, a lot of people (even amongst the youth) still had some faith, and did not believe the thesis that scientific atheism had disproved the existence of God.

<sup>132</sup> For instance, in the case of the Metropolitan Slipyj of the Ukrainian Uniates, the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty and the plan to re-structure the East German diocese borders, which was cancelled at the very last moment, when Paul VI died and John Paul II came into office (see below).

<sup>133</sup> See below.

<sup>134</sup> See Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, p. 353f.

<sup>135</sup> See Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, p. 354.

## 6. The 1980s: John Paul II

### a. John Paul II's election

In 1978 Paul VI died, his successor John Paul I died after a pontificate of only 30 days. The cardinals therefore had to find another pope, and for obvious reasons they were, this time, looking for someone who was likely to stay in office for some years. Cardinal Wojtyła of Cracow was only 58. Furthermore, he was good at languages, had attended international conferences, and was therefore well-known in the West. His support for religious liberty as a human right on the Second Vatican Council had won him much sympathy amongst the Western European and the Northern American bishops, and his conservative views on issues like abortion, married priests and the ordination of women made him attractive to the traditionalist wing. Thus, only the very liberal and the Italian cardinals who wanted to preserve the Italian domination of the Church disapproved of his candidature, but, in the words of Chadwick, the Italians "had no candidate to measure against him."<sup>136</sup>

### b. John Paul II as pope

John Paul II did not inherit a comfortable post. The liberal movements in the Western democracies were about to create divisions in the Catholic Church, and the impact of his personal background on the Church in eastern Europe was unpredictable. His election, however, definitely encouraged the faithful all across eastern Europe. They now saw themselves as an important part of the universal Church, and not as a trouble-shooting and unwelcome minority at the edge of Europe.<sup>137</sup> John Paul II's election also attracted the attention of the governments of eastern Europe; the Soviets were especially concerned about the effects he might have on the Polish Church.<sup>138</sup>

The new Pope travelled extensively, and made evangelism a personal goal. He also visited states with a Catholic minority, or with no Catholics at all, and states where religious liberty was oppressed, pursuing the concept of dialogue even where it was very difficult.<sup>139</sup> In June

<sup>136</sup> Chadwick, p. 195.

<sup>137</sup> See Chadwick, p. 196.

<sup>138</sup> See Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, p. 353.

<sup>139</sup> See Stehle, *Papal Diplomacy*, p. 341.

1979, he was allowed to visit Poland, which did not cause any immediate conflict with the state and yet encouraged the Polish Catholics. The Pope's simple religiosity (for instance he was committed to prayers to the <sup>Virgin</sup> Mary and to the rosary) was impressive. At the same time he fostered the ecumenical movement: His relations with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrius, ~~was~~ friendly, he was the first Pope to visit a Jewish service (at the synagogue of Rome) and a Protestant worship (at Canterbury Cathedral). On 27 October 1986, he chaired an ecumenical meeting in Assisi with big delegations from non-Catholic denominations and non-Christian religions. "So, if the ecumenical movement was not prospering, this was not because the Pope was narrow-minded about the relationship between religious people."<sup>140</sup>

## 7. Summary

The relations between Catholic Church and Communist states were traditionally hostile. After the revolution in Russia, the Communist government oppressed religion according to its atheist ideology, and continued attempts to improve the diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Soviet government failed. During the war, the Pope did not officially take sides, although he had supported the anti-Communist policy of the German national socialist government in the early 1930s.

After the war, Pius XII's anti-Communism was increased by the threat of a Communist government in Italy, with all the consequences this could possibly have on the Holy See. A ruling by the Holy Office on 2 July 1949 did not condemn Communism as such, but was widely perceived as a repetition of the Catholic Church's previously antipathy. By pursuing this policy, Pius XII aligned himself with the western concept of society and improved his position on the international stage.

Stalin's death in 1953 brought the heightened antagonism between Communism and Catholicism to an end. When the pontificate of the anti-Communist Pius XII ended in 1958, the atmosphere further improved under his successors. After the five-year pontificate of John XXIII, Paul VI was determined to pursue negotiations with the Communist regimes; this led to established contact with Hungary and Yugoslavia. However, the Pope's willingness to negotiate often caused anger and dismay among local churches, since it was they who faced the

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<sup>140</sup> Chadwick, p. 198f.

everyday pressures and discriminations. The cases of Metropolitan Slipyj of the Ukrainian Uniates and especially of the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty publicly illustrated the deep rifts between the Vatican and high-ranked local church leaders. After years of imprisonment for standing up for their faith and their church, they found themselves publicly deserted by the Pope who now dealt with those that had imprisoned them and killed many of their priests. There is no doubt that some *modus vivendi* had to be reached, but to sacrifice those who had suffered most at the hands of Communist regimes disappointed many of the faithful Catholics in eastern Europe.

Interestingly enough, this policy changed immediately when a cardinal who had personally lived under Communism became pope. Paul VI and the later John Paul II had been allies on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council concerning the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* and the resistance against the condemnation of Communism, but the concrete policies they applied when dealing with the Communist regimes differed substantially. The sudden change of the Vatican's policy becomes most apparent in the case of the Catholic Church in the GDR, as we will later see.

## PART B: The Churches in Eastern Germany

### I. The churches in zonal Germany, 1945-1949

#### 1. The end of the war

For the clergy as well as the faithful in the parishes all over Germany the war ended, when the allied forces arrived. The local German administration usually broke down, when higher officials (as a rule party members and thus afraid of allied prosecution) simply deserted their offices and fled to areas still held by the German army. Nevertheless, the every day struggle of living with a destroyed infrastructure of any kind (destroyed or damaged churches and parish buildings, transport and communication) continued. The division of Germany into zones, the varying (and often inconsistent) policies of the military administrations and the obstacles the zone borders increasingly provided, did not interfere with church life on parish level very often, but they did hinder progress especially in the higher levels of the churches' administration.<sup>141</sup>

#### 2. The church structure and the division of Germany

In 1945, the Protestant church structure collapsed. The church leaders, most of them members of the German Christians or in another way connected to the Nazi regime, had left their offices, and a general reconstruction above parish level was required. More than ever before the need for a common umbrella organisation was acknowledged, and after the centralist *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (a legacy of the Third Reich) had been dissolved, the EKD (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*)<sup>142</sup> was founded at the conference of Treysa on 6 August 1945.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, the Lutherans (in parts still cautious about any kind of co-operation with the United Churches) set up the VELKD (*Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*

<sup>141</sup> A valuable first-hand insight into the every day problems of the churches (although concentrating on the Protestant Church) is provided by Herman, Stewart: *The Rebirth of the German Church*. London 1946.

<sup>142</sup> Commonly translated as *Evangelical Church in Germany*.

<sup>143</sup> See Mojzes, *Religious Liberty*, p. 193.

*Deutschlands*). However, the VELKD turned out to pose no competition to the EKD, but rather was a committee of intra-Lutheran negotiations.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst in other countries the Protestant communities are theologically and structurally very diverse, it is significant for German Protestantism that the Lutheran and Reformed Churches dominate. In the Prussian core lands, the Church of the Old Prussian Union is also present. This comparatively uniform situation (with a very high percentage of Protestants as members of the respective *Landeskirche*) is without doubt a result of the strong affiliation of German Protestantism to the Princes who were heads of the Protestant Churches in their territories until 1918. With the founding of the EKD, however, the co-operation between the *Landeskirchen* intensified. Although theological differences remained (and were accepted), especially in their relationship with the government, the German Protestants now spoke with a more united and therefore stronger voice. Hence, it seems justified to speak of the EKD as the Protestant Church of Germany (in the singular), although the Lutherans especially stressed that no new church had emerged when the EKD was founded.

The Catholic Church with its hierarchic and clergy-based structure was comparatively intact. It suffered as much as the Protestant Churches from the organisational disruptions caused by the war, but contact between the Vatican, the diocesan bishops and the parish priests had been maintained. Both the Protestant and the Catholic parishes in the Soviet occupied Zone faced the problem of integrating refugees from the east, that is eastern Europe, but particularly from the German areas now occupied by the Soviet Union and Poland.

The Catholic Church faced some administrative difficulties due to the changed German-Polish border as well as to the almost equally divisive zone borders. However, by means of the appointment of administrative representatives, who could administrate the diocese like a bishop but were still obviously dependent on their superior bishop, the church reacted flexibly to this problem.<sup>145</sup>

One major change in the churches' dealings with the new administration was the division of Germany into zones. This was a stark contrast to the centralised Nazi regime and to the GDR regime that would later emerge in eastern Germany. Especially in the American and the Bri-

<sup>144</sup> See Ward, p. 411.

<sup>145</sup> For details see von Hehl, Ulrich / Tischner, Wolfgang: *Die katholische Kirche in der SBZ / DDR 1945-1989*, in: *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages). Vol. 1-9. Published by the *Deutscher Bundestag*. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 875-949, p. 882-883.



fish zones, attempts to re-introduce democracy and restricted German self-government were also undertaken;<sup>146</sup> thus, the inner-German division became increasingly apparent.

In West Germany, both the churches were involved in the negotiations on the West German constitution. Since no agreement could be reached as to the public role of the churches between the two main parties, Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the SPD, the respective articles of the Weimar Constitution were simply incorporated into the new constitution, the 'Basic Law'. However, not only was the churches' advice sought by the Parliamentary Council; from 1949 onwards, whenever a bill had a possible potential impact on the churches (especially in the vast field of social politics), they were consulted at some point during the legislative process - stressing the general atmosphere of consensus and co-operation between state and church in the Federal Republic. A situation that did not change in 1969, when after the three years of the Grand Coalition (CDU / SPD), the SPD was elected into government.

### 3. The demographic shift in eastern Germany and its impact on the churches

In the immediate post-war period up to 1947/48, some 20 million Germans were expelled from south-eastern Europe, the Baltic states, Bohemia, and the newly defined Poland - 2 million of whom died. Whilst most of the refugees fled to Western Germany (sometimes after a short stay in the Soviet Zone), nearly 4,5 million, mostly from the former German areas now occupied by Poland (Pomerania, Silesia, southern part of East Prussia) and Russia (northern part of East Prussia), settled down in the Soviet Occupied Zone.<sup>147</sup> The Catholic population of the Soviet Occupied Zone rose from some 1,081,000 to 2,772,500; an increase of 156%. The figures in some areas increased tenfold.<sup>148</sup>

This sudden demographic increase had a huge impact on the churches in eastern Germany, particularly the Catholic Church. It had been a minority church, in the territory that was to

<sup>146</sup> The first elected district council in Germany was set up in the British zone as early as October 1945.

<sup>147</sup> See Mellor, Roy E. H.: *The Two Germanies. A Modern Geography*. London 1978, p. 153f.

<sup>148</sup> More specific statistical material is given in Pilvousek, Josef: "Innenansichten". Von der "Flüchtlingskirche" zur "katholischen Kirche in der DDR", in: *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages). Vol. 1-9. Published by the *Deutscher Bundestag*. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 1134-1163, p. 1135-1137.

become the GDR, ever since the Reformation. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several phases of immigration (mostly Polish labour force) increased the number of Catholics (resulting in the foundation of the dioceses of Meißen, 1921, and Berlin, 1929) without changing the specific character of the Catholic church in this area, it remained a diaspora church.<sup>149</sup>

The integration of the Catholic refugees into the existing communities was problematic.<sup>150</sup> The mainly small Catholic parishes were not prepared for the high numbers of arriving refugees, and the Catholic Church faced a sudden shortage of churches, clerics, and (in general) church structure. New parishes had to be founded and the amount of services increased accordingly. The refugees were still hoping to return to their home parishes very soon, and the measures introduced were intended only to cope with a temporary phenomenon. Eventually these measures turned into structures lasting for decades and became a main component of GDR church life, helping to create a certain self-image of the *Kirche in der DDR*, the church in the GDR.<sup>151</sup>

The process of integration turned out to be even more difficult, where a working parish structure already existed as in the mainly Catholic *Eichsfeld*. In many diaspora areas the newcomers formed almost the entire community, which seemed to result in less tensions. Catholic welfare organisations (especially the *Caritas*) helped out with the basic needs of the refugees. The major problem, however, was a severe shortage of priests.

Having reached its apex in 1949/50, the GDR's Catholic population decreased as a result of the Stalinisation of the GDR. Suffering from mounting discriminatory measures (poor educational and professional perspectives for Christians, outlawing of Catholic youth groups and clubs) more than 1.1 million Catholics fled from GDR to the Federal Republic up until 1961. The connection with flight (as opposed to cases of people simply leaving the Church) becomes evident if these figures are compared with the period after the building of the Wall: Between 1962 and 1988, the GDR's Catholic population only sank by some 670,000. In 1989/90, another 140,000 left the collapsing GDR.

<sup>149</sup> Pilvousek, p. 1134.

<sup>150</sup> See Höllen, p. 273. He quotes a Görlitz priest who, in 1952, saw this event as a chance to re-found a basis for Catholicism in these traditionally Protestant areas.

<sup>151</sup> See Pilvousek, p. 1134, see also below.

#### 4. The Declarations of Guilt

Coming to terms with the recent past presented an entirely new task for the churches. They had not experienced a comparable regime before. This holds true for the Third Reich's church policy, but as far as the moral guilt was concerned even more for its racial policy. The burden of guilt for the holocaust rested heavily on the Germans and on the German Churches. The so-called "Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt", published on 19 October 1945 by some leading Protestants (headed by Niemöller) has been described as a "genuine agony of penitence".<sup>152</sup> Other church leaders, especially the bishops Dibelius and Wurm (Württemberg) were opposed to this public step. They considered the declaration too humble, and feared that they might put church members off if they took the view of the enemy. But the influential Barth (at this time living in Switzerland) also pressed for a public confession of guilt, and eventually Niemöller had his way.

In the summer of 1945, the Catholic German bishops (the Fulda Committee of Bishops) published a declaration of guilt, comparable to the Stuttgart Declaration. It admitted that Catholic laymen as well as priests and bishops had failed during the Nazi period by joining the National Socialist movement, or had failed to act in spite of their knowledge of Nazi crimes and atrocities.<sup>153</sup>

The Third Reich experience had, of course, an impact on the churches' ethics. The atrocities committed by the regime (unimaginable up to that point) as well as the oppression of religion also changed their general attitude towards the state and towards a totalitarian regime in particular. Even in theological discourse, the concept of authority had become suspect, and the term again became a the focus of Protestant theology in a process to re-consider Protestantism's attitude towards the state and authority, and the legitimacy of secular rule. As to the Catholic Church, it is significant that the entry 'resistance' is not to be found in the 1931 edition of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, the encyclopaedia of the teaching of the Catholic Church issued by the leading German-speaking theologians in close collaboration with the Vatican.<sup>154</sup> However, in the next edition (1965) the entry *Widerstandsrecht* (right to resist) was

<sup>152</sup> Chadwick, p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> The core sentence is quoted in Ward, p. 423. Why he, after having quoted this clear statement, undermines it with sarcasm (leaving "the quality of this declaration ... to the moral judgement of the reader"), remains unclear. For a longer quote, giving the wider context, and a short analysis, see Höllen, p. 64f.

<sup>154</sup> *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. Vol 1-10. Ed. by Buchberger, Michael. Freiburg 1938.

included.<sup>155</sup> This change has to be borne in mind, when we look at the most influential post-war church leaders in eastern Germany: Dibelius and von Preysing.

## 5. The churches in the years of Soviet military administration (SMAD)

### a. The German Communists and Christianity

The years of the Weimar Republic had been a period of Communist hostility towards any kind of Christianity: On the one hand, Communists declared that sooner or later religion would become obsolete, and the measures taken against the churches under Communist rule proved the Soviets' determination to encourage this 'inevitable development' wherever possible. The churches,<sup>156</sup> on the other hand, had recognised the threat, the Communist vision of world revolution posed, and had issued continuous warnings against the atheist Communists.

In 1935, the Communist International (Comintern)<sup>157</sup>, at its seventh world conference, dropped its course of confrontation and looked to establish an anti-fascist front by incorporating parts of the bourgeois camp.<sup>158</sup> The now established Communist regime in the Soviet Union (the power behind the Comintern) recognised that a society free from any kind of religion was not an instantly obtainable aim. By looking for restricted co-operation with the Vatican, Stalin also tried to overcome the USSR's international isolation. However, these attempts were constantly rejected by the Catholic Church.

