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THE CHURCH AND RENEWAL OF STATE AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE FOUNDATION OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC IN 1989

The foundation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP, later: SPD) in the GDR shortly before the reunification of Germany shows in an exemplary way the relation between state and church in nowadays Germany. Although both institutions are divided from each other, the history and present of political Germany is deeply influenced by Christians who see it as their duty to struggle for freedom in the political field, based on their personal Christian motivation. The foundation of the SDP in the former GDR is a good example: Most of the founding members were Protestant pastors and theologians. In founding the SDP they were the forefront of the will for freedom, based on their personal belief that had to be expressed politically. This way of relating politics and religion describes the model of religious freedom of nowadays Germany: On the one hand the state encourages religious communities and individuals to participate in the political process and thereby gives religion an important function in the public sphere. On the other hand the state provides the freedom of worship.

Keywords: religion, history, religious freedom, secular state, state and church, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany

Introduction

Among the countries of Europe, Germany has chosen a unique way to govern the relationship between the church and the state. Since the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, their way has become an established alternative alongside the French *laicité*. The success of the West German model can be observed in comparison to the church-state relationship in the German Democratic Republic. The GDR was never interested in creative interactions between church and state. Instead, the church faced repression and persecution by the government. Members of the church were excluded from the regular education system in the GDR and the church was forced into leading a shadowy existence [3; 9; 11; 12].

The Relationship Between Church and State According to the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany

The relationship between church and state in West Germany had already progressed before the reunification in such a way that it could be readily adopted in East Germany, despite their preceding forty-year history of atheist ideology. On the website of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the basic law governing the relationship between church and state can be found under the term "state-church law" [19. P. 95-99]. The term comes from articles 4 and 140 of the Basic Law. The ministry is adamant that organisational structure of Christian churches be reflected in the constitution for historical reasons, while, at the same time, being valid for members of other religious and ideological communities. After centuries of war and conflict, church and state have been strictly separated since World War I and a state church was no longer allowed. Following the Second World War, the state's ideological and religious neutrality has been a number-one priority. The most crucial point is religious freedom. According to the first two paragraphs of article 4 in Basic Law every person is free to profess any faith and may join any religious community. They are likewise free refrain from doing so, leave their community, or convert to another religion. This freedom of faith and conscience meets its limitations where other people's basic rights are affected. Otherwise legislature in Germany may not interfere with people's religious practices. With the exception of three constituent states – namely Berlin, Bremen, and Brandenburg – religious communities have a state-guaranteed right to religious education. It is a compulsory subject for members of a religious community. Johannes Rau, Protestant preacher and former President of Germany, said the following in a speech in 2004: "Our country is neither an irreligious nor a religion free state. On the contrary: our state protects the freedom of worship" [6].[1] The state might remain neutral, but it benefits from the religious convictions of its citizens who provide values and

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[1] Original citation: "Unser Staat ist kein religionsfeindlicher und auch kein religionsfreier Staat. Im Gegenteil: Unser Staat schützt die Religionsfreiheit aller."

orientation. Faith is not simply a private matter. There is also a public element to religion in Germany. Religious communities are expressly encouraged to contribution to public life. It is one of the greatest achievements of the German model of state and religion to have brought quarrelling religious communities together and encourage everyday life together. Members of the Protestant Church have always been involved in German politics. The most recent example of Angela Merkel, daughter of a Lutheran pastor and herself an active Lutheran, and President and Lutheran pastor Joachim Gauck has shown how grateful the public is, in trying times (Gauck's predecessor, Catholic Christian Wulff, faced prosecution for alleged corruption which led him to resign), to be able to rely on the moral strength of practicing Protestants.

