

Turbulent Priests : “Solidarity Groups”, “Councils” and Theology in Post-Vatican II Germany

Claus Arnold

“Will no one rid me of these turbulent priests?” Quite a few German bishops between 1969 and 1973 may have thought so. The formation of radical priest groups was a pan-European phenomenon,¹ which found expression in the famous Conference in Rome in October 1969, on the fringes of the Extraordinary General Synod of Bishops. The European dimension of this phenomenon was also stressed by the German-language documentation of the Conference, published by Patmos, Düsseldorf.² The reception of Vatican II³ had entered a critical state in 1969. This was felt world-wide and led to a virtually simultaneous mobilization and a very keen international awareness within these groups. The general crisis of post-Vatican II reforms in the age of Paul VI, especially after *Humanae Vitae*,⁴ provided a common background for all such groups. To some extent, this extraordinary mobilization, which included around 10 % of all priests in Germany,⁵ had a special antecedent within (West) German Catholicism.

“The Discovery of Conflict”: Developments in Post-WW II German Catholicism

In contrast to the German Reich, Catholics were no longer a minority in the new West German Republic after 1949,⁶ and with the arrival of millions of refugees⁷ the

¹ See, for instance, Denis Pelletier, *La crise catholique. Religion, société, politique en France (1965-1978)* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2005), 58-72 and *passim*.

² Michael Raske, Klaus Schäfer and Norbert Wetzels (eds.), *Eine freie Kirche für eine freie Welt. Delegiertenkonferenz europäischer Priestergruppen Rom 10.-16. Oktober 1969. Eine Dokumentation* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969).

³ Amongst the wealth of literature on this problem, see for instance Franz Xaver Bischof (ed.), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil (1962-1965). Stand und Perspektiven der kirchenhistorischen Forschung im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012).

⁴ See, for instance, Norbert Lüdecke, “Einmal Königstein und zurück? Die Enzyklika *Humanae Vitae* als ekklesiologisches Lehrstück”, in Dominicus M. Meier et al. (eds.), *Rezeption des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils in Theologie und Kirche heute. Festschrift für Klaus Lüdicke* (Essen: Ludgerus, 2008), 357-412.

⁵ Carl-Peter Klusmann and Edgar Utsch (eds.), *Dem Konzil verpflichtet – verantwortlich in Kirche und Welt. Priester- und Solidaritätsgruppen in Deutschland (AGP 1969-2010): eine Bilanz nach vierzig Jahren* (Münster: LIT, 2010).

⁶ For a synthesis of the rich research on the post-WW II religious history of Germany see: Thomas Großbölting, *Der verlorene Himmel. Glaube in Deutschland seit 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2013); Benjamin Ziemann, *Encounters with Modernity. The Catholic Church in West Germany, 1945-1975* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn 2014.) Specifically on East German Catholicism, see, for instance, Christoph Kösters (ed.), *Akten deutscher Bischöfe seit 1945. DDR 1951-1957* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012); and Josef Pilvousek, *Die katholische Kirche in der DDR. Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte Mitteldeutschlands* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2014).

traditional confessional landscape had been transformed in East and West Germany alike. Although the Churches' hopes for a thorough re-christianisation proved to be illusory, the Catholic Church gained political influence after 1945.⁸ Thus, even the cultural politics of the French Republic, the responsible political authority in the French zone of occupied Germany, relied on the cooperation of the German Catholic hierarchy, as can be seen, for instance, during the negotiations surrounding the re-foundation of the University of Mainz.⁹ Although the 1950s were not without tensions – and some German Catholic intellectuals had, to mention but one example, participated in widespread protests against rearmament – mainstream German Catholicism and its organisations remained remarkably uniform. Politically, they backed the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union) government of Konrad Adenauer; and natural law, as understood and interpreted by the bishops, influenced the decisions of the Federal Court of Justice.¹⁰ The SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) leader Kurt Schumacher famously and polemically called the Catholic Church the 'fifth occupation force' in Germany, and the Protestant theologian Martin Niemöller commented that the Federal Republic of Germany had been 'conceived in Rome and born in Washington'. These are stereotypes, of course, but they bear witness to a certain perception of German Catholicism.

In his seminal study on Catholic students in Germany between 1945 and 1973, Christian Schmidtman has labelled the early 1960s as the period of "the discovery of conflict in Catholicism".¹¹ The new spirit of discussion and criticism in the 1960s could be perceived in student and intellectual circles.¹² The Catholic Student Paper *Einigung* (Unity) was renamed *Initiative* and began to criticise racism in the USA, torture in Algeria and CDU-politics in Germany. More fundamentally, the historical self-perception of German Catholicism began to change. Long before Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* (1963),¹³ the Catholic layperson Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde had published 'a critical consideration' of 'German Catholicism in the year 1933'. The self-image of the Catholic Church as the only German institution untouched by National Socialism began to be questioned.¹⁴ Catholic non-conformists like Friedrich Heer, Carl Amery, Heinrich Böll and Walter Dirks received a greater hearing in mainstream Catholicism. They criticised the *juste milieu* not only for its failings between 1933 and 1945, but also for an ultimately un-Christian attitude in the Adenauer-years, which were perceived as materialistic,

⁷ Rainer Bendel, *Vertriebene finden Heimat in der Kirche. Integrationsprozesse im geteilten Deutschland nach 1945* (Köln: Böhlau 2008).

⁸ Joachim Köhler/Damian van Melis (eds.), *Siegerin in Trümmern. Die Rolle der katholischen Kirche in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1998).

⁹ Corine Defrance, *La politique culturelle de la France sur la rive gauche du Rhin, 1945-1955* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 1994).