<sup>155</sup> The crucial sentence reads: "Passive and under certain circumstances even active resistance is generally allowed and sometimes required not only against an illegal, but also against a (merely) illegitimate state authority, namely when it ignores the purpose of its function in single acts or entirely." (my translation) See *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. Vol 10. Ed. by Höfer, Josef / Rahner, Karl. Freiburg 1965, column 1092-1094, quote: column 1093.

<sup>156</sup> This refers especially to the Pope and the Catholic bishops, since the Protestant Churches usually refrained from political statements.

<sup>157</sup> Re-established in March of 1919 under Lenin's leadership with the aim to pursue the world revolution.

<sup>158</sup> See Goerner, Martin G./Kubina, Michael: Die Phasen der Kirchenpolitik der SED und die sich darauf beziehenden Grundlagenbeschlüsse der Partei- und Staatsführung in der Zeit von 1945/46 bis 1971/72, in: *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland" (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages)*. Vol. 1-9. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Published by the Deutscher Bundestag. Ed. by Peter Mascher. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 615-874, p. 620. This anti-fascist alliance was at least partly reached in the Spanish Civil War.

After the tactical change of 1939-1941, when Communists all over the world were momentarily instructed by Moscow to co-operate with Nazi Germany, the idea of an anti-fascist coalition was revived in 1941 after the German invasion of Russia. The so-called *Nationalkomitee „Freies Deutschland“* (NKFD, National Committee 'Free Germany'), mainly consisted of German prisoners of war, but was politically controlled by the German Communists around Wilhelm Pieck (at that time chairman of the German Communist Party KPD) and Walter Ulbricht. It became the platform for the German Communists' attempt to incorporate, amongst others, Christians into their movement.<sup>159</sup>

This was the directive for the first two years. Goerner / Kubina call it the phase of (attempted) 'integration', which was followed, in the years 1948-1952, by the phase of 'confrontation'. It was during these years, that the churches were systematically pushed out of the education sector, and arguments over the GDR's constitution led to continuous clashes.<sup>160</sup> The religious freedoms guaranteed in the constitution were never respected.<sup>161</sup> After 1952, the regime's obvious aim was the 'liquidation' of the churches as a factor in society.<sup>162</sup>

#### b. The Protestant Church in the Soviet Occupied Zone

In the first years, the SMAD's church policy was surprisingly mild. The Protestant Church still benefited from the Confessing Church's reputation as part of the anti-Hitler resistance.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>159</sup> The NKFD-subcommittee dealing with church policy consisted of the NSDAP member Friedrich-Wilhelm Krummacker, after 1955 bishop of the *Landeskirche* of Pomerania, amongst other clerics. For details see Goerner / Kubina, pp. 621-623.

<sup>160</sup> For details on the education policy see Dähn, Horst: *Konfrontation oder Kooperation? Das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der SBZ / DDR 1945-1980*. Opladen 1982, p. 23 and pp. 29-45. On the arguments concerning the constitution see particularly Dahlgreen, Sam: *Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat während der Jahre 1949-1958*. Uppsala 1972, pp. 30-37 and Koch, Gerhard: *Staat und Kirche in der DDR*. Stuttgart 1975, pp. 35-47.

<sup>161</sup> This was noticed by historians as early as 1954, see Shuster, George Nauman: *Religion behind the Iron Curtain*. Westport: Greenwood Press 1978 (reprint of the ed. publ by Macmillan, New York 1954), pp. 33-35.

<sup>162</sup> See Goerner / Kubina, p. 624. This pattern is also established by Dusdal, Edgar: *Gesellschafts- und kirchenpolitische Positionen innerhalb des Protestantismus und der SED nach 1945*, in: *Staatliche Kirchenpolitik im „real existierenden Sozialismus“ in der DDR*. Conference at the Adam-von-Trott-Haus on 1 - 3 October 1992. Publ. by the Evangelisches Bildungswerk Berlin, ed. by Joachim Heise, pp. 21-33, see pp. 26ff. and Seidel, J. Jürgen: *Grundzüge staatlicher Kirchenpolitik in der SBZ 1945 bis 1949*, in: *Staatliche Kirchenpolitik*, pp. 5-20, see pp. 7-19.

<sup>163</sup> In January 1947, a cultural conference, sponsored by the SED declared "the brave conduct of a part of the clergy in the struggle against the barbarism of Hitler has also earned the recognition and respect of socialist labourers. Faith and socialism are not the antagonists that some would arbitrarily make them. The position of the party [the SED] toward religion is one of absolute tolerance. That which Christianity seeks from faith, socialism seeks from knowledge. In their efforts to achieve their imminently secular objectives, the socialists have no desire to misuse the church in a propagandistic manner." Quoted in Ramet, Sabine P., *Protestantism in East Germany*, p. 171f.

However, it was also the period in which German Communists were attempting to incorporate the churches, especially the Protestant Church, into the anti-fascist front. The *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED* (Socialist Unity Party)<sup>164</sup> was aiming for support from Christian workers, and set up committees discussing religion and Communism. In the quarrels over denominational schools, parts of the Protestant Church publicly stood out against the regime (especially Dibelius). This was the only reason for arguments between the church and SMAD authorities in this phase. However, from 1947 onwards, attempts to force the Church into line were carried out with increasing intensity. In 1949 at Whitsun, Bishop Otto Dibelius compared the new regime with the Nazi totalitarianism. This statement clearly marked a new high in public confrontation.<sup>165</sup>

### c. The Catholic Church in the Soviet Occupied Zone

As with the Protestant Churches, there was no immediate confrontation between Communism and Catholic Church when the Communists took control in eastern Germany in 1945 - despite Catholic expectations.<sup>166</sup> The position of the Catholic Bishop of Berlin, Konrad von Preysing, was at this time very strong. Whilst many of the Evangelical *Landeskirchen* were momentarily paralysed by internal struggles with their Nazi-friendly, German Christian leaders, Bishop von Preysing was (together with his cousin Count von Galen, the bishop of Münster) well-known as one of the most decisive opponents of the Nazi-regime among the German bishops (both of them being rewarded for this by being promoted to Cardinals in 1946).<sup>167</sup> Besides, von Preysing knew Pope Pius XII well, having met during the later Pope's work as nuncio in Munich. Pius XII was anti-Communist and very sympathetic towards the German Catholics, which secured support from the Vatican.

The Bishop of Berlin became the dominant figure in east German Catholicism, and maintained this role during the 45 years of Communist rule in East Germany. The identifiable changes in the church/state relationship in East Germany, either by turns in the government's church policy or by changes of the church's attitude towards the East German state, were usually indicated (sometimes even caused) by the appointment of a new Bishop of Berlin. One

<sup>164</sup> On 21 April 1946, the SPD was forced to unite with the KPD, forming the SED.

<sup>165</sup> See Goerner / Kubina, p. 629-633. Dibelius is quoted in Solberg, Richard W.: *God and Caesar in East Germany: the Conflict of Church and State in East Germany since 1945*. New York 1961, p. 74.

<sup>166</sup> See von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 879-881.

<sup>167</sup> Another indicator for the respect von Preysing enjoyed: It was as early as December 1945, when he obtained permission to publish the diocese's paper (the *Petrusblatt*) again from the American authorities.

reason for this is that the Bishop of Berlin was (almost without intermission) the head of the *Berliner Ordinarienkonferenz* (BOK, Berlin Committee of Ordinaries) and (later on) the *Berliner Bischofskonferenz* (BBK, Berlin Committee of Bishops). He, therefore, directed the policy of the Catholic Church towards the SED-regime, his position being strengthened by the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. Secondly, the diocese of Berlin, with its territory divided between Federal Republic and GDR, suffered most from the impact of the German division, yet also remained the strongest link between the Church on both sides of the German border.

As we will see, it was later significant for East German Catholics to refrain from political activity, but the early East German CDU was dominated by politicians of Catholic denomination: Until Jakob Kaiser had to stand down in 1947, both party chairmen (Andreas Hermes and Kaiser himself) had been Catholics. The same held true for six out of the 13 party committee members, all of whom were former Centre party members. Whereas only 12% of the Soviet Occupied Zone's population were Catholics in 1947, 40% of the CDU's members were Catholics;<sup>168</sup> but when, Kaiser stepped down, the strong Catholic influence on the East German CDU ended quite abruptly.

In 1946/47 the SED responded to attempts to re-establish Catholic youth organisations by forcing these organisations into the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ, the Communist-dominated Youth Organisation), where the young Catholics were soon outnumbered and sidelined. Many of them, trying to resist the pressure, were arrested.<sup>169</sup> The same method was used to destroy the welfare organisations, but was less successful.

With respect to the Catholic schools, von Preysing's attempts to re-open them nearly failed entirely, especially since the Protestant Churches were divided among themselves about this issue, and only the CDU was in favour of church-run schools. Only a small number of schools were re-established in Berlin (one of them, however, situated in the eastern part of the city even survived the four decades of GDR).<sup>170</sup>

Socialisation and land reform were criticised in public statements,<sup>171</sup> and the Church supported the CDU in its struggle over the *Länder* constitutions (a controversial topic, for instance, was an article prohibiting "the abuse of the pulpit or the faith for political means"). However, von Preysing soon felt that the political activities of the Catholic clergy slipped out of his control.

<sup>168</sup> Von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 886.

<sup>169</sup> Cf von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 887.

<sup>170</sup> See Höllen, pp. 90-94.

<sup>171</sup> See Höllen, p. 71f.

Under the influence of the participation of some Protestant church leaders at the Communist-dominated *Volkskongress* 1947, Cardinal von Preysing declared that Catholic clerics had to refrain from political declarations, which were exclusively to be made by the bishop himself. This declaration from 20 December 1947 is nowadays known as the "Döpfner Decree"; it was, however, Cardinal von Preysing who was the first to give this directive against political involvement of the clerics. So, it was as early as 1947 when the decision on the basic policy of the Catholic Church in the GDR was made - no political involvement.<sup>172</sup>

During the years 1947/48, the SED consolidated its political leadership and moved rapidly towards the foundation of a separate state, safeguarded, and, wherever possible, supported by the Soviet administration. Lacking any political support after the dismissal of Kaiser, von Preysing's course of no compromise with the arising dictatorship led to confrontations. The key figure in the church/state negotiations was, at the next level down, Heinrich Wienken, who had already acted as a representative of the German Committee of Bishops during the Third Reich. On the governmental side, the *Hauptabteilung Verbindung zu den Kirchen* (Chief Department 'Contacts with the Churches') was founded in 1949, mainly staffed with church-friendly CDU members (led by the CDU chairman, and Deputy Prime Minister of the GDR, Otto Nuschke).<sup>173</sup> Von Preysing's directive, that Catholics should not join the National Front (the alliance of the so-called 'bloc parties' with the SED) led to a public clash between him and the regime, resulting in a press campaign directed against the Bishop of Berlin and a crisis within the East German Catholic Church, since the bishop of Meißen, Legge, was not prepared to carry on with von Preysing's strict course much further. Receiving support from the Vatican, however, von Preysing's position was strengthened by the foundation of the *Berliner Ordinarienkonferenz* (BOK, Berlin Committee of Ordinaries) and his appointment as its chairman.<sup>174</sup> Von Preysing's sudden death on 21 December 1950, however, made a change in the Church's increasingly fruitless policy of strict opposition possible.

<sup>172</sup> Von Preysing's decree is quoted in Höllen, p.152. The bishopric of Meißen had issued a directive effectively encouraging the clergy to express their views in order to help building a state 'based on Christian principles' on 31 August 1945. See Höllen, p. 68. In the two following years, the Church's attitude had obviously changed substantially.

<sup>173</sup> A concise overview of the officials who dealt with church policy in government, SED and the Ministry for State Security (MfS) see Besier, Gerhard: *Aus der Resistenz in die Kooperation. Der „Thüringer Weg“ zur „Kirche im Sozialismus“*, in: Heydemann, Günther / Kettenacker, Lothar (Eds.): *Kirchen in der Diktatur. Drittes Reich und SED-Staat*. Göttingen 1993, pp. 182-212, see pp. 182-184.

<sup>174</sup> For details on this inner-church dissent see von Hehl, Katholische Kirche, p. 892-93.



## 6. Summary

At the end of the war, both the churches suffered from the same problems as the rest of Germany's public life: destroyed infrastructure of any kind and the division of the country. The Catholic church structure remained intact, whilst Protestant communities lost many leaders who had been affiliated to Hitler's regime. As early as the 6 August 1945, the Protestant *Landeskirchen* founded the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) in order to increase co-operation. Although this was not seen as the founding of a monolithic church, as far as state/church relations are concerned, the German Protestants now spoke with one voice; thus, we will from now on speak of the Protestant Church.

Most of the millions of Germans expelled from the eastern parts of the country, settled down in the Soviet Occupied Zone. Since many of them were Catholics, the few and small Catholic communities struggled to incorporate the arriving faithful. However, many of them left the GDR before the borders were closed in 1961, and the Catholic Church in the GDR remained a diaspora church.

On an entirely different level the churches also struggled with the heritage of the recent past, as the atrocities committed by the regime became public knowledge. It also became obvious that the Nazi government had systematically oppressed religion. This had two effects: Firstly, the churches had to deal with their own involvement with the regime (the Protestant communities especially undertook a process of self-purification) and to come to terms with their actions. This was done publicly by the so-called *Declarations of Guilt* in summer and autumn of 1945. Secondly, the experience of a totalitarian regime changed the churches' attitude towards state and secular authority as such.

Despite traditional hostility between German Communists and Christianity, during the first years of the SMAD confrontations were rare and usually restricted to education policy. The German Communists tried to incorporate the churches into the so-called 'anti-fascist front'. Only when this strategy failed in the late 1940s, did clashes between state and churches increase. Dibelius publicly attacked the regime's continuous interference, and as early as 1947, Cardinal von Preysing established the policy of non-involvement of the Catholic Church with the regime (later called the „Döpfner Decree“). The mutual attempts of church/state co-operation had failed.

## II. The churches in the GDR, 1949-1969

### 1. The churches and the foundation of the GDR

When the GDR was founded, on 7 October 1949, this phase of late Stalinism was marked by continuous clashes between the government and the churches. The government almost immediately started violating the churches' recently granted constitutional rights, such as the right of religious education and the independence of church-run institutions. In early 1953, some pastors were arrested, and accused of spying for the West.<sup>175</sup> This signalled a fundamental change in the regime's methods of applying pressure on the churches.

Crucial for the relationship between the Catholic Church and the GDR government was the question of the validity of the *Reichskonkordat* of 1933. After having unsuccessfully tried to get it overturned in the Allied Control Commission in 1947, the Soviets, as well as the early GDR government, respected at least some of its articles and continued to fund the Church (*Staatsleistungen*). The Church, on the other hand, also demanded fulfilment of the articles relating to church-run institutions, especially the schools. When Bishop Weskamn was elected Bishop of Berlin in 1951, a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister Nuschke (CDU), informed the Church that the state had willingly let the deadline for any reservations concerning this election expire, demonstrating that the state, too, still considered the *Reichskonkordat* valid.<sup>176</sup>

### 2. The early 1950s: The GDR stabilises itself

#### a. The Protestant Church

In the early 1950s, the GDR government tightened its grip on the educational system. From 1951 onwards, Marxism-Leninism became a compulsory part of all schools' curricula,

<sup>175</sup> See Goeckel, Robert F.: *Der Weg der Kirchen in der DDR*, in: Heydemann, Günther / Kettenacker, Lothar (Eds.): *Kirchen in der Diktatur*. Göttingen 1993, pp. 155-181, p. 156.

<sup>176</sup> See von Hehl, Katholische Kirche, p. 893. In West Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1956 that the *Reichskonkordat* was still valid ("Concordat Judgement").

and teachers had to commit themselves to the atheist world-view.<sup>177</sup> From 1952 onwards, the regime's aim was to wipe out the churches as a factor in society. This has been called the phase of 'liquidation'.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, from this point on, whenever religious liberty was mentioned by state officials it was referred to as an individual right, in an attempt to shift the focus of religious liberty away from the churches as institutions (quite the opposite to the situation in the Federal Republic).<sup>179</sup>

In late 1954 the state introduced the so-called *Jugendweihe* (Youth Consecration), a pseudo-religious commitment to socialism and the GDR, young people were urged to make. The reactions in the Protestant Church were diverse: Bishop Mitzenheim of Thuringia remained rather cautious as far as public criticism was concerned, but Dibelius, and with him the rest of the Protestant Church, did everything in their power to prevent members of their *Landeskirchen* from participating in this rite.