Political Actors with a Protestant Background Prior to the Reunification

After the collapse of the GDR, the regulations of the Federal Republic were suddenly valid for reunified Germany as a whole and despite state-resistance they took effect throughout the new constituent states. The oppressive system of the GDR crumbled from the inside and experienced a spiritual and political change that sealed its fate. The foundation of a Social Democratic Party in the GDR in 1989 marked the birth of a party with Protestant affiliations next to the state-sanctioned East German CDU. The SDP (later: SPD) kept spiritual traditions alive, such as, for example, the reception of Hegel's philosophy. It was a sign that the government's proscribed order of church and state had already been undermined. The Social Democratic Party in the West was not involved in the development of the their eastern counterpart. They were more focussed on the activities of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). Two days after the foundation of the SDP, on 9 October, the SPD in West Germany was still ignorant of the party's existence and their members background [10. P. 6-9]. Nonetheless, one of the leading representatives of the western SPD stood in support of the founding members of the SDP, summarising their responsibility in acting opposite the SED as follows: "It is through biographies from the GDR that we learn to understand the bravery and self-confidence of Schwante, who, with great success, founded a party that challenged the power of the GDR system. A politician who was shaped by personal discrimination, harassment, surveillance, persecution and resistance. A man who actively participated in environmental groups and the peace movement, who used the freedom granted by the church to his advantage. Toughened through bureaucratic struggles with the GDR system, supported by strong ties to oppositional groups in Eastern Europe and frequent theological and philosophical exchanges with masters of improvisation and practical organisation – this was the kind of politician that the West had to grow accustomed to." [10. P. 8; 4].[2] In his speech to the founders of the East German SPD, Willy Brandt, chairman of the SPD, spoke of their moral strength with which they infused the entire party [10. P. 9].[3] At the party conference on 18 December 1989, a speech was given by Lutheran pastor Markus Meckel, who became foreign minister of the GDR (April till August 1990) following the first free election [10. P. 8]. Reports and biographies of the founding members provide information on numerous aspects of the formation process. Among these accounts are stories of dodged arrests, extraordinary escapes from state security and secret meetings. When Ibrahim Böhme joined the party, none of the founding members knew of his connections to the Ministry of State Security [1]. As a result, state security in the East knew of the foundation of the East German SPD before their associate party did in the West. Christoph Matschie, like so many others at the time, struggled with the question "Who

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[2] Gutzeit was the son of a pastor, he trained to be an electrician, he refused to do military service and was a vicar in Berlin-Pankow from 1980–1982 following his theology degree. He continued to be a pastor in Schwarz near Neu-Strelitz from 1982–1986. 1986–1990 Lecturer at the Theologisches Sprachenkonvikt in Berlin. A founding member of the SDP and representative at the Round Table, member of the first People's Chamber following the first free election and party executive of the SPD. Member of the German Parliament from October to December 1990. Commissioner of the Stasi Record Agency for Berlin since 1993. Original quotation: "Es sind DDR-Biographien, die die Kühnheit und das Selbstbewusstsein zu verstehen helfen, mit der in Schwante der historische Wurf einer Parteigründung, die offene Herausforderung des DDR-Systems, die Machtfrage gewagt wurden. Geprägt durch persönliche Benachteiligungen, Schikanen, Bespitzelungen, Verfolgung und Widerstehen, in der Umwelt- und Friedensbewegung, aktiv kirchliche Freiräume nutzend und ausnutzend, im Kleinkrieg mit der Staatsbürokratie abgehärtet, vernetzt mit oppositionellen Gruppen in Osteuropa und sich immer wieder selbst vergewissernd in theologischen und philosophischen Gesprächen, mit Improvisationskünstlern der praktischen Organisation – an diesen Typ von Politiker (ich denke an den beharrlichen Martin Gutzeit) musste man sich im Westen gewöhnen."
[3] Quotation from the speech by Brandt at the Party Unification Day in Berlin.

can I trust?" [10. P. 94].[4] One important aspect in the foundation of the party, was the aforementioned theological background of its members, who were active Protestant, predominantly Lutheran Christians. The political system was not prepared for that [8. P. 95-108].[5] The church, as an institution, had accepted their state-dependence and had adapted their thinking to the circumstances in a dictatorship. There was enough room left, however, for the church to cultivate a way of thinking that followed the direction of western social democracy. It thereby completely evaded the influence of government propaganda that had already lost much of its influence on the general public in the GDR. Markus Meckel, who used to be a Lutheran country pastor in Müritz, Mecklenburg, emphasised that the party had always been intended as an opposing party to the established SED: "With the creation of our party, we practically posed the question of power and demanded a parliamentary democracy based on the western model [10. P. 14-28; 7]".[6] Meckel and many of his like-minded companions were discriminated against, because of their connections to the church. As a conventional university education was not accessible to him, he studied at the two Protestant universities in the GDR. He praised these institutions as "places of otherwise seldom found spiritual freedom". [10. P. 16; 15][7]. Spiritual freedom did not mean the study of modern philosophies however, but rather entailed reading the classics: Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and, against government policies, Marx. Classical theologians such as Saint Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa were also part of the curriculum [10. P. 17, 110, 113; 5. P. 242-244; 13. P. 217-226].[8] "Ancient languages, philosophy, and theology give access to alternative ways of thinking to Marxism/Leninism, political economy, and scientific socialism – the ideological trinity of my student years," summarises Sabine Heideler [10. P. 49].[9] The theologian Richard Schröder, who had been a lecturer there since 1977, became a disseminator of philosophical thinking for students who were reluctant to accept the situation in the GDR. [10. P. 17]. He let his students read texts by Robert Spaemann and Hannah Arendt [10. P. 29-41; 14].[10] They wrote texts, copied, and distributed them, trying their best at participating in the ecumenical exchange and promoting it in the GDR. The ecclesiastical framework soon became too narrow for their political activities. "The church was able to lead people to independent thinking and acting – and we have done so for years. A programmatic opposition, however, the church could never be" [10. P. 83].[11] Meckel went even fur-

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[4] Christoph Matschie used to be a mechanic, then a nurse. He studied theology until October 1989 when he joined the SDP and became one of the representatives at the Round Table, 1990–2004 member of the parliament, 1999 head of the SPD in Thüringen, 2009 Minister of Education and Arts in Thüringen.