#### b. The Catholic Church: Bishop Weskamm (1951-1956)

The Catholic Church was more united in its stand against the recently introduced measures. However, the approach of the newly-elected Bishop of Berlin, Wilhelm Weskamm (from April 1951 onwards), consolidated this already comparatively solid position. Despite various obstructions by the authorities over the *Katholikentag* (Catholic Convention) in Berlin in August 1952, and the foundation of a seminary (which finally had to be opened at Erfurt rather than Berlin<sup>180</sup>), he tried to avoid open confrontation, strictly refraining from any church involvement in the regime.

Weskamm, originated from a diaspora area in Westphalia and having worked in Protestant-dominated Magdeburg from 1932 to 1951, looked to the diaspora situation in the GDR as both a danger and an opportunity. The need of community for a Catholic Christian led him to believe that a lively parish life was crucial for the Church as a whole.<sup>181</sup> As opposed to von Preysing, he was foremost a pastor, often led by emotions,<sup>182</sup> and primarily interested in the

<sup>177</sup> See Fulbrook, Mary: Co-option and commitment: Aspects of relations between church and state in the German Democratic Republic, in: *Social History* 12 / 1987, pp. 73-91, p. 76.

<sup>178</sup> See Goerner / Kubina, p. 624.

<sup>179</sup> See Geiger, Max: *Christsein in der DDR*. Stuttgart 1975, pp. 12-14.

<sup>180</sup> For details see Höllen, pp. 276-281.

<sup>181</sup> For details on Weskamm's theology see Pilvousek, p. 1155f.

<sup>182</sup> On the occasion of a meeting with Grotewohl on July 25th 1952 he asked him "Are you a dictator?", see Pilvousek, p. 1156. For details on this obviously rather heated discussion (at least on Weskamm's side) see Höllen, pp. 292-295.

improvement of the pastoral situation in the GDR. Whilst von Preysing was convinced of the basic antagonism between Christianity and Socialism / Communism, and tried to change the system, Weskamm avoided confrontation for the sake of spiritual welfare - once comparing the situation of religion in the GDR to gardening in the north; in spite of set-backs it was worth the patience and hard work.

There was no official Catholic reaction to the uprising of 17 June 1953, but a large number of Catholics, mainly young adults, were involved.<sup>183</sup>

By the middle of the 1950s, the Catholics in the GDR seem to have developed the mentality of being the 'Church in the GDR', but they still considered the GDR a hostile environment. This was verbalised by Bishop Spülbeck who, on the occasion of the *Katholikentag* in Cologne in 1956, introduced the metaphor of the GDR as a 'house', in which a Christian could live in spite of being excluded from any influence on its 'foundation'. The Catholic Church also refrained from issuing a pastoral letter, advising Catholics to stay in the GDR (as opposed to the Protestant Church which did so in 1960). Although this decision was made after lengthy discussions it demonstrates that the Church maintained a certain distance to the Socialist GDR.<sup>184</sup>

### 3. The late 1950s: The churches under the established regime

#### a. The Protestant Church: intra-church discussions and Dibelius' „Letter on Authority“

When the EKD signed the Military Chaplaincy Treaty with the Federal government in Bonn 1957, the SED took this opportunity to strengthen its anti-church struggle.<sup>185</sup> It cancelled contact with the EKD, and, from this point on, pursued a policy of 'differentiation' by negotiating with the *Landeskirchen* themselves. Additionally, the east German *Landeskirchen* were

<sup>183</sup> See von Hehl p. 896f.

<sup>184</sup> See Pilvousek, Josef: *„Innenansichten“. Von der „Flüchtlingskirche“ zur „katholischen Kirche in der DDR“*, in:

*Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission „Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland“ (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages). Vol. 1-9. Vol 6: Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Published by the Deutscher Bundestag, Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 1134-1163, p. 1141-1144. On the special identity of GDR Catholicism also see Schäfer, p. 272f.

<sup>185</sup> Besier comments: "The SED wanted to intensify the confrontation and had found a pretext." See Besier, Gerhard: *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche. Der Weg in die Anpassung*. München 1993 (henceforth referred to as Besier, SED-Staat 1993), p. 217.

'encouraged' to split from the all-German umbrella organisation. This intensified the theological dispute within the Protestant Church, which had broken out some years earlier, and dominated the late 1950s; the question of how to deal with a regime, whose totalitarian basis had become obvious.

In 1956, the synod of the EKD first reached agreement over this question, and in a declaration effectively detached the issue of state authority from the problem of legitimacy.<sup>186</sup> In the following years, public statements from Protestant Church leaders followed this line. Bishop Dibelius' *Obrigkeitsbrief* (Letter on Authority) in late 1959, therefore came as a surprise to them as well as to the SED.<sup>187</sup> In the *Obrigkeitsbrief*, the EKD chairman denied the GDR's legitimacy and the right to claim authority in the sense of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Chapter 13),<sup>188</sup> proving that he (as opposed to many of his colleagues) had not changed his attitude to the regime.<sup>189</sup> The reactions even within the Protestant Church were severe. The Berlin-Brandenburg synod distanced itself from its bishop; so did Bishop Mitzenheim of Thuringia. In spite of huge efforts to provoke an intra-church revolt at the Berlin-Brandenburg synod in January of 1960, Dibelius was not deposed.<sup>190</sup> On its meeting in February 1960, the synod of the EKD also disapproved of Dibelius' views and confirmed the 1956 resolution, but did stress its loyalty to the EKD chairman. This disappointing ending (in the eyes of the SED) was partly the regime's own fault. While the EKD synod was still in session, the press was notified that the Berlin general state attorney had initiated preliminary proceedings against Dibelius, and as a result the outspoken bishop received a boost of solidarity from his colleagues. Nevertheless, despite his personal popularity, the internal discussions had shown that Dibelius "could not stop the development [towards a recognition of the regime by the Protestant Church] any more."<sup>191</sup>

<sup>186</sup> The core sentence is quoted in Besier, SED-Staat 1993, p. 312: "The gospel places the state under God's merciful order, which we know to be valid, independent both from the way the power of the state came about and from its political form." (my translation) This was a big step in the process of acknowledging the illegitimate SED regime.

<sup>187</sup> Dibelius composed it on the occasion of Bishop Lilje of Hannover's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and sent it to him rather privately.

<sup>188</sup> Paul declares that all authority eventually derives from God and is to be obeyed, a part of the bible that has played an important role in Protestant theology throughout the centuries.

<sup>189</sup> Looking back, in his book 'In the Service of the Lord' Dibelius had written: "After long reflection, I learned, as a man of 70 [in 1950], to say 'no' to communism and to everything it thinks and does ... I learned it not on political grounds, but for the sake of the Christian religion. For the sake of that religion, there could be no weighing in the balance of reason what was good in the communist social order and what was less good. The only thing was to penetrate the roots and to recognise the spirit permeating everything." Quoted in Gordon, Arvan: *The Church and Change in the GDR*, in: *Religion in Communist Lands* 18, no 2 / 1990, pp. 138-154, p. 143.

<sup>190</sup> SED and State Security instructed the regime-friendly members of the synod and presented personal gifts to potential allies, see Besier, SED-Staat 1993, pp. 321-324.

<sup>191</sup> Besier, SED-Staat 1993, p. 327.

#### b. The Catholic Church: anti-Communism under Cardinal Döpfner (1957-1961)

The election of Julius Döpfner in 1957, the youngest German bishop, well-known for his strict anti-Communism, was a signal to the state that the moderate course of bishop Weskamm was to be continued no longer. Before long the tensions between the Catholic Church and the state increased even further, with an impact especially on religious education and Catholic institutions, such as hospitals and orphanages. At the same time the government transferred responsibility for church policy to the State Secretary for Church Affairs and thereby removed the influence of the rather church-friendly CDU. The Berlin Committee of Ordinaries responded with several pastorals, clarifying that Communism and Catholicism were incongruent (encouraged by Döpfner's promotion to Cardinal in late 1958) and the conflict climaxed in January 1960 (pastoral *The Christian in an Atheistic Environment*). In late 1960, however, the GDR government made another attempt to ease tensions, and changed the staff at the State Secretary for Church Affairs. In July 1961, Döpfner was appointed Archbishop of Munich, possibly an attempt by the Vatican to contribute its share to a new church/state relationship.<sup>192</sup>

### 4. The 1960s

#### a. The Protestant Church: The "Thuringian Way" of co-operation

In the following years the intra-church discussions continued. Another episode in these is the argument over the *Zehn Artikel über Freiheit und Dienst der angefochtenen Kirche* ("Ten Articles on Freedom and Service of the contested Church"), expounded by the Committee of the Evangelical Governing Bodies of the eastern German Churches in March of 1963,<sup>193</sup> and

<sup>192</sup> This thesis is put forward by von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 908.

<sup>193</sup> This document was an instruction for pastors and a response to the regime's enforced atheism campaign. It denounced the cultural policies (for instance the Ten Commandments of Socialist Morals, recently set up by the SED Convention) and maintained the distance between Church and state. The SED particularly disliked the fact that Lutherans and the EKV found a common ground for this declaration and seemed to improve their co-operation, see Besier, *SED-Staat* 1993, p. 544f.

the response, the *Sieben Sätze* ('Seven Sentences'), drawn up by the 'progressive' intra-church opposition.<sup>194</sup>

An outstanding example of collaboration with the totalitarian regime is the case of Bishop Mitzenheim of Thuringia and his *Oberkirchenrat*<sup>195</sup> Lotz. Throughout the late 1950s and the 1960s the so-called '*Thüringer Weg*' led to continuous intra-church struggles, more than once nearly leading to the collapse of co-operation between the *Landeskirchen*. The Thuringian collaboration remained an exception to the rule, but it makes clear the extent to which the Protestant *Landeskirchen*'s responses to the regime's pressure varied.

On 21 July 1958, the government and East German Protestant Church leaders (as mentioned above negotiations with a deputy from the EKD having ceased) issued a declaration as a result of a meeting. Mitzenheim had led the Church's delegation and agreed on a text, but failed to mention the many complaints the Church wanted to highlight, and drew a picture of harmonious relations. Mitzenheim had obviously, and willingly, ignored the instructions and was strongly criticised when he reported to the eastern Committee of the EKD two days later. The chairman of the EKD-synod, Lothar Kreyssig, declared that the EKD could not endorse the conclusions of this meeting. Following a meeting of the EKD one day later, the Lutheran Church of Saxony expressed strong dissent, and concern, about the way the negotiations had been conducted, insisting that the next time, it should be ensured that all EKD members agreed on a binding text before it was signed by a Church delegation.<sup>196</sup>

It was attempted to keep the intra-church row secret, but as early as 7 August 1958, the State Secretary for Church Affairs noted down the results of a conversation which he had presumably<sup>197</sup> led with *Oberkirchenrat* Lotz. Lotz kept the regime informed about the further development of this dissent, including the question of the treatment of Church members that participated in the socialistic *Youth Consecration*. It materialised that he had been employed by the State Security Service, and had actively encouraged Mitzenheim on his path of collaboration.<sup>198</sup> Even when suspicions concerning Lotz' treason (including an article in the West Ger-

<sup>194</sup> For details see Besier, SED-Staat 1993, p. 540-553.

<sup>195</sup> *Oberkirchenrat* is the church assembly of a *Landeskirche*, and a member of this assembly also bears the title *Oberkirchenrat*.

<sup>196</sup> For details see Besier, *Thüringer Weg*, p. 187-189.

<sup>197</sup> This assumption is made by Besier, *Thüringer Weg*, p. 189.

<sup>198</sup> Mitzenheim himself was certainly not a Communist. "Gullibility" is the worst, Oestreicher can blame him for, see Oestreicher, Paul: *Christian Pluralism in a Monolithic State*, in: pp. Religion, State and Society, vol 21, no 3 & 4/1993, pp. 263-275, p. 269.

man newspaper „Die Welt“ in October 1961) were bought forward, Mitzenheim would not believe them, and remained under Lotz' influence.<sup>199</sup>

In December 1958, the *Landeskirchen* issued strict regulations regarding the Christmas Communion for those who had taken part in the Youth Consecration. Uniquely, Mitzenheim departed from the EKD's line regarding these regulations and issued a rather low key statement, that caused confrontations especially with the neighbouring Lutheran Church of Saxony, whose stricter approach led the clergy into severe pastoral problems. The conflict was the result of Mitzenheim's own totally different attitude towards the regime, and it increased the division even further. Finally, in early 1961, Mitzenheim was not re-elected as a member of the Council of the EKD,<sup>200</sup> and from then on dedicated himself entirely to close co-operation with the SED. In August 1961, only three days after the Berlin Wall had been erected, and one day before he turned 70, Mitzenheim received the highest Order of Merit the GDR awarded. From his West German colleagues, Mitzenheim asked (and received) a Mercedes car as a birthday gift.

Mitzenheim eventually retired in 1970, and the regime-friendly faction lost its most prominent figure. Lotz continued until his retirement in 1976, to exercise influence on the Thuringian *Landeskirche* under Mitzenheim's successor Braecklein.<sup>201</sup>

#### b. The Catholic Church: The struggle over the diocese boundaries

The new Bishop of Berlin, Alfred Bengsch, faced severe practical and pastoral problems, after the erection of the wall. Based in East Berlin he had to apply for a visa whenever he had to travel to West Berlin, at the same time he was afraid that he would not be re-admitted to the East on his way back. Being primarily concerned about the unity of his diocese he, thus, refrained from nearly any activity that could provoke the regime.

<sup>199</sup> To many of Mitzenheim's colleagues and clergy in the *Landeskirche* of Thuringia, however, the situation was only too obvious. See Besier, *Thüringer Weg*, pp. 197-200. Mitzenheim's role becomes even more tragic if statements Lotz made on his bishop are considered. In 1968, he complained in front of the State Security that the ageing Mitzenheim "blethers uncontrollable drivel ... and in his senility ... destroys much" that he [Lotz] had helped to build up over the years. Quoted in Besier, Gerhard: *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche 1969-1990. Die Vision vom "Dritten Weg"*. Berlin / Frankfurt a. M. 1995, p. 24 (henceforth referred to as Besier, *SED-Staat und Kirche* 1995 I).

<sup>200</sup> The connection between this event and Mitzenheim's political course was obvious to the other church leaders as well as to the regime. See Besier, *SED-Staat* 1993, p. 354-356.

<sup>201</sup> See Besier, *SED-Staat* 1995 I, pp. 65-76.



Bengsch was foremost a theologian, and his theology (his dissertation having focused on St. Irenaeus of Lyon, who believed that ecclesiastical tradition led to truth and thereby to a new approach to life in the world) probably had an impact on the way he led the East German church.<sup>202</sup> Under Bengsch the Berlin Committee of Ordinaries was formed into a real committee with himself as its leader; He sometimes decisively prevented any dissent on his policy of separation between church and state (once using the strong term *Dialogbesoffenheit* - "dialogue drunkenness" - to characterise deviant views<sup>203</sup>).

Soon after he came into office, Bengsch had to face a threat to the unity of his diocese from outside the GDR. In 1961/62, some years after the death of the German-friendly Pope Pius XII (1958), the Polish Committee of Bishops made repeated attempts to change the church boundaries in western Poland. The Polish bishops tried to obtain administrative control over the Polish territories that still belonged to German dioceses. This would probably have led to a general re-establishment of the East German diocese boundaries with only too predictable an impact on the diocese of Berlin. The situation became even more dangerous, when it turned out that the successor of John XXIII, Paul VI, wanted to improve the Vatican's relationship with the Soviet bloc as a whole.

On the occasion of the Second Vatican Council (from 1962 on), Bengsch resumed Döpfner's attempts to establish a new relationship between the German and the Polish bishops. The latter, aiming at a change of the diocese boundaries, responded favourably; but this soon turned into serious disappointment, when it became clear that the German bishops were not willing to fulfil their Polish colleagues' expectations regarding the church boundaries.<sup>204</sup>

Encouraged by the intra-church dissent, in late 1966 the GDR government refused access to West German bishops to their diocesan territories in the East, thereby forcing the church to introduce new measures in order to maintain the administrative structure of the church in the territories concerned. Bengsch (who momentarily had even been willing to concede new diocese boundaries subject to the condition that the unity of the German Catholic Church could be maintained) was in favour of the introduction of apostolic administrators; the more so, since the Polish bishops had suddenly and surprisingly agreed with this solution in regards to

<sup>202</sup> In spite of analysing this theological approach for nearly two pages (pp. 1157-1159), and while obviously hinting at this conclusion, Pilvousek denies that it is evident (p. 1159).

<sup>203</sup> Pilvousek, p. 1160. Bengsch's strict policy of distance from the state also meant little involvement in society. This ghetto-situation was, according to Fischer, encouraged by Bengsch's conservative views which led him into opposition to some of the progressive results of the Second Vatican Council and hindered the spiritual renewal of the East German Catholics. Fischer, Hans-Friedrich: *The Catholic Church in the GDR: a Look Back in Anger*, in: *Religion in Communist Lands* 19, no 2/1991, pp. 211-219. See p. 213f.

<sup>204</sup> For details on the dialogue between the German and the Polish episcopate see von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 915-919.

the former German territories in Poland. In an attempt to improve the relations with the Vatican, in 1968, Walter Ulbricht (Chairman of the State Council and the SED) said the GDR government was ready for diplomatic relations with the Vatican.<sup>205</sup> However, no progress was made, until a couple of years later the rapid movement of the new *Ostpolitik* left Bengsch without any support, either from the Vatican or from the new SPD-led government in Bonn. The changes in the East German Catholic Church started with the upgrading of the consecrated bishops in Magdeburg and Schwerin to coadjutor-bishops (a newly established title).<sup>206</sup>

## 5. Summary

The GDR's constitution guaranteed the churches a certain amount of freedom. Even the validity of the *Reichskonkordat* (concluded between Catholic Church and the Hitler government in 1933) was effectively acknowledged after attempts to declare it invalid had failed. Despite this theoretically comfortable situation, practical tensions increased after 1949, when the regime strove to stabilise itself. The teaching of materialism at schools was enforced and the atheistic Youth Consecration was introduced (1953). After the Military Chaplaincy Treaty between the EKD and the Federal Republic in 1957, the GDR regime renewed its accusations that the EKD was the militaristic 'NATO Church', and stressed that east German Protestants had to leave it in order to prove their commitment to peace.

The mounting state pressure had different effects among the Protestant Church leaders. One faction (led by Dibelius), after the experience of the Third Reich, put forth the argument, that the Church had to speak out against totalitarianism, since human rights were God-given and could not be questioned by any regime. Others were determined to fulfil the church's task in any society, even tolerating a certain amount of co-operation. Bishop Mitzenheim of Thuringia chose the path of collaboration as early as the 1950s. Interestingly enough, both Dibelius and Mitzenheim had been part of the Confessing Church under the Third Reich. The hostile environment of the totalitarian regime very often disguised this intra-church dissent, but the Protestant Church never really overcame it. Although the dissent was genuinely a theological one, it had far-reaching political consequences.

The rift became obvious, when, in 1961, Mitzenheim failed to be re-elected as a member of the EKD Council, and the regime publicly lauded Mitzenheim's attitude, honouring him with

<sup>205</sup> See Dunn, Dennis J.: *Détente and Papal-Communist Relations, 1962-1978*. Boulder, Colorado 1979, p. 172.

<sup>206</sup> See Goeckel, Catholicism, p. 102.

the GDR's highest Order of Merit just three days after the Berlin Wall had been built. There is little doubt that any other church leader (whether Protestant or Catholic) would have refused this award. The dispute nearly destroyed co-operation between the east German Protestant *Landeskirchen*.

The collaboration of the Thuringian Church during the late 1950s and early 1960s remained an outstanding exception, and met fierce resistance from other *Landeskirchen*. It is an example of the differing approaches, church leaders pursued when facing a mixture of repression, and offers of co-operation. The GDR regime called this 'differentiation', and the Thuringian Church proved that this policy had some success. Moreover, the *BEK* could not hide the widening intra-church rift among its members, which made this success considerably easier for the government and the State Security Service. Hence, the damage collaboration of individual clergy (such as *Oberkirchenrat* Lotz) did to the Church can not be overestimated.

The 1950s also signalled a change in the Catholic Church's attitude towards the regime, but this change was less fundamental. The new Berlin Bishop Weskamm (1951-1957) ended von Preysing's struggle over principles and pursued a more pragmatic approach for the sake of pastoral care. Weskamm's tone, in dealing with the SED regime, differed from von Preysing's in order to avoid confrontations, but it was always obvious that in principle he agreed with his predecessor.

In 1957, Julius Döpfner became Bishop of Berlin. He was an outspoken opponent of the SED and renewed von Preysing's fundamental criticism. The by now more stable and self-confident GDR government increased its pressure on the churches in the GDR, but sensed its chance to improve relations with the Vatican after the death of Pius XII. The appointment of Döpfner as Archbishop of Munich in 1961 probably indicated the new Pope's readiness to ease the tensions.

However, Döpfner's successor Bengsch was hardly in office when the Polish bishops started pressing for an adjustment of the east German church boundaries according to the political borders. In his stiff resistance, Bengsch was supported by Döpfner, but eventually lost out to his Polish colleagues, and the former German territories, east of the new Polish border were appended to Polish dioceses. The reason for this was not only the lack of support from the new West German government (the CDU-led cabinets up to 1969 had traditionally been against anything that could confirm the new western border of Poland); but more importantly the investiture of a new Pope (Paul VI) who was increasingly prepared to sacrifice the interests of the local Catholic Church in order to improve diplomatic relations with the east Euro-

pean governments. However, Bengsch was able, for the time being to maintain the unity of the German Catholic Church and his diocese.

### III. The churches in the GDR, 1970-1989

#### 1. The 1970s: Collaboration and *Ostpolitik*

The early 1970s were the period of *détente*. The *Ostpolitik* of the Brandt government contributed to, and was a product of, an overall improvement in the atmosphere between East and West - characterised by the CSCE process (that culminated in the *Final Act* of Helsinki in 1975). Between the two German states relations also improved; a number of treaties being concluded and both joined the United Nations in 1973.

For the German churches, the years 1969/70 signalled a change in a number of ways: In West Germany, the SPD formed a coalition with the FDP (Liberal Party) and, for the first time since the war, led a government. The SPD was interested in improving the relations to the GDR government, which was to have an impact on the churches, too.<sup>207</sup> At the same time, the East German *Landeskirchen* left the EKD to form the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (BEK),<sup>208</sup> and in early 1970, Paul VI started to re-shape the structure of the Catholic Church in East Germany.

#### a. The Protestant Church

##### 1) The EKD breaks up

In 1969, the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (BEK) was founded. A year earlier, the East Committee of the EKD had declared that the Socialist GDR was, compared to the capitalist Federal Republic, the "fairer form of human social existence" ("gerechtere Form menschlichen Zusammenlebens").<sup>209</sup> From this point on, although there were still occasional confrontations between the Protestant Church and the state; the Church's criticism shifted from a position denying the legitimacy of the political and economic order, to clashes over some of the regime's measures, such as abortion, censorship of Church publications, the

<sup>207</sup> Chancellor Willy Brandt had been Mayor of Berlin from 1957 which convinced him of the need for co-existence.

<sup>208</sup> Commonly translated as *Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR* or *Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR*.

<sup>209</sup> Quoted in Goeckel, p. 157.

problem of travelling abroad and so forth. Even German division was finally accepted, and accordingly carried out in the church sector. According to Lohse,<sup>210</sup> the separation of the EKD had obviously become a 'necessity'<sup>211</sup> as a result of the 'political development'<sup>212</sup> by the end of the 1960s. The east German Protestants had been continuously accused of being under the influence of the west German-dominated and therefore 'NATO-infiltrated' EKD. Tired of the relentless pressure, Lohse says, the east German *Landeskirchen* eventually decided to leave the EKD in 1969. However, the EKD and the BEK tried to maintain a "special community" (besondere Gemeinschaft) over the next twenty years. This was reflected in the joint celebrations on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's birthday.<sup>213</sup> This occasion, however, also demonstrated the extent to which the two churches had drifted apart in their approach towards political problems. When the Bishop of Dresden, Hempel (at that time chairman of the Committee of the BEK), addressed the guests at the ceremony organised by the EKD on 30 October 1983, in front of political guests of highest rank (including Chancellor Helmut Kohl) he attacked the NATO twin-track policy,<sup>214</sup> causing not only upset among the politicians (some even suspected he had acted under instructions by the GDR government) but also tensions between EKD and BEK.<sup>215</sup>

## 2) The "Church in Socialism"

After the split from the EKD, and the acceptance of the existence of the GDR, it was increasingly urgent for the east German Protestant church leaders to define the role of Protestantism in GDR society. The government had seemingly succeeded in pushing the Protestant Church out of its public role. Compared to the Catholic Church the Protestant Church had increasingly

<sup>210</sup> Himself bishop of the Lutheran Church of Hannover 1971-1988, member of the Council of the EKD 1973-1985, chairman of the Council of the EKD 1979-1985.

<sup>211</sup> Lohse, Eduard: *Der Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR (BEK) und die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) in ihrem Verhältnis zueinander und zu den beiden Staaten in Deutschland*, in *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages). Vol. 1-9. Published by the *Deutscher Bundestag*. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 997-1025, see p. 998.

<sup>212</sup> Lohse, p. 1004.

<sup>213</sup> Lohse, pp. 1009-1012 and 1018-1020.

<sup>214</sup> On 12 December 1979 NATO had decided to continue with the nuclear armament of western Europe (especially to equip bases in West Germany with nuclear weapons), if the intensive nuclear armament programme the Warsaw Pact carried out in eastern Europe (especially the GDR) had not been stopped within four years. The set deadline was approaching in autumn of 1983, and discussions on how to react to the continuing nuclear armament in eastern Europe were controversial.

<sup>215</sup> Lohse, p. 1017f.

failed to prevent its members from participating in secular rites like the *Youth Consecration* (within the Protestant Churches, the more pietistic churches of Thuringia and Saxony were less infected by the regime's attempts).<sup>216</sup> Church membership was also decreasing. The BEK was determined to retain its claim to a public position, but concepts of how to live under the GDR regime were diverse. The Lutherans, under the influence of Luther's "Doctrine of Two Kingdoms" (*Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*) tried to arrange themselves within the reality, but stayed away from any political involvement.<sup>217</sup> Some of the Lutherans (such as Heinrich Rathke, Bishop of Mecklenburg between 1970 and 1982) still saw their task to be the support of those that lived outside the society, and later on became entangled in conflict with the regime over prisoners of conscience and environmental activists.

In this situation, Albrecht Schönherr (Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg 1972-1981) created the famous term "Church in Socialism", trying to strike a balance between those denying the GDR's legitimacy, and those, who wanted to co-operate. The latter consisted of Werner Krusche (Bishop of Saxony 1969-1982) and the Provost Heino Falcke of Erfurt. They spoke of "critical solidarity", meaning a dialogue with the regime based on a basic approval of socialism. Schönherr's concept offered the best chances to unite the various approaches.

The term "Church in Socialism" left room for interpretation, made high involvement with the regime possible. Even after the collapse of the GDR, Provost Heino Falcke, one of the protagonists of the „progressive“ wing, sees it as the basis for what he called a process of immigration into the GDR.<sup>218</sup> Falcke states that, especially after the Third Reich, there was no option to "hibernate" in this state, to let the fear of getting involved with the regime dominate the church's policy (what Falcke calls the "Barmen trauma"). Instead, a "theologically responsible" involvement was required.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>216</sup> Höllen sees this as the end of the Protestant *Volkskirche* status, see p. 379.

<sup>217</sup> For a concise summing-up of Luther's doctrine applied to the situation in the GDR, see Krusche, Günter: *The Church between Accommodation and Refusal: the significance of the Lutheran Doctrine of „Two Kingdoms“ for the Churches of the German Democratic Republic*, in: *Religion, State and Society* 22, no. 3/1994, pp. 323-332, p. 327f. In this article, Krusche defends the Protestant Church's accommodation within the GDR society, accusing the opponents of this course of "polemics" and even claiming the Barmen Declaration as a model for the regime-friendly line (p. 329). He "wish[es] the reunited EKD a somewhat greater ability to keep critical distance from the powerful in state and society, such as the churches in the GDR had to maintain as the 'church in socialism'" (p. 329). This proves that Krusche has not, even after the collapse of the GDR, understood the fundamental difference between a totalitarian regime that is hostile towards religion from a principled point of view, and a democratically elected and church-friendly government.

<sup>218</sup> It is impossible to explain his theologically-based approach at length, but the concept, he (as well as Manfred Stolpe) were in favour of (marked by the two terms "Church in Socialism" and "Critical Solidarity") became more and more dominant within the Protestant Church in the GDR, especially in the last 15-20 years before the 'Wende'. Therefore a short abstract is given of his article *Kirche im Sozialismus*, in: Heydemann, Günther / Kettenacker, Lothar (Eds.): *Kirchen in der Diktatur*. Göttingen 1993, pp. 259-281.

<sup>219</sup> Falcke, p. 261f.

Falcke divides the state/church relationship in three main phases. The first (1949-1961) being characterised by the regime's attempt to consolidate itself, at the same time oppressing the church as much as possible. After the Wall had been built, the second phase (1961-1969) was dominated by the effort on both sides to re-define the Church's role in the GDR. The state reduced anti-church propaganda, whilst intra-church discussions came to an end with the founding of the BEK. Bishop Dibelius had in his pastoral (*Obrigkeitsbrief*) denied the GDR's legitimacy as an authority which Christians had to follow (according to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter 13). The BEK then drew up a declaration that, in its tenth and last article, referred to the "theology of revolution", as opposed to, a rather anti-revolutionary and conservative tradition in the history of the church to date. According to Falcke, Marxism was now seen as a "partner in the responsibility for the world". "Socialism became a political term of hope with wide acceptance" (*Sozialismus wurde zu einem Hoffnungsbegriff breiter Akzeptanz*).<sup>220</sup>

The third phase was the phase of the "Church in Socialism", a compromise term between "Church for Socialism" and "Church against Socialism". In 1971, the government invited the leaders of the BEK for a talks on a high political level, which led to a "normalisation of the relations between state and church, and even to a system of reciprocal stabilisation."<sup>221</sup> This was the "immigration into the GDR", as opposed to the emigration of many Christians before the wall was erected.

The BEK, says Falcke, also had to take into account that a sudden de-stabilisation of the GDR could have endangered the peace in Europe, if not in the world, and it well remembered the events of 17 June 1953, Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968. Therefore, the option to reform Socialism from within seemed to be the only practical, and achievable task. This was the formula of "Socialism capable of improvement" (*„verbesserlicher Sozialismus"*), the dream of a "better Socialism". This approach failed, as Falcke admits, but still had some positive results: First of all, the Church remained the only institution that had not been forced into line. Secondly, in many cases it could, by using its influence, help individuals. The intra-church debate also helped to keep the Church flexible and able to re-consider its policy. Finally, it showed, how a minority Church can exercise political influence and, as in 1989, can be at the spearhead of a political mass movement.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>220</sup> "Sozialismus wurde zu einem Hoffnungsbegriff breiter Akzeptanz." Falcke, p. 267.

<sup>221</sup> Falcke, p. 263f.

<sup>222</sup> Falcke, pp. 279-281.



A positive result of the Protestant Church's willingness to get "involved" with the system was the introduction of the military construction units (*Bausoldaten*) which young men could join instead of doing army service after 1964, a singularity in Communist east Europe.<sup>223</sup> Another was an amendment to the new constitution in 1968 - the guarantee of equal treatment, regardless of religious confession, was only incorporated after pressure from church leaders. However, it was mostly ignored in practice, as the obvious discrimination directed towards those who refused to participate in the *Youth Consecration*, proved.<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, the attempts to avoid public clashes with the regime also widened the gap between church leaders and their flock. The self-immolation of Oskar Brüsewitz in 1976 showed this dramatically.<sup>225</sup> Two years later, on 6 March 1978, the East Berlin Bishop Schönherr met the head of state Erich Honecker, forming what has been called an "uneasy alliance"<sup>226</sup> between church and state and „a kind of concordat“.<sup>227</sup> Shortly after this meeting, the so-called *Wehrkundeunterricht* (military education at school) was introduced, illustrating how limited the Protestant Church's influence on the government actually was.<sup>228</sup>

Another case detracting from the church leaders' state-friendly policies is that of the Bishop of Greifswald, Horst Gienke, a prominent representative of the regime-friendly part of the church. In 1979, he had invited Honecker to Greifswald, soon after the Cathedral had been restored. Ten years later, in early November 1989 (some days before the Wall came down) the synod of Greifswald dismissed its bishop by a majority vote, "an extraordinary vote, in recent Lutheran history almost unique."<sup>229</sup>

<sup>223</sup> See Eppelmann: *Opposition und Kirche in der DDR*, in: *German Studies Review* 1994, pp. 101-110, see p. 104f.