[5] Idem. "Der Pastor". In *Lebenswege … im Schatten des Staatssicherheitsdienstes*, edited by Sandra Pingel-Schliemann. Schwerin: Landesberauftragte für Mecklenburg-Vorpommern für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2008. Stephan Hilsberg sees his way into the opposition mainly as a result of his socialisation: "I grew up in a Protestant Vicarage" (Original quotation:„Ich wuchs in einem protestantischen Pfarrhaus auf").

[6] Markus Meckel was a pastor in Vipperow/Müritz from 1980–1988, head of the ecumenical community and education centre in Niederndodeleben near Magdeburg from 1988–1990, took the initiative to create the SDP together with Martin Gutzeit and was a representative at the Round Table. Member of the People's Chamber from 18 March–2 October 1990. April till August Foreign Minister of the GDR, member of parliament 1990–2009. Original quotation: "Wir stellten mit der Parteigründung faktisch die Machtfrage und wollten eine parlamentarische Demokratie westlichen Musters erreichen."

[7] Original citation: „Orte sonst nicht so leicht erfahrbarer geistiger Freiheit."

[8] Arndt Noack, like many other members of the founding generation, tells of the seminars on philosophy and theology by the West German philosopher Michael Theunissen, renowned Hegel-scholar and honorary doctor at the faculty of theology at Göttingen University.

[9] As a Social Democrat, Sabine Heideler strongly opposed to a possible minister-president of The Left in Thüringen, cf. https://aufruf2014.wordpress.com/. Accessed 30 October 2016. Party executive of the SDP from 1989–1990, scientific advisor of the SPD parliamentary group from 1991–1995, no longer aligned to any party since 2008. Original quotation: „Alte Sprachen, Philosophie und Theologie eröffnen andere Denkweisen als Marxismus/Leninismus, Politische Ökonomie und wissenschaftlicher Kommunismus, dem ideologischen Dreigestirn meiner Studienzeit."

[10] Konrad Elmer-Herzig refused military service, studied theology from 1968–1973, pastor for the church district Aschersleben 1976–1982, PhD. theol. 1982, founding member of the SDP 1989, elected member of the People's Chamber, 1990–1995 member of parliament. He attempted in vain to include the phrase "It is upon everyone to show humanity and public spirit" (Original quotation:„Jeder ist zu Mitmenschlichkeit und Gemeinsinn aufgerufen") in the constitution. He has been a pastor in Potsdam since 1994.

[11] Concerning her work in the congregation Susanne Kschenka summarises her experience as follows: "I helped create and live democracy in the middle of a dictatorship!" (Original quotation:„Inmitten einer Diktatur erlebte und gestaltete ich Demokratie!"). She was legal advisor of the church governing body in Magdeburg in the Church Province of Saxony from 1990 onwards, treasurer of the SDP. She left the SDP in 1994. Original quotation: "Kirche konnte Men-

ther. He was opposed to founding a decisively "Christian" party for theological reasons. "We want to avoid any form of exploitation of the Christian faith for political purposes. The bible cannot be the basis for concrete traffic and health policies, but it can provide ethical guidelines; no party should claim to be more Christian than others. It should be in everybody's interest to respect human dignity and enable weaker members of society to participate and integrate"[10. P. 21].[12] It is not surprising then, that the address to the founding members was delivered on 26 August 1989, the commemoration day of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen during the French Revolution [10. P. 23]. Europe had always been part of the equation. Konrad Elmer-Herzig emphasises: "We wanted to encourage the German reunification as part of a greater European context [10. P. 36]".[13] It was only logical that the founding members were interested in strengthening the UN [10. P. 36]. The church proved to be a place where environmental matters like justice, peace, and the safeguarding of creation could be discussed and put into practice without corporate interference [10. P. 37; 2]. The fact that, according to the founding members, the party was labelled a "pastor's party" [10. P. 49]. and that the process of reunification was called "a Protestant revolution" for a while [16-18] [14] goes to show that the Protestant background of those involved was indeed a relevant factor. Thomas Krüger, who wrote a particularly engaging report on the activities surrounding the foundation – including tales of pursuit – commented on the choice of a meeting place at the East Berlin assembly: "We meet in a church, again" [10. P. 76] [15] (the assembly was held in the Sophienkirche in Berlin).