<sup>224</sup> See Volkmer, Werner: *East Germany: Dissenting Views during the Last Decade*, in: Tökes, Rudolf (ed.) *Opposition in Eastern Europe*. London: Macmillan 1979, p. 113-141, p. 123.

<sup>225</sup> In the aftermath of Brüsewitz's suicide, Protestant church leaders stressed their independence from the regime. Bishop Krusche stated, the Church had to occupy the "narrow space between opposition and opportunism", quoted in Holmes, Leslie: *The State and the Churches in the GDR*, in: Miller, Robert F. / Rigby, T. H. (Eds.): *Religion and politics in Communist States*. Canberra: National Australian University 1986, pp. 93-114, p. 105. On difficult position of the Protestant Church leaders after Brüsewitz' suicide, also see Besier, SED-Staat 1995 I, pp. 201-208.

<sup>226</sup> Chadwick, p. 44.

<sup>227</sup> Ramet, Pedro: *Cross and Commissar. The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1987, p. 83.

<sup>228</sup> See Fulbrook, Mary: *Co-option and commitment: aspects of relations between church and state in the German Democratic Republic*, in: *Social History* vol 12, no 1/1987, pp. 73-91, p. 79.

<sup>229</sup> Chadwick, p. 45.

## b. The Catholic Church: The *Ostpolitik* of Pope Paul VI.

From 1970 onwards, Paul VI carried out his plans to restructure the east German dioceses. After the upgrading of the consecrated bishops in Magdeburg and Schwerin in March 1970, his next step, in June 1972 (after the *Warsaw Treaty* between the Federal Republic and Poland had been concluded in 1972): was the appointment of an apostolic administrator for Görlitz, and the addition to the existing Polish diocese of the former German territories in Poland.<sup>230</sup> In summer 1973 (following the *Basic Treaty* between Federal Republic and GDR and an agreement between the Vatican and a GDR emissary) the West German dioceses' administrative control over their territories in the GDR was suspended and apostolic administrators were appointed for Erfurt, Magdeburg and Schwerin. The bishoprics which stretched out into GDR territory were effectively cut along the border. Hereby, the SED had for the first time succeeded in its attempts to divide the German Catholic Church.

Over the next years the negotiations between the Vatican and the GDR intensified; Bengsch's desperate efforts to regain influence over them were nearly entirely frustrated. In September 1976 (only two months after the death of Cardinal Döpfner who had been Bengsch's most influential ally in the German Committee of Bishops), the Berlin Committee of Bishops was established as an independent committee, yet, for the time being restricted to a five-year period. Even worse, in the eyes of Cardinal Bengsch, West Berlin was not part of the BBK, yet remained part of the diocese of Berlin.

In spite of stiff resistance from the German bishops, only a year later Paul VI announced that he had decided to create a new diocese structure in the GDR, according to the borders of the socialistic state. The following year (4 August 1977), the Vatican informed the Federal Government in Bonn that (according to the regulations of the *Reichskonkordat*) it would be consulted on the matter of a new church structure in Germany on 28 August. Only two days later, however, Paul VI died and the negotiations were aborted. The GDR Foreign Secretary still made his pre-arranged visit to Rome on 29 October, but had to leave without having signed anything, since the new Pope, the Pole John Paul II (following the short pontificate of John Paul I) had "little illusions about the sense of concessions towards a by principle atheist state."<sup>231</sup> Bengsch, who died on 13 December 1979, had (in spite of lacking any support for

<sup>230</sup> See von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 920-24.

<sup>231</sup> Von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 929.

some years) just succeeded in maintaining the unity of the German Church, albeit having paid the price in political abstinence.

## 2. The churches in West and East Germany

The relations between the Protestant Churches in East and West Germany remained difficult throughout the 40 years of German division. Until the BEK was founded in 1969, the East German Protestants were under consistent pressure from the regime to split from the EKD. Despite this they refused, claiming a shared tradition; the EKD legally never split at all. Even after 1969, the West German Protestant Churches supported the East German through substantial financial contributions<sup>232</sup> and publications. However, the two bodies seemed to drift apart under the influence of the political systems they lived in; and their relationship became more and more politicised.<sup>233</sup> The East German Protestants now saw themselves as catalysts of East/West dialogue, thereby often arguing against the EKD's views. In 1985, the EKD, made a declaration in support of democracy, but tempered it with criticism of the Bonn government and the way democracy was exercised in the Federal Republic.<sup>234</sup> Nevertheless, east German Church leaders were outraged and accused the EKD of having blessed the West German system with "religious dignity".<sup>235</sup>

The GDR government often managed to use this intra-church rift to its own advantage, turning the BEK against the EKD and the West German state.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>232</sup> The regime also benefited greatly from these financial transactions by receiving West German Deutschmarks from the EKD and passing on East German Marks to the BEK. On these fairly dubious business connections, see Besier, SED-Staat 1995 I, pp. 511-547.

<sup>233</sup> See for example the difficult negotiations with respect to the declaration of EKD and BEK on the occasion of 1 September 1979 (40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War). They made very clear, the extent that the German Protestants were already divided from each other, and how much political interference hindered mutual understanding between East and West. See Besier, SED-Staat 1995 I, 278-285.

<sup>234</sup> Besier points out that the EKD (led by its chairman Michael Schmude, Member of Parliament for the SPD) continued to cover up the fundamental difference between the democratic West German constitution and the SED regime, see Besier, Gerhard: *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche 1983-1991. Höhenflug und Absturz*. Berlin/Frankfurt M. 1995 (henceforth referred to as SED-Staat 1995 II), p. 139.

<sup>235</sup> See Besier, SED-Staat 1995 II, pp. 139-141.

<sup>236</sup> See above Hempel's highly controversial speech on 30 October 1983. Another occasion was the declaration the EKD and the BEK set up to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1985 (8 May). This so-called 'Wort zum Frieden' (Epistle on Peace). The GDR government was very pleased with the result of the heated discussions between EKD and BEK, see Besier, SED-Staat 1995 II, p. 125f. Within the Church, some expressed disagreement, see p. 123f. Hempel, Stolpe and other Protestant Church leaders were also involved into government's celebrations on the occasion of 8 May 1985, see p. 127.

The Catholic Church did not face these problems to the same extent. Whenever dissent existed between the West and the East German bishops, it was usually better concealed. Even after the BBK was set up, the Rome-orientated, and traditionally supra-national structured Catholic Church was more able to avoid the pitfall of being led into intra-church confrontation by the SED regime.

### 3. The 1980s: stagnation of the GDR

#### a. The Protestant Church

In the late 1970s, and the early 1980s, the poor economic performance of the GDR had already led to political setbacks: The regime had given in to consumers' demand by allowing delicatessen and the so-called *Intershops*, which offered western-imported goods to the 'privileged few' (including West German visitors who paid in Deutschmarks). These were "ideological and political defeats which the regime barely tried to justify" ("ideologisch und politisch ... Niederlagen, die nur noch sehr selten zu rechtfertigen versucht wurden").<sup>237</sup> Ever since the famous meeting between Honecker and the Protestant Church leaders on 6 March 1978, the Church was needed for domestic political stabilisation. Indeed the churches' support was increasingly needed the closer the GDR came to its economic and political Armageddon.<sup>238</sup> For this simple reason, religion became fashionable again amongst high state officials, as illustrated by Honecker's visit to the Greifswald church in 1989. In spite of entering a form of partnership with the regime, the Protestant Church retained its structural independence. It could thereby provide room for the discontent<sup>ed</sup> who gathered under the roof of the Protestant Church. It also attracted intellectuals, as opposed to other less active east European

<sup>237</sup> Noack, Axel: Die Phasen der Kirchenpolitik der SED und die sich darauf beziehenden Grundlagenbeschlüsse der Partei- und Staatsführung in der Zeit von 1972 bis 1989, in: *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages), Vol. 1-9. Published by the *Deutscher Bundestag*. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 1048-1133, see p. 1109.

<sup>238</sup> See Noack, pp. 1115-1123.

Lutheran churches (Sandford compared the GDR Lutherans to those in Estonia, Latvia and Hungary), and would later strengthen the opposition movement.<sup>239</sup>

## b. The Catholic Church

Bengsch's successor Joachim Cardinal Meisner led the east German Catholics through a time of comparative quiet. The SED became aware of its own diminishing support among the GDR's population, and the Church felt the impact of the continuing fast paced secularisation, losing a considerable number of members (in Eastern Berlin from 178,000 in 1978 to 132,000 in 1988).<sup>240</sup> With both sides feeling relatively vulnerable further clashes were avoided, and the Catholic Church even seemed to depart from its previous position of fundamental denial with the pastoral letter 'Catholic Church in the Socialist State' in 1986. The metaphor of the 'alien house', that Meissen Bishop Spülbeck had introduced in 1956, and which had also been used by Bengsch, was refined to 'liveable house',<sup>241</sup> and Höllen sees this pastoral as the end of the strict 'non-involvement' policy which had begun with von Preysing's directive in 1947.<sup>242</sup> Interestingly enough, by the early 1980s, both the BBK and the Vatican had re-considered their policy towards the Socialist regime: When the BBK (after five years) asked for an unlimited renewal of its status in 1981, Pope John Paul II only conceded a temporary renewal of five years, thereby expressing his reservation about the current church structure in the GDR.

<sup>239</sup> See Goeckel, Robert F.: *Is the GDR the future of Hungary and the Baltics? Dissent and the Lutheran Church in Eastern Europe*, in: Childs, David / Baylis, Thomas A. / Rueschemeyer, Marilyn (Eds.): *East Germany in comparative perspective*. London / New York 1989, pp. 110-136, see p. 128. As a reason for this, Sandford sees the different tradition of east German Protestantism, critical to secular authority and encouraged by the experience of the Third Reich and the impact of Barth and Bonhoeffer, see pp. 129-131.

<sup>240</sup> Von Hehl, Katholische Kirche, p. 931-932.

<sup>241</sup> See Goeckel, Robert F.: *The Catholic Church in East Germany*, in: Ramet, Pedro (Ed.): *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*. Durham / London 1990, pp. 93-116, p. 110.

<sup>242</sup> See Höllen, p. 151, footnote 407.

#### 4. Change in Eastern Europe and the churches' role

##### a. Economic crisis in eastern Europe

In the 1980's, unnoticed at first in the West, the nature of most of the East European regimes changed. The economic crises could not be disguised any longer. The people felt deprived of what they perceived as affluence in the West. The generation that had grown up under Communism realised that the system did not offer what it had promised, and dissent mounted. On the side of the governments, on the other hand, the generation of those who had established Communism grew old and died out. New leaders were more likely to have a more pragmatic attitude and to realise that economic and political reforms were overdue. In Poland, the regime had effectively already acknowledged the opposition movement-Solidarity. In Hungary, the government started to loosen its grip on the churches (as a result of the economic crisis), and independent groups that had emerged in both the Reformed and the Lutheran Church of Hungary in the late 1970s increased their public activities.<sup>243</sup> At this point, Mikhail Gorbachev came into office in 1985. He inherited the leadership of a country that was stagnating and, as a result of the ruinous nuclear arms race, was about to be overwhelmed by economic problems. The legitimacy of the Communist regimes became more and more undermined. As a result the regimes turned to the churches, which shows how desperate they were. The Communist regimes hoped to align with widely respected institutions and thereby gain legitimacy for themselves as well as domestic stability.

##### b. Renewed state church co-operation

###### 1) Poland: The Church turns away from the regime

By the mid-1970s, the attitude of the Catholic Church had changed. It was not prepared to act as a strut for the regime any longer. Despite government's calls for support from the Church,<sup>244</sup> the Church obviously decided to change sides. When the Workers' Defence

<sup>243</sup> For details on this development which led rather smoothly into the transformation to democracy, see Pungur, pp. 143-146.

<sup>244</sup> On 3 September 1976, Prime Minister Gierk again declared that "there is no conflict between Church and State in Poland," see *International Herald Tribune*, 9 September 1976, quoted in Rupnik, p. 89.

Committee was founded on September 23, 1976 (one of the members was a Catholic priest) the Church backed the Workers' Defence Committee by holding Church collections for the families of those arrested or sacked (28 November 1976).

By supporting dissent the Church won the respect of Marxist intellectuals in opposition, who suddenly saw it as an ally against the totalitarian government.<sup>245</sup> At the same time, the Catholic lay Left drifted away from Marxism and back to the Church, since the "absolute primacy of ethical values in social and political life",<sup>246</sup> as Rupnik calls it, had been upheld by the Catholic Church.<sup>247</sup> The ability to "integrate" intellectual opposition strengthened the Church in its confrontation with the state; this, according to Rupnik, was "a de facto recognition by the state of a greater autonomy for the society as a whole."<sup>248</sup> The people acknowledged that the Church had maintained its independence from the regime; by that time (in the late 1970s), 55% of the population still attended mass.

When Solidarity, the workers' union movement, emerged, it "enjoyed the benevolent regard of the Roman Catholic Church" (with Cardinal Wyszyński as its head)<sup>249</sup> and in return publicly supported Wyszyński and the Church with a distinctive Catholic religiosity.<sup>250</sup> The Polish opposition movement developed parallel to, and, was "profoundly influenced by the increasingly active role of the Roman Catholic Church in the social and political life of the country."<sup>251</sup> This was only possible, because the Church had retained its structural and ideological independence from the regime, backed strongly by the population. The Church's historical legitimacy was closely identified with the Polish nation and by the rejection of the regime's atheistic base it naturally attracted support from the religious and anti-Russian feelings of the people. Since the regime could not do without it, the Church became the only recognised opposition.<sup>252</sup> For a long time, however, it remained a "loyal opposition, since some form of *modus vivendi* with the communist authorities [was] a necessity."<sup>253</sup>

<sup>245</sup> See Rupnik, p. 90f.

<sup>246</sup> Rupnik, p. 91. He refers to the book *The Left, the Church, the Dialogue*, written by Adam Michnik, a leading member of the *Workers Defence Committee* who praises the role of the Church as very supportive for the opposition movement.

<sup>247</sup> See Rupnik, p. 91.

<sup>248</sup> Rupnik, p. 92.

<sup>249</sup> See Rothschild, Joseph: *Return to Diversity. A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*. New York 1989, p. 199.

<sup>250</sup> See Chadwick, p. 104f.

<sup>251</sup> Rupnik, p. 86.

<sup>252</sup> See Rupnik, p. 86.

<sup>253</sup> Rupnik, p. 86.

## 2) The election of John Pope II

On October 16, 1978, Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, Archbishop of Crakow became the first Polish Pope as John Paul II. Poland underwent a wave of religious patriotism,<sup>254</sup> and for some years the position of the Polish Church officials (caught between the government and the revolutionary and increasingly self-confident Solidarity movement) became rather uncomfortable.<sup>255</sup> The situation for the government was even worse: "The already brittle legitimacy of Gierek's regime was ... dealt ... [a] damaging blow" by the election of Pope John Paul II. The new pope's triumphal nine-day visit to his homeland the following June further highlighted the stark contrast between a vibrant people and a sclerotic political system.<sup>256</sup>

One of the most famous excesses of Communist violence was the murder of the Polish Father Jerzy Popieluszko. After a number of clashes with the regime (partly due to his involvement with the Solidarity trade union), he was killed by members of the security police in 1984. The fact that the murder was not simply covered up by the regime proves the strong pressure the regime faced from the people and the Catholic Church, and although the three policemen were publicly convicted and received long sentences, "rule by the Communist Party never recovered its reputation after his martyrdom."<sup>257</sup>

Wyszynski, the architect of the long-lasting *modus vivendi* between state and Church in Poland, died in 1981. "By a mixture of courage and wisdom, and with the aid of a Polish Pope, he prepared the way, step by step, for the return in Poland, after nearly half a century, of a government with Christian ideals."<sup>258</sup>

## 3) National anniversaries as transition points for the state/church relations

By the early 1980s, other Communist governments in eastern Europe were trying to utilise the churches in their efforts to remain control over the increasingly discontent<sup>ed</sup> people. Opportunities for collaboration were located in the national and religious anniversaries which occurred in the 1980s. In this field, state/churches co-operation was somewhat forced upon them and these occasions illustrate well how the climate between church and state had changed within as little as a decade. In Poland, the millennium of the Church in 1966 was celebrated as a national feast, but the regime tried to draw people's attention to secular events. The millennium

<sup>254</sup> Rothschild even calls it "religious nationalism", p. 198.

<sup>255</sup> See Chadwick, p. 105f.

<sup>256</sup> Rothschild, p. 198.

<sup>257</sup> Chadwick, p. 79.

<sup>258</sup> Chadwick, p. 106.



of the foundation of Hungary in 1973 (at the same time being the millennium of Christianity in Hungary) was celebrated. The church celebrations were, however, usually kept at low key, and the churches' role in the countries history minimalised.<sup>259</sup> In Czechoslovakia, the 1100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. Methodius in July 1985 (150,000 - 250,000 faithful attended the celebration), marked the beginning of a movement of publicly demonstrated Catholicism. In late 1987, a petition demanding religious liberty and the re-establishment of church property and institutions was set up, backed by Cardinal Tomasek. 600,000 people (including a number of non-Catholics, which showed growing ecumenical support) signed the petition. It was also endorsed by the West German Catholic Church and received a very supportive echo in the Western media.<sup>260</sup> Finally, the Czechoslovakian government signalled a shift in its religious policy by announcing its intention to follow the model of *glasnost* and *perestroika* set by the USSR.<sup>261</sup> and the Vatican was eventually allowed to appoint four new bishops in summer 1989.

In East Germany, the change was particularly amazing. Here, Martin Luther turned within 16 years from a bourgeois traitor of the peasants' revolution into a German revolutionary. In 1967, the Protestant Church's celebrations for the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 95 theses were hindered by the authorities (for example, previously obtained permission for lectures by Western speakers in Wittenberg was withdrawn when guests from the West were already en route) and an alternative celebration organised. In contrast, in 1983, on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's birth, the atmosphere between the Protestant Church and the East German state had altered and the celebrations were carried out in co-operation.<sup>262</sup> In Latvia, Estonia and Hungary, the 1983 celebrations led to publicity for the Protestant communities after a long period when the government had managed to sideline them.<sup>263</sup>

However, the change was most obvious in the USSR. In 1983, the Danilov monastery in Moscow, restored at great expense, was handed back to the Patriarch (the first monastery the Church was to own since the revolution). In 1988, three years after Gorbachev had come into office, state and Church celebrated the Russian millennium on a large scale - including per-

<sup>259</sup> For details see Chadwick, pp. 85-87.

<sup>260</sup> See Ramet, S., Czechoslovakia, p. 388.

<sup>261</sup> See Ramet, S., Czechoslovakia, p. 387-391.

<sup>262</sup> The official brochure states: "...the German Democratic Republic now pays its tribute to Luther's historical achievement and seeks to uphold its progressive values. See 'From Theses concerning Martin Luther: The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformer's Birth'; the official quinqucentenary brochure, 1983", in: Thomanek, Jürgen, K. A. / Mellis, James (Eds.): *Politics, Society and Government in the German Democratic Republic: Basic Documents*. Oxford 1989; document no D76, p. 164f.

<sup>263</sup> See Chadwick, p. 86.

formances of sacral music in the Bolshoi Theatre, which were attended by high state officials, and from 1988, bibles were allowed to be imported into the Soviet Union.<sup>264</sup>

From this date onwards it became obvious to the West, as well as to the rest of the Communist bloc, that the system in the Soviet Union was about to substantially change. This was the beginning of a development that led to political, and therefore religious, freedom across eastern Europe. Starting in the USSR (and here as a dialogue between state and the Catholic Church in Lithuania in February 1988<sup>265</sup>), church property all over eastern Europe was handed back, seminaries re-opened and the role of the Churches in a (still) Socialist society publicly stressed. In 1988, the last priests and bishops were released, and in 1988 (in Latvia) and 1989 (in Lithuania) new bishops and apostolic administrators were allowed to be appointed.<sup>266</sup>

Many measures could not be implemented immediately, due to the slow and often reluctant local authorities, and there were often quarrels about former church property. However, the attitudes towards the churches were generally friendlier, for instance church appointments no longer needed state approval. By 1990, Czechoslovakia, as an example, had 13 Catholic bishops again. This led to a change in the churches themselves. Many regime-friendly officials were dismissed, for instance in the Catholic Church of Czechoslovakia and the Reformed Church of Romania.<sup>267</sup> There was also an immediate struggle concerning the legalisation of the Uniate Churches (some Orthodox Churches seeing no need for what they considered was a new schism), especially after the Vatican had appointed five new bishops for Romanian dioceses (in March 1990).

The decades of repression made dialogue with the new governments difficult, the more so since the flock of the faithful was smaller, but had grown more conservative under the pressure. This was further complicated by the quarrels about new church officials, which increased the difficulties the church leaders had when dealing with the collapsing or changing state authorities, many of which still worked inefficiently and were full of old Socialist bureaucrats.

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<sup>264</sup> See Chadwick, p. 86f.

<sup>265</sup> See Solchanyk, Roman / Hvat, Ivan: *The Catholic Church in the Soviet Union*, in: Ramet, Pedro (Ed.): *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*. Durham / London: Duke University Press 1990, pp. 49-92, p. 85.

<sup>266</sup> See Solchanyk / Hvat, p. 86f.

<sup>267</sup> See Chadwick, p. 202f.

## 5. The churches and the East German opposition

The churches in the GDR could maintain a certain amount of independence, definitely more so than most of their East European counterparts. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church was of little importance, as far as opposition movement was concerned. This was not only due to its relatively small size but also to the Catholic Church's general policy of refraining from large scale involvement in the GDR society.

The Protestant parishes, on the other hand, attracted various sorts of dissidents, particularly because of the Protestants' public role, even in non-religious affairs. Often, critical concerts or readings would be organised under Protestant church roofs; which also attracted non-Christians. The government expected the churches to help channel the dissent and stabilise the regime. Very often this did indeed happen, as Stolpe and Falcke publicly admitted.<sup>268</sup>

In the late 1980s, however, the opposition groups under the roof of the Protestant communities grew stronger and more self-confident. Protestant church leaders, on increasingly friendly terms with the SED government, saw these groups as obstacles in the way of co-operation. A telling example of this are the events in September 1988, when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) met in West Berlin. The SED government allowed East Berlin hotels to accommodate visitors to the conference who had not been able to find rooms in West Berlin. Church-affiliated protest groups planned demonstrations in front of the hotels in order to protest against third-world policies of the IMF. Attempting to improve its international reputation, the government tried to prevent any disturbances and church officials agreed to help.<sup>269</sup>

## 6. The 1989 revolution in the GDR

### a. The Protestant Church

As the 1980s proceeded the Protestant Church was less and less prepared to provide help in stabilising Honecker's regime. The laity and the lower clergy, attracting the discontented, started to make the position of the higher church administration increasingly uncomfortable.

<sup>268</sup> Goeckel, p. 177.

<sup>269</sup> See Besier, SED-Staat 1995 II, p. 334f.

The government, by now led by a clique of old and often ill bureaucrats in the *Politbüro*, was increasingly detached from the GDR's population, and failed to respond to the political problems, as it had failed to solve the economic difficulties. In 1988, the regime even tried to oppress the dissent that emerged from the Protestant Church by some of the old Stalinist measures (like censorship of publications), but this only encouraged the discontented to raise their voices even louder.<sup>270</sup> When the protest movement finally became public, and rapidly spread out to be a mass movement, some Protestant parishes had acted as the seedbed for the peaceful revolution.

#### b. The Catholic Church

In the 1989 revolution, the Catholic Church itself was not involved, not only due to the change of the bishop of Berlin (Meisner was elected Archbishop of Cologne, after Cardinal Höffner's death, and Georg Sterzinsky was appointed Bishop of Berlin only on 24 June), but also because of the still valid policy of political abstinence. The role of some clerics (such as Msg. Dücke as discussion leader at round table meetings) remained an exception.

### 7. The GDR churches and the *Staatssicherheit*

#### a. The Protestant Church

It seems that systematic infiltration of the Protestant Church by the Ministry for State Security (*MfS*) did not take place; even in the most co-operative Church of Thuringia, the SED hardly succeeded in its attempts to influence decisions over church appointments.<sup>271</sup> Yet, some indi-

<sup>270</sup> See Sandford, John: *The Peace Movement and the Church in the Honecker years*, in: pp. Glasner, Gert-Joachim / Wallace, Ian (Eds.): *The German Revolution of 1989: causes and consequences*, Oxford 1992, pp. 124-143, p.138.

<sup>271</sup> However, Besier shows that great but subtle efforts were made by the regime to influence the election of the Bishop of Berlin in 1981: See Besier, Gerhard: *Die Rolle des MfS bei der Durchsetzung der Kirchenpolitik der SED und die Durchdringung der Kirchen mit geheimdienstlichen Mitteln*, in: *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland. Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"* (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages). Vol. 1-9. Published by the *Deutscher Bundestag*. Vol 6: *Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen*

viduals had been corrupted (especially *Oberkirchenrat* Gerhard Lodz, but also the Bishop of Greifswald Horst Gienke).<sup>272</sup> To an extent, contact with the State Security organisation was necessary in day-to-day church life, but in its policy of co-operation, the Church was often outwitted and led into intra-church dispute, thereby becoming a victim of the regime.

The GDR government tried to corrupt the Protestant Church, but never tried to force it into line. The SED's ideological pretension was totalitarian, but after a while it became a "lazy monopolist",<sup>273</sup> tolerating the existence of the Church, and trying to abuse it, in which to an extent succeeded.

#### b. The Catholic Church

Evidence of willing collaboration between clerics and the *MfS* has not yet been found. However, the regime was occasionally able to gain some information from single clerics, providing it with a better understanding of the intra-church debates. On the other hand, it was nearly impossible for the SED to influence the Church's decisions due to its hierarchic structure. Von Hehl sums up "The Church's political course was essentially the job of one man, the Bishop of Berlin."<sup>274</sup>

### 8. Summary

The 1970s were the age of *détente* and *Ostpolitik*, under the new SPD-led government (since 1969) and relations between the two German states improved. The Protestant Church eventually gave in to pressure from the East German government with the founding of the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (BEK) in 1969. For the first time, the SED regime had succeeded in dividing one of the East German churches from its West German counterpart.

It has to be stressed that the founding of the BEK strengthened the position of the Protestants (although they never achieved the unity of the Catholic Church). It helped to improve the co-

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*Phasen der SED-Diktatur*. Ed. by Peter Maser. Baden-Baden / Frankfurt M. 1995, pp. 509 - 558, see pp. 545-551.

<sup>272</sup> Goeckel, p. 177-179. A number of further case studies were carried out by Besier: See Besier, *Die Rolle des MfS*, pp. 524-544.

<sup>273</sup> Goeckel, p. 180.

<sup>274</sup> Von Hehl, *Katholische Kirche*, p. 933.

operation between the Protestant Churches, especially between the diverse traditions of Lutherans and the Old Prussian Union, enabling them to speak with one voice when dealing with the regime. It also restricted the Thuringian collaboration, and from this point, the regime found it harder to make headway in its strategy of so-called "differentiation". However, the founding of the BEK also made it even more urgent for the East German Protestants to define their role in the Socialist society. The result of this (often very heated) argument was Schönherr's formula of „Church in Socialism“. It indicates that the Church had, on the one hand, accepted the GDR with its society, but at the same time claimed a public role in this society. The regime on the other hand granted this public role to a certain extent and maintained the friendly atmosphere, as long as Socialism as such was not questioned. In 1971, the government formally acknowledged the BEK, and entered talks after thirteen years of official non-recognition of the EKD (contacts with bishops as heads of the *Landeskirchen* had been maintained).<sup>275</sup> Goeckel calls this new relationship an "informal exchange of legitimacy" ("einen informellen Austausch von Legitimität") between state and church.<sup>276</sup> Whether 'Church in Socialism' marks support for the Socialist society, or simply describes the situation the Protestants found themselves in, the BEK had clearly accepted that the GDR regime would not vanish and some kind of co-operation was necessary.

Yet, the BEK could not entirely cover diverging approaches among Protestant church leaders. 'Church in Socialism' was at heart a compromise. Goeckel comments on the term: "Its greatest virtue was its vagueness" ("Seine größte Tugend war seine Unbestimmtheit").<sup>277</sup> It was, however, this vagueness that made rather regime-friendly interpretations possible. The Erfurt provost Heino Falcke is a good example of this. The necessity to settle day-to-day problems with the SED regime, to compromise and to co-operate to a certain extent is obvious. For the Protestant Church with its still broad membership base, the idea of political involvement was not altogether an anathema, and credit has to be given for reaching the amendment to the constitution in 1968. The following years proved, however, that this guarantee of religious freedom was worthless. Thus, it is difficult to accept, especially retrospectively, that Falcke can still speak of Socialism as 'capable of improvement'. After the churches' experiences with Socialism in the 1950s and 1960s, Falcke (as others) should have realised that Socialism was not capable of reform. The totalitarian claim of Socialism as a philosophy left no room for religion. The regime accepted the Protestant Church's role unwillingly and continued to try

<sup>275</sup> See Koch, pp. 164-167.

<sup>276</sup> Goeckel, p. 180.

<sup>277</sup> Goeckel, p. 160.

to push it out of the public arena. This only changed after the meeting between Schönherr and Honecker on 6 March 1978, when the crumbling regime looked to the churches for support in order to improve its standing amongst the GDR's population.<sup>278</sup> The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's birthday in 1983 provided an opportunity for the government to demonstrate improved relations between the state and the Protestant Church.

In the meantime, the Catholic Church also entered negotiations with the regime; but it was not the local church that initiated and conducted these negotiations. After a phase of intensified diplomatic contacts with a number of eastern European countries during the 1960s, Pope Paul VI also wanted to improve the relations with the GDR government. Not only without serious consultations, but even against the stiff resistance of the German bishops (especially the Bishop of Berlin Bengsch), Paul VI, in summer 1973, suspended the administrative control of west German bishops over the parts of their dioceses that lay east of the internal German border and appointed apostolic administrators for these territories. As a result, the German Catholic Church was divided along the internal German border. When (again ignoring Bengsch's desperate interventions) Paul VI set up the Berlin Committee of Bishops in 1976,<sup>279</sup> the German Catholics were for the first time structurally divided and the diocese of Berlin remained the only link between East and West Germany. It was only Paul VI's death that prevented the establishment of totally independent east German dioceses in autumn 1977. John Paul II had no intentions of compromising as far as Paul VI had. His personal experience of Communism (albeit with a relatively mild regime in Poland) led him to abort the negotiations immediately. The Pope's unwillingness to acknowledge the status quo was underlined when, in 1981, he extended the mandate of the BEK for only another five years, despite the BEK's request for unlimited confirmation; therefore, the east German Catholic Church retained its structural distance from the regime. The Catholic Church never again attempted to enter negotiations with the GDR government as eagerly as Paul VI had, and the east German bishops refrained from any political activity. The most obvious and immediate result was that some links between the west and the east German Catholics were maintained. The regime's attempts to entirely break up the German Catholic Church, as it had done with the Protestants, failed. The 'Bensch era' (1961-1979) will on one hand always be seen as a phase of stabilisation for the east German Catholic Church, which managed to remain undivided, and spoke

<sup>278</sup> This view is also expressed by Smith, p. 74.

<sup>279</sup> To date, the Berlin Committee of Ordinaries had only acted as a regional conference under the roof of the German Committee of Bishops, but was then upgraded to an independent body.

with one voice. On the other hand this unity could only be maintained by avoiding public involvement in society.

As far as German division was concerned, the churches remained a link between both societies. However, German division and the totally different situations the churches found themselves in, also deepened the divisions between them. This was especially true within the German Protestant Church where the east German Protestants were sometimes successfully turned against the west German state, as their leaders were more willing to co-operate with the GDR government. In fact, they increasingly adopted the SED's propaganda against the West German state. The extent to which the SED succeeded in convincing the church leaders of the benefits of Socialism and the faults of the West German 'capitalist' system became apparent by the mid-1980s.

The hierarchical structured Catholic Church, still united under the roof of the German Committee of Bishops, was more difficult to use for this purpose.

In the 1980s, the GDR stagnated economically and politically. The GDR government turned to the churches, especially to the Protestant Church, in order to stabilise its position. An exchange of legitimacy was achieved, as in this way the Protestant Church could maintain its public role in spite of a loss in membership. The Catholic Church, also decreasing in membership, continued to lead a niche existence under the leadership of the Berlin Cardinal Meisner (1980-1989). A possible change in the Catholic Church towards more public activity and acceptance of the political status quo, as some historians have observed in 1986, did not manifest itself before the regime collapsed in 1989.