Conclusion

The pastors and theologians who founded the SPD in East Germany did not act as members of their church. They acted as Christians who publicly took political responsibility. They knew the risks. Sabine Heideler and Martin Gutzeit strongly opposed the political alliance between the SPD and *The Left* in some federal states [4]. Those who were not led astray by pragmatic political decisions, but stood by their determination to fight for freedom in times of upheaval, gain a true understanding of politics fitting for a new Germany. Today, we find these kinds of individuals among Christians who constantly advocate alternative ways of thinking. They continue an ecclesiastical tradition that began as an opposition to Hitler, followed by an opposition in the GDR, and is still visible in social movements to this day. In the long run, the SPD often struggles with these individuals. They are first and foremost obliged to uphold a way of thinking and acting that once led to the foundation of the SPD in East Germany. Some changed their alliances and became members of a different party or simply left the SPD. However, all of them kept a creative desire for freedom that is based on Protestant beliefs. Thus being a great example of the way religion and state operate in Germany: not through institutions, but through Protestant individuals who get publicly involved in politics. They influence society through their Protestant point of view and not through their affiliation to the church as an institution and they deliberately choose an institutional separation of state and church.

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schen anregen und begleiten zu freiheitlichem Denken und Handeln – und das haben wir über Jahre getan, eine programmatische Opposition durfte Kirche jedoch nicht sein."

[12] Similar quotation by Susanne Kschenka: "no oppositional church group, no working party" (original quotation: "keine kirchliche oppositionelle Gruppe, kein Arbeitskreis"). Original quotation: „Wir wollten jeder politischen Instrumentalisierung des christlichen Glaubens für politische Zwecke wehren. Die Bibel kann schlecht eine konkrete Verkehrs- und Gesundheitspolitik begründen, aber eben ethische Grundorientierungen geben; keine Partei darf für sich in Anspruch nehmen, mehr als andere christlich zu sein. Allen muss es um Achtung vor der Würde des Menschen gehen und darum, den Schwachen Partizipation und Integration zu ermöglichen!"

[13] Konrad Elmer-Herzig stands in support of including all eastern European countries in the EU to this day and advocates democratisation in European institutions. At the same time, he promotes a vision of a world government as the answer to global issues following globalisation and environmental disasters. Original quotation: „Wir wollten damals die Einheit Deutschlands im europäischen Kontext voranbringen."

[14] Torsten Hilse is a head of production in the publishing house Evangelische Verlagsanstalt in Berlin, founding member of the SDP, 1991–1995 member of the house of representatives (Abgeordnetenhaus) in Berlin (again in 2001), head of the publishing house verbum.

[15] Following an apprenticeship Thomas Krüger studied theology and became a curate in Berlin and Eisenach. He supported the "Church from Below". Founding member of the SDP, last mayor of East Berlin, member of the people's chamber following the first free election, 1991–1994 Senator for Family and Youth in Berlin, 1994–1998 member of the German parliament, president of the German child relief organisation since 1995, president of the Federal Agency for Civic Education since 2000. Original quotation: „Schon wieder in einer Kirche."

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М. Тамке

ЦЕРКОВЬ И ВОЗРОЖДЕНИЕ ГОСУДАРСТВА И ОБЩЕСТВА В ГЕРМАНСКОЙ ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ В 1989 г. НА ПРИМЕРЕ СОЗДАНИЯ СОЦИАЛ-ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКОЙ ПАРТИИ

Создание Социал-демократической партии (СДП, далее СПД) в ГДР накануне объединения Германии, демонстрирует в полной мере отношения между государством и церковью в современной ФРГ. Хотя существует разделение между двумя этими институтами, история и современная политика в Германии в значительной степени подвержена влиянию верующих христиан, которые исходя из своих личных христианских убеждений, считают своей обязанностью сражаться и отстаивать политические свободы. Создание СДП в бывшей ГДР очень хороший пример. Большинство членов - основателей партии были протестантскими священниками и теологами. В создаваемой СДП они были в авангарде борьбы за свободу, что определялось их личной убежденностью, которую они стремились выразить на политическом уровне. Данный способ взаимоотношений политики и религии хорошо описывает модель религиозной свободы в современной Германии: с одной стороны, государство поощряет участие религиозных общин и отдельных лиц к участию в политическом процессе и тем самым делает религию важной функцией в общественной сфере. С другой стороны, государство предоставляет гражданам свободу вероисповедания.

Ключевые слова: религия, история, религиозная свобода, светское государство, государство и церковь, ГДР, ФРГ.

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