During the early 1980s, across eastern Europe, a change in the regimes' attitude towards the churches became apparent. New political leaders were more likely to change the governments' previous course and they were encouraged to do so, by the worsening economic crises. The numerous religious and national anniversaries provided a platform for the churches to re-appear on the public stage, in some countries for the first time after decades of oppression. In Poland, however, the Catholic Church had already reached a different stage. Over the years it had grown confident enough to publicly turn from the government to the opposition movement Solidarity, and forced the government to acknowledge its existence. Hence, the Polish government became the most shaken Communist regime in Europe as early as the mid-1970s. The change in the Communists' church policy prepared the ground for the recognition of opposition movements in general and thereby heralded the end of the totalitarian regimes as such.



This also held true for the GDR, albeit at a later stage than in Poland. The new public role of the Protestant Church encouraged opposition groups that had gathered under its roof. They, too, became publicly noticeable and established themselves as a semi-acknowledged opposition in the niche that the structurally independent Protestant Church provided. This channeling of dissent stabilised the regime, but also helped the Protestant Church to position itself in society. It considered itself a mediator between the government and those who demanded more political freedom; even non-Christians becoming involved in these activities. However, in the last years of the GDR, the opposition against the regime grew so strong that the church leaders struggled to control it. At times, it seemed that church officials like Stolpe and the regime (in the persona of the State Security Service) were allies in their efforts to keep the discontented quiet. Nevertheless, from these groups, the mass protest movement eventually emerged in 1989.

The Catholic Church was publicly never as involved in political dissent as the Protestant Church. Catholic Christians remained alienated from Socialism and from the state itself. However, when the revolution started, Catholic laity did involve itself in the unprecedented events.

## PART C: Conclusion

### 1. Christians and the 1989-Revolutions in eastern Europe

It was certainly not the Christian Churches who overthrew the Communist regimes in eastern Europe in 1989-90. More important was the Communist states' inability to work efficiently. They ended up as heavy-handed bureaucracies, and economic failings became more and more obvious, in contrast to the relative affluence enjoyed by people in western Europe. When the Soviet economy ran into such trouble that the menace of invasion disappeared, the satellite states were no longer forced to remain subordinate. In 1989, the regimes that had obviously been stable until some months before collapsed so suddenly that it came as a surprise to everyone, possibly most surprising for the opposition movements themselves. One reason for this is that (as opposed to the dictatorships in the past) Communist regimes were obviously not 'legitimate', and did not seek legitimacy with the help of religion. They had also abandoned (at least theoretically) the concepts of nationality and national tradition, since these were regarded as being irrelevant to society. However, the people were unwilling to abandon the idea of nationality. The outbreak of nationalism across eastern Europe after 1990 shows that the artificial construct of Socialist internationalism had only superficially oppressed national identity which remained an obviously natural human feeling. The churches provided the natural aegis of national identity and tradition, which increased their attractiveness to the masses. It was in East Germany alone that the Protestant Church (with the Lutheran tradition of secular authority) and state found a basis for reciprocal legitimacy; but in other countries, the loyalty of the people was in the long run difficult to maintain.

After forty years, the churches (especially the higher clergy) had eventually in one way or the other accommodated themselves to Communist rule. Still, the first spark of revolution seemingly spread out from the churches. The Romanian revolution started, when the Hungarian Reformed pastor Tökes at Timisoara refused to be evicted and received support first from his congregation and then from the people. In Poland, Solidarity from an early stage gained support from the Catholic Church, and the political party that challenged the Communists' claim to political leadership (and would eventually overthrow the regime) was a Catholic party. In Latvia, a group around the Lutheran pastor Modris Plate overthrew a complaisant archbishop, and Plate became one of the leaders of the party for the independence of Latvia,

the Latvian Popular Front. In Slovakia, certain groups within the Catholic Church refused to toe the official prelatical line, and it was from these dissenting parts within the Church that initial opposition to the government in Prague emerged before the Czechoslovakian Catholic Church joined in, and pushed the revolutionary process forward by supporting the demands for freedom in November 1989.<sup>280</sup> Finally, the German revolution began in Leipzig, where the discontented held prayer meetings in churches before going out to demonstrate.

The churches obviously played an important role in the process of finally bringing down the governments. The main reasons for this are:

(1) The churches had increasingly attracted dissent throughout the eighties due to their more public role. As opposed to the pluralistic West, under Communist rule Christianity was the only alternative to the Marxist world-view, and the churches were the only institutions that provided an ideological alternative. Thus, they attracted every kind of dissent against the regime, so that revolutionary potential materialised directly within the churches. At the same time, they could rely on mass support, even from non-Christians.

(2) The churches were the only structurally independent institutions and provided space (simple things such as rooms to meet in to speak freely), infrastructure (restricted publishing equipment), and even characters capable of leading the people, who had previously been indoctrinated against thinking for themselves.<sup>281</sup>

## 2. Churches in eastern Europe and the GDR

In this dissertation, I have looked at the Christian churches in the GDR against the background of the situation in eastern Europe. It is obvious that the GDR's church policy was never as violent as the church policies in other Communist countries. From the years of the SMAD, the east German churches maintained a privileged position. They retained many of their institutions, especially churches and parish buildings; and were even exempted from land reform. Violence against clergy hardly occurred.<sup>282</sup> The regime never violently interfered with church

<sup>280</sup> Cardinal Tomasek publicly declared: "The right of faith cannot be detached from other democratic rights. Freedom is indivisible." Quoted in Ramet, S., Czechoslovakia, p. 391f. from a newspaper called *Lidova Demokracie* (22.11.1989).

<sup>281</sup> See also Krölke, Wolf: *Die Kirche und die „friedliche Revolution“ in der DDR*, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol 87, no 4 / 1990, pp. 521-544, see pp. 523-525.

<sup>282</sup> This does not hold true, of course, for the territory under Polish administration where the German population was expelled.

appointments (from local pastors / priests to bishops)<sup>283</sup> or prevented local bishops from contacting the Vatican or the Protestant World Council of Churches in Geneva respectively, although until the 1960s approximately, it was clear that the Pope would encourage the Catholic bishops in their fundamental rejection of the GDR. The EKD as the pan-German Protestant umbrella organisation eventually became the target of the east German government after 1957. It seems that the SED simply accepted the existence of the Catholic Church. Catholicism refrained from public political statements and, because of its limited numbers, never acted as the nucleus for a protest movement anyway. As opposed to the Catholics, the Protestant Church with its mass base and traditional role as a *Volkskirche*,<sup>284</sup> provided in the long run a bigger threat, and had to be controlled. This proved easier than with the hierarchic Catholic Church, since the Catholic Church had never claimed a public role as a *Volkskirche* in this part of Germany. From 1947 onwards, Catholic priests followed the orders of their bishops and simply would not co-operate when approached by state officials.<sup>285</sup>

Why were the Christians (and their church hierarchies) in the GDR not persecuted as vigorously by the Communists as they were in other east European countries? It seems that the starting point of Christians and Communists in Germany was different from those in the other countries behind the Iron Curtain in a number of aspects:

- (1) Many German Communists and Christians shared the experience of resistance against the Nazis. The suffering in prisons and concentrations camps (which even led to personal friendships) decreased the traditional hostility of both groups towards each other. After the war, many German Communists saw the Churches as allies in their efforts to build a new Germany.
- (2) In the first years of Allied administration, the Churches enjoyed privileges not only as a result of their role in the resistance, but also because the Soviets were reluctant to act too recklessly under the eyes of the western allies. Also, the Soviets still aimed for control over a re-united Germany when the foundations for the east German society were laid in the late 1940s.

<sup>283</sup> Although efforts were made to influence the decisions of Protestant church committees by means of the State Security Service.

<sup>284</sup> This term (literally translated meaning 'people's church') also carries the meaning of an established church. *Volkskirche* is not a state church, but has ties to the government and co-operates with it in a number of fields, as both German Catholicism and Protestantism have traditionally done. To date, they are still the only religious communities with status as public corporations in Germany. A significant feature of a *Volkskirche* is, of course, a substantial number of faithful in terms of the country's whole population.

<sup>285</sup> On the unity of the Catholic Church and the regime's failed attempts to carry out its 'policy of differentiation' (that had partly worked with the Protestants), whether via party officials or the State Security Service, see Schäfer, pp. 273-277. According to Schäfer, 97% of the Catholic clergy in the GDR followed the instructions regularly given by their superiors, p. 275f.

(3) The east German Communists were for various reasons (influence from the western zones, Soviet reluctance to use force as much as in the other east European countries) the most insecure of the recently established Communist regimes, and depended on the help of at least parts of the bourgeois parties, especially the CDU (after the SPD had been forced into the SED). The east German CDU survived the four decades of the GDR as a close ally to the SED and act<sup>ed</sup> as a bridge to those who otherwise would have turned their backs on the regime. Indeed, for most of the time, the CDU fulfilled this task effectively with regard to the Churches themselves, with its chairman Nuschke as the government's leading church politician: in the first decade of the GDR. Many genuine Christians were members of the CDU, and were concerned about the fate of Christianity in East Germany. In the early years, especially, this had an impact on the government's church policy.

For these reasons, the GDR was probably the only Communist country where church policy ever played a role as an independent field of governmental politics. The SED's church policy was not consistent most of the time, but it was never as subordinate to other policies as in other Communist countries, where church policy was often secondary to the oppression of ethnic minorities, and later became (when church/state partnerships were formed) merely a means to maintain public order.

An exception is the Polish Catholic Church, whose public status probably comes closest to that of East German Protestantism. The State and the Protestant Church in the GDR formed the same kind of partnership in 1978 as the State and Polish Catholic Church had done 20 years earlier. As a matter of fact, by the late 1970s, the Polish Catholic Church had already effectively cancelled its agreement of mutual stabilisation with the Communist regime by supporting Solidarity. As the Protestant Church in the GDR did a decade later, the Polish Catholic Church used its independent status to attract the discontent<sup>ed</sup> (even from outside the church) and protect them from state persecution, thereby preparing the ground for mass protest. It has to be stressed that this was in both cases unintentional. In fact, the Polish Catholic Church as well as the Protestant Church in the GDR were for years trapped between the government they were on rather friendly terms with and the groups of discontented forming among the laity. Nevertheless, they eventually took the side of the opposition.

As far as relations between the two east German churches are concerned, Shuster notes that up to 1954 at least, the regime did not try to play the Catholic Church off against the Protestant Church, whilst in other east European countries, the government had often successfully looked for support from minority churches in order to silence criticism from the (usually more

resistant) majority church. Of course, the minority churches were weaker and therefore more easily corrupted by the regime. Efforts of this kind cannot be found in the GDR. Shuster sees the common experience of the Third Reich, and the shared suffering experienced during it, as the reason for improved relations between the German Christian denominations.<sup>286</sup> In fact, it was rather the Protestant Church that publicly lent support to the regime, leaving the Catholic Church to be blamed for its ties to West Germany and to the Vatican.

### 3. Catholicism and Protestantism in the GDR

The attitudes towards the regime varied substantially between Catholics and Protestants, but also within the Protestant Churches (*Landeskirchen*) themselves. The divisions within the Protestants have been analysed above; the cases of Dibelius and Mitzenheim show that the same personal background (the *Confessing Church*) does not necessarily lead to the same views on what is best for the Church. Dibelius was convinced that ~~to~~ compromise would mean to breach God's commandments. Mitzenheim believed, after terrible losses under the Nazi regime, that the only way to survive at all in the hostile environment was through co-operation. He was encouraged to pursue this path, and, deceived by, one of his closest collaborators, *Oberkirchenrat* Lotz. The tragic consequences of Mitzenheim's policy do not prove his approach was wrong per se. However, in order to deal with a totalitarian and, in terms of its methods, unscrupulous regime, a church politician with less naiveté was required. Totalitarian oppression of the churches does not always appear to be violent at first sight; the Communists had learned their lesson from Hitler's attempts to destroy the churches, , and pursued their goal determinedly but with greater subtlety.

The Catholic Church, the only one of the two churches to survive the Third Reich structurally intact, began life under the second totalitarian, and church-hostile regime, from an entirely different position than in 1933. At that time, German Catholicism was very influential with strong bases in Silesia, Bavaria, and western Germany (the Rhineland and the Ruhr area). The Catholics had exercised political power via the Centre Party during the Weimar Republic, and the Catholic laity was well organised in clubs and associations. In the Soviet Zone of 1945, the Catholic Church was a diaspora church, facing the great infrastructural challenge of incor-

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<sup>286</sup> Shuster, p. 37f.

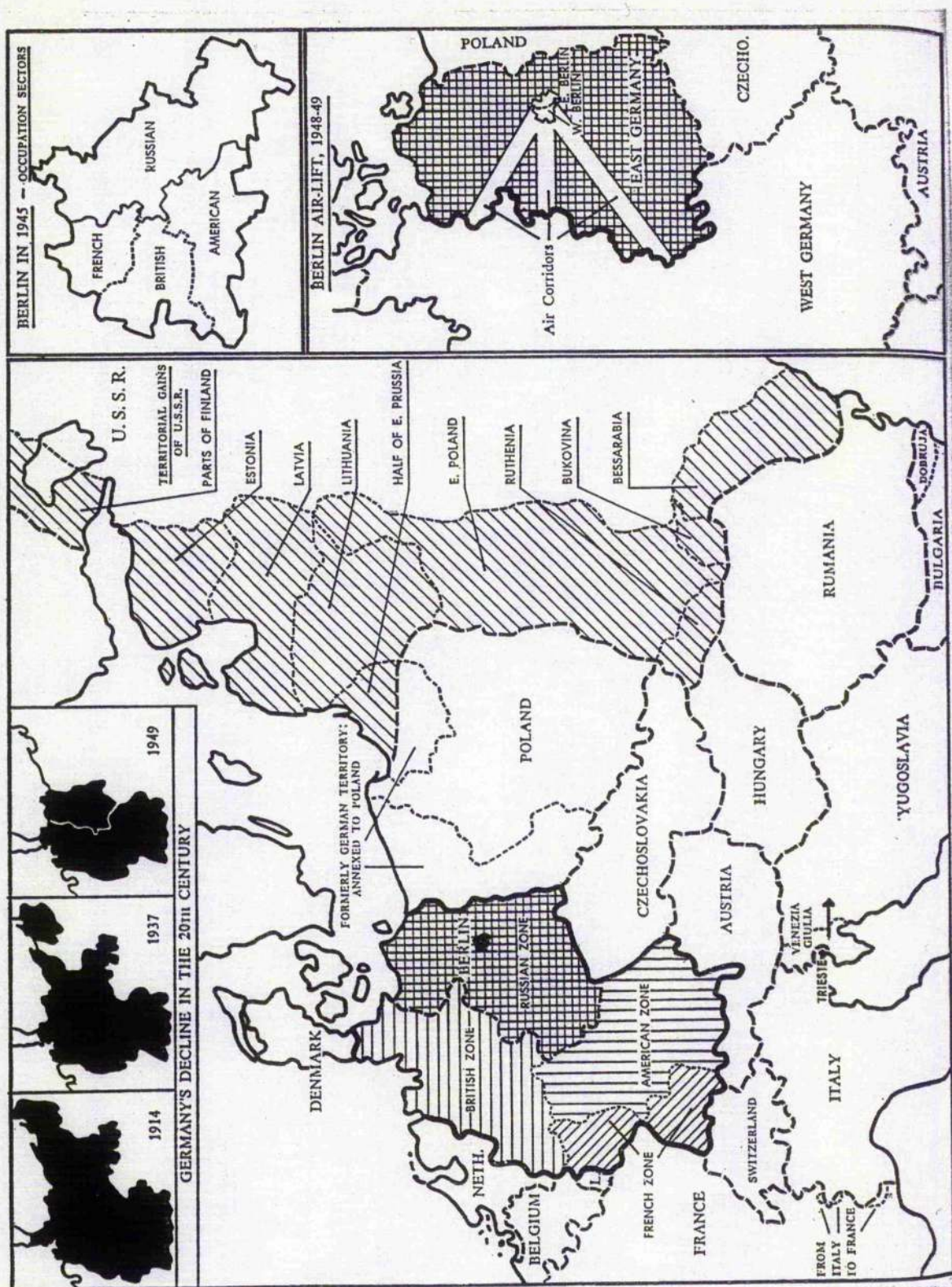
porating hundreds of thousands of refugees from the east. In other words: The Catholic Church was in no position to challenge the GDR regime on a fundamental level. Expecting the violence it had experienced in the previous decade, for the Catholic Church survival was its most important task in the GDR. Indeed, the often-used term of "hibernation" describes the Catholic Church's attitude very well.<sup>287</sup> Possible alternatives were hardly available, especially if the fate of other minority churches across eastern Europe is taken into account. In return for minding their own business, the Catholic Church was practically left alone by the regime, although discrimination against Catholic individuals was systematically carried out. On a parish level, the Catholic Church remained intact, and sacraments (the biggest pastoral concern of the Church) continued to be given. In the long run, the policy of hibernation was successful. As we have seen, it is very difficult to compare the two Christian Churches in GDR from a moral standpoint. The Vatican as well as the Protestant church leaders can be accused of very regime-friendly attitudes during the 1970s. *Détente*, or *Ostpolitik*, contributed to the stabilisation of the Communist regimes after the Prague Spring of 1968 had already proved that the Communist idea was incapable of reform. In order to maintain control over the people, the Communist regimes had to turn to totalitarian oppression.

It was definitely easier for the Catholic Church not to get involved in politics because of its size. The Protestant Church (especially at a parish level) due to its structural independence attracted dissent, and helped to marginalise it, which led to a momentary stabilisation of the regime. However when discontent eventually surfaced, it used the space the Protestant Church (and only the Protestant Church) provided. Since Catholics had always kept a certain distance from the state they, too, soon became involved in the opposition, but the hierarchy of both churches found it difficult to change their policies given the speed of the collapse of the regime. This holds especially true for the Catholic Church which maintained its strict policy of non-involvement throughout the revolution.

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<sup>287</sup> See, for instance, Oestreicher, p. 272.

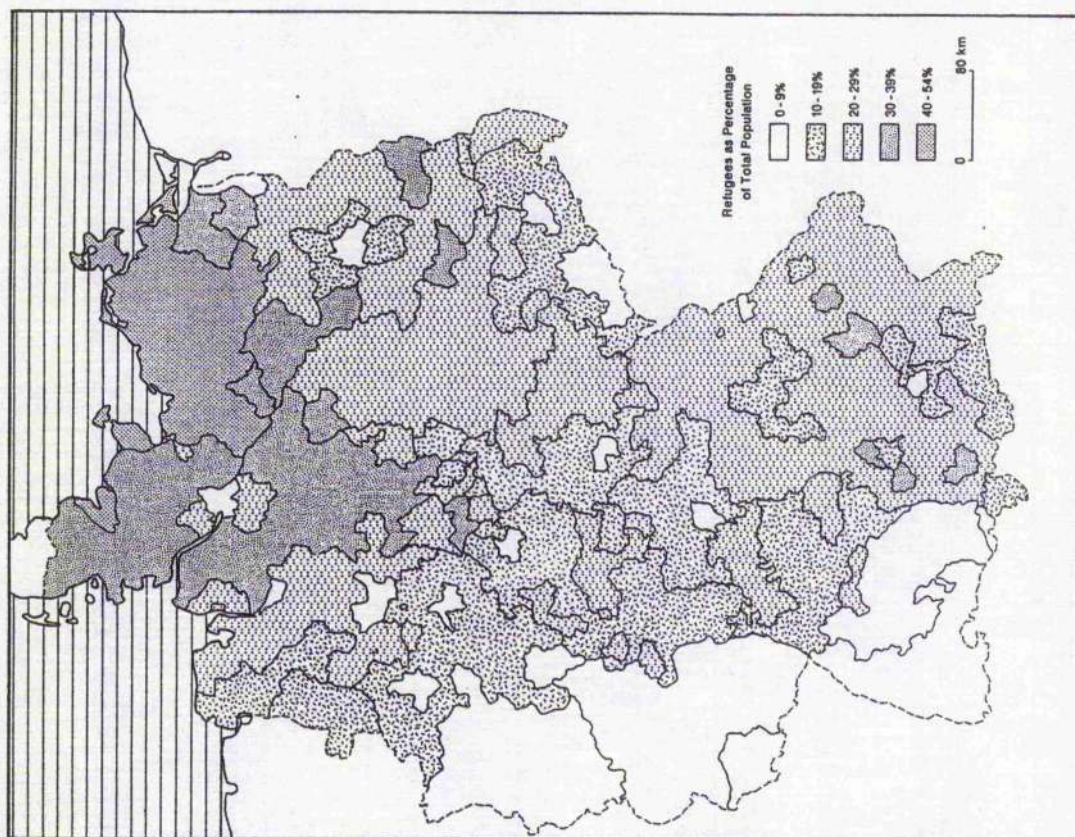
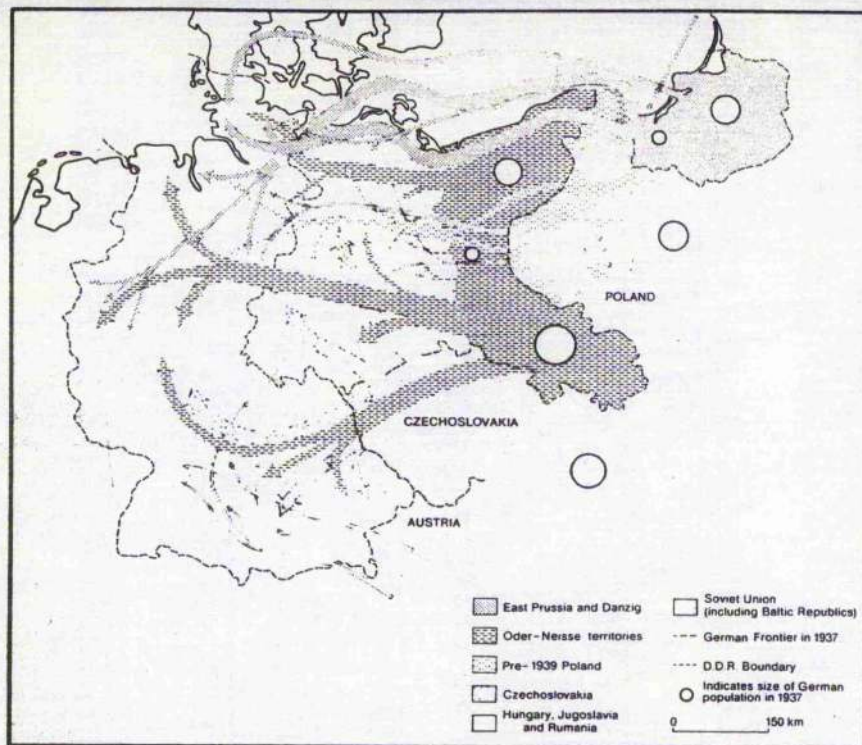




**MAP I: Territorial changes in Europe after the Second World War.**

[from: Price, B. J.: *Map Guide to Modern History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Sydney: Reed 1972, p. 82.]





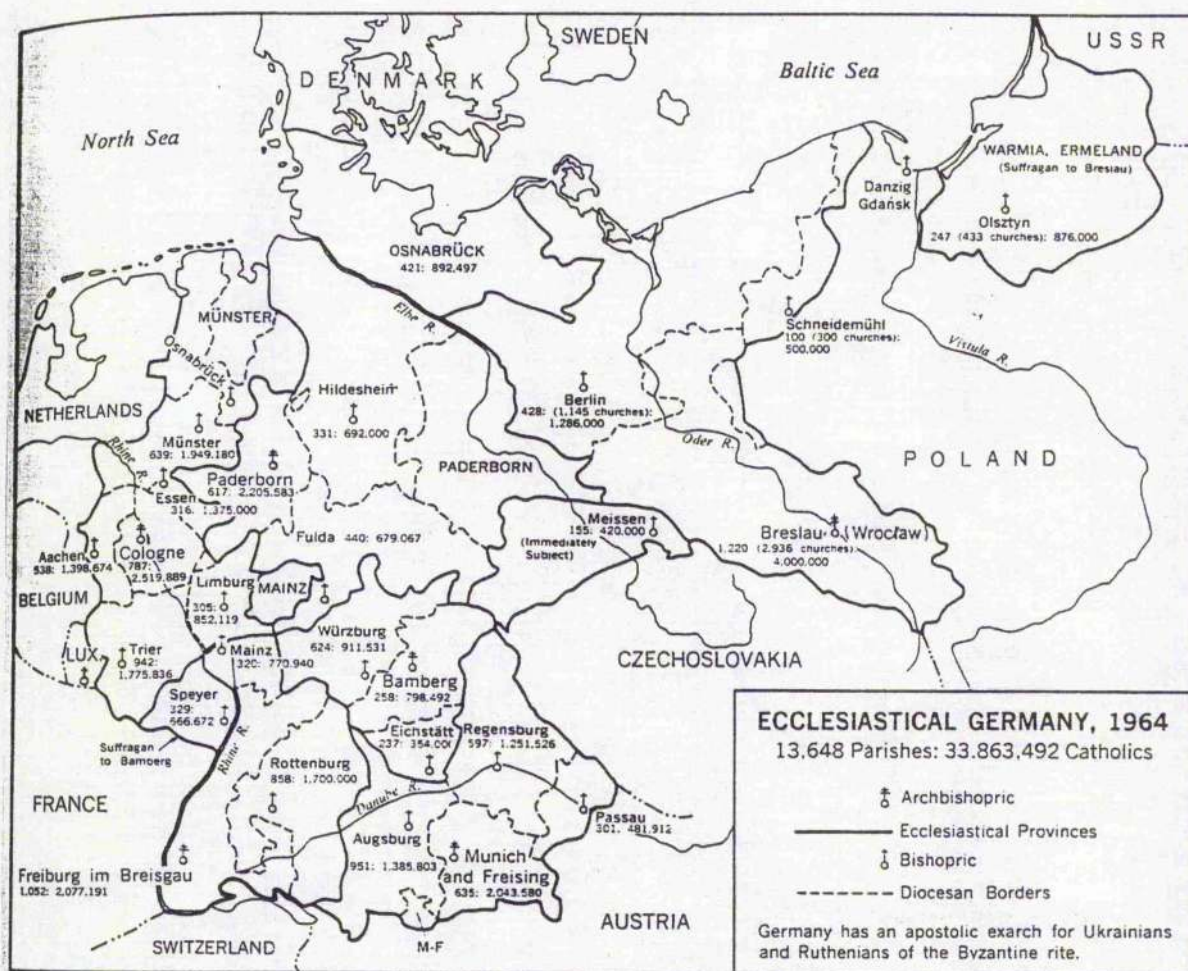
**MAP II: The expulsion of ethnic Germans after the Second World War.**

**MAP III: Main destinations of the refugees.**

[from: Mellor, Roy E. H.: *The Two Germanies. A Modern Geography.*

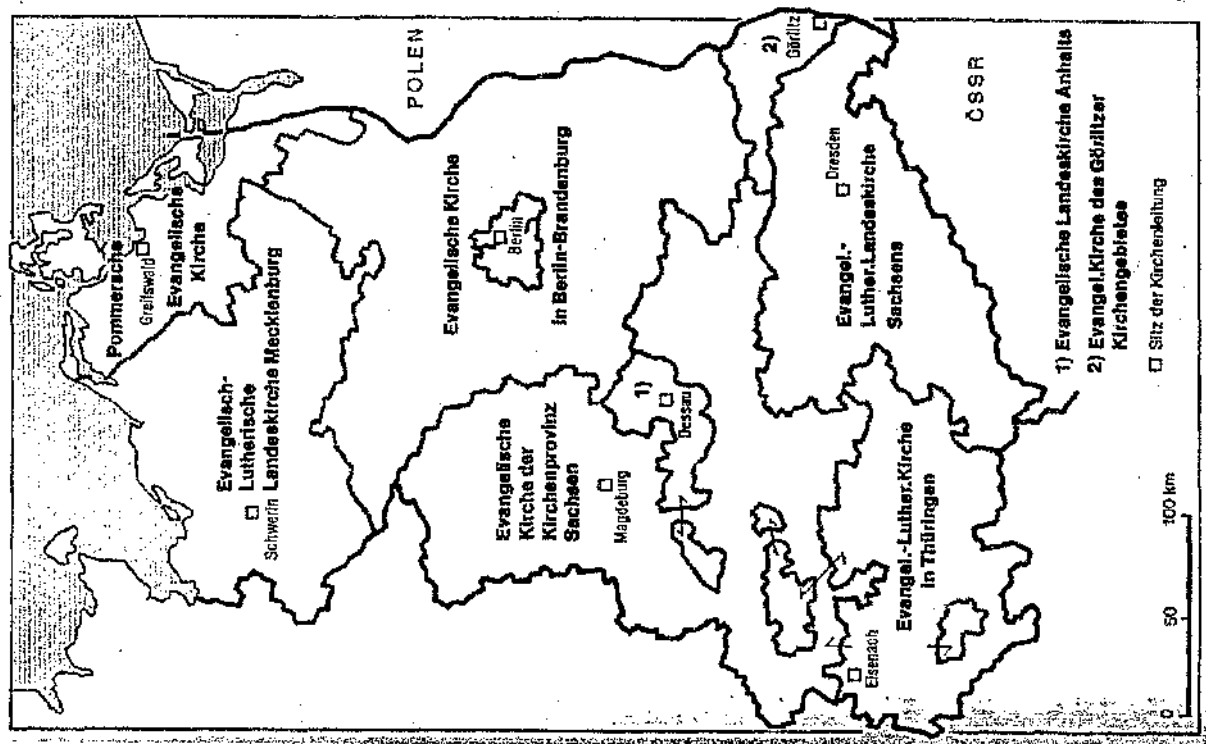
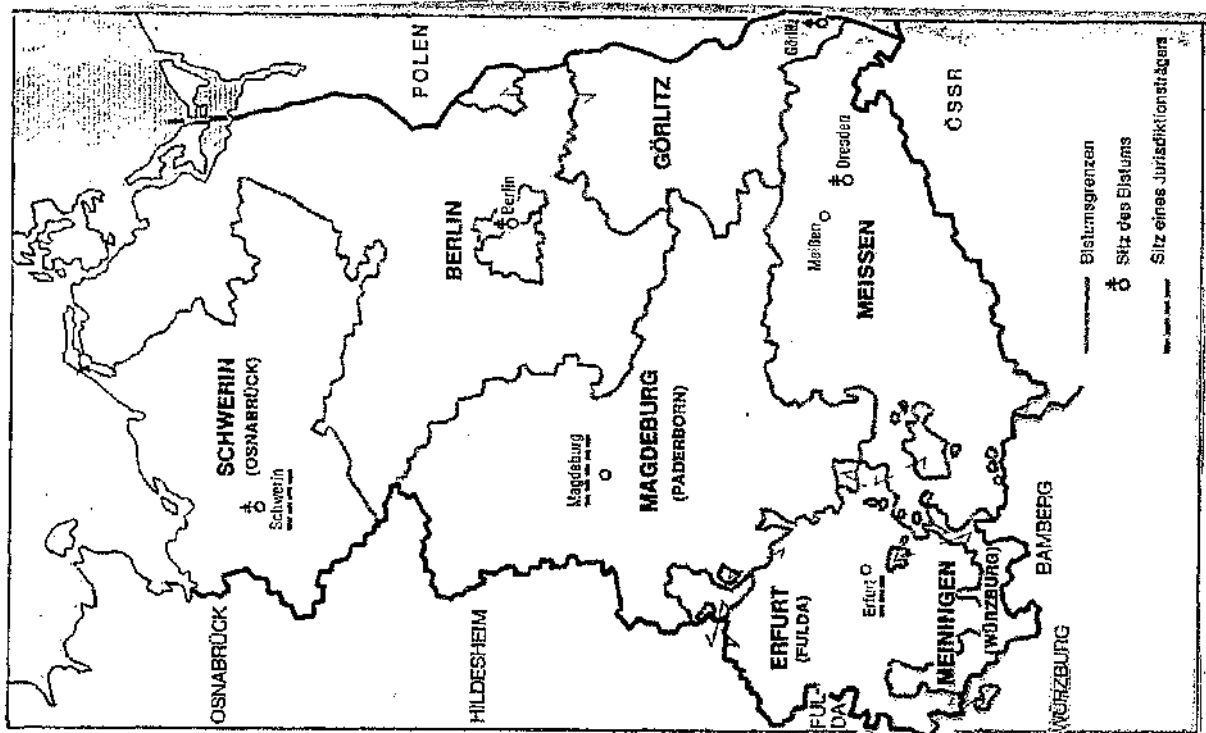
London: Harper & Row 1978, p. 154 and p. 160]





**MAP IV: The Catholic church structure in Germany in 1964.**

[from: *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*. New York / London: Mc Graw-Hill 1967-1979, vol 6, p. 433.]



**MAP V: The Catholic church structure in the GDR after 1973.**

**MAP VI: The Protestant church structure in the GDR after 1969.**

[from: Besier, Gerhard: *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche. Der Weg in die Anpassung.*

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