¹⁰ Norbert Hörster, *Recht und Moral. Texte zur Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1986), 103-108.

¹¹ Christian Schmidtman, *Katholische Studierende 1945–1973. Ein Beitrag zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

¹² Schmidtman, *Katholische Studierende*, 191-248.

¹³ This controversial play by the German writer Rolf Hochhuth, whose full title and subtitle mean *The Deputy. A Christian Tragedy*, portrays Pope Pius XII as having failed to speak out against the holocaust. It was translated into more than twenty languages.

¹⁴ See Mark Edward Ruff, "Die Auseinandersetzungen über Rolf Hochhuths ‚Stellvertreter‘: Ein Historisierungsversuch," in Hubert Wolf (ed.), *Eugenio Pacelli als Nuntius in Deutschland. Forschungsperspektiven und Ansätze zu einem internationalen Vergleich* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2012), 111-125.

bourgeois and militaristic. And with the Erhard¹⁵ government, the Grand Coalition of 1966 and the Social-Liberal Coalition under Willy Brandt of 1969, the Adenauer-years had, at any rate, become a thing of the past. After having fought Socialism in Germany for more than a hundred years,¹⁶ the rapprochement with the SPD now formed part of the current agenda of mainstream Catholicism. The famous and turbulent Katholikentag¹⁷ of 1968 in Essen with its heated and controversial discussions about *Humanae Vitae* (“*Sich beugen und zeugen*” = ‘resign and multiply’) demonstrated that the spirit of discussion and democracy, as promoted by the student movement of 1968, had begun to influence significantly the mainstream milieu of Catholicism.¹⁸ Now even the German bishops saw the necessity to engage in a critical dialogue, and they created the weekly journal *Publik* which appeared from 1968 till 1971 and which has recently been studied by Florian Bock.¹⁹ This attempt to create a critical public sphere within the Church eventually failed, not only because of financial difficulties but also because of the sympathies vis-à-vis the SPD on the part of many editors, which pleased neither the chief editor nor the bishops.

Theology and Progress

A certain element of progressive revisionism and reform-orientation was also beginning to be felt in theological circles. And theology mattered in Germany. The Protestant and Catholic Faculties at the State Universities, which had been established at the beginning of the 19th century for the training of priests and pastors as ‘public servants’, had survived all political changes.²⁰ They now became an important forum of discussion within the universities. Reform theologians drew large crowds, and it was not at all unusual that Hans Küng, Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann or Karl Rahner would have a thousand students sitting in their lectures. Students in the university chaplaincies, but also Catholic associations like the *Bund Neudeutschland* or the *Kartellverband*, generally took an active interest in theology, an interest which was fostered by the events of the Second Vatican Council. With regard to the university chaplaincies, Christian Schmidtman interprets the huge interest in the theologies of Rahner, Metz, Küng, Ratzinger, etc., as a phenomenon of crisis. As traditional authorities in Church and State were being questioned or where hierarchical chains of command disappeared completely, new theological

¹⁵ Ludwig Erhard served as Minister of Economics under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer from 1949 to 1963, and he then succeeded Adenauer as Chancellor from 1963-1966.

¹⁶ See Walter Friedberger, *Die Geschichte der Sozialismuskritik im katholischen Deutschland zwischen 1830 und 1914* (Frankfurt a.M./Bern/Las Vegas: Peter Lang Verlag, 1978). A comparative case study of Anti-Socialism in the (arch-) dioceses of Mainz and Pisa is being prepared by Francesco Tacchi. Cf. *idem*, “Lavoro di fabbrica e origini del cattolicesimo sociale in Germania”, in *Contemporanea* 19 (2016) 101–120.

¹⁷ A *Katholikentag* is a public general assembly of interested Catholic laity and clergy in Germany, which occurs every two-to-four years, and gathers a significant number of individuals.

¹⁸ See now the excellent synthesis of Stefan Voges, *Konzil, Dialog und Demokratie. Der Weg zur Würzburger Synode 1965-1971* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2015), 133-149.

¹⁹ Florian Bock, *Der Fall 'Publik'. Katholische Presse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland um 1968* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2015).

²⁰ For the vast field of the history of theology at German universities, see for instance Johannes Wischmeyer, *Theologiae Facultas. Rahmenbedingungen, Akteure und Wissenschaftsorganisation protestantischer Universitätstheologie in Tübingen, Jena, Erlangen und Berlin 1850-1870* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter 2008); and Hubert Wolf/Claus Arnold (eds.), *Die katholisch-theologischen Disziplinen in Deutschland. Ihre Geschichte, ihr Zeitbezug* (Paderborn: Schöningh 1999).

orientations were a means for the students to adapt to the emancipatory impulses of the general student movement and to formulate new blueprints for radical action.²¹ But why could such a progressive potential develop in German theology in the 1960s? One important factor was the arrival of relative outsiders in the faculties: especially of Jesuits and pupils of Jesuits.²² Prior to this moment they had been, partly for practical purposes, banned from the Catholic state faculties, which only recruited diocesan priests whom they had educated themselves.²³ Now scholars from the *Collegium Germanicum* like Hans Küng²⁴ or Jesuits like Karl Rahner²⁵ and the latter's pupils Herbert Vorgrimler²⁶ and Johann Baptist Metz²⁷ (with his 'Theology after Auschwitz') started to influence Catholic theology and propelled the collapse of a scholasticism that was rapidly transforming itself.²⁸ Additionally, theologians like Norbert Greinacher, who had studied at the *Institut catholique* in Paris,²⁹ contributed a new international perspective. Internationalism at the faculties was also fostered by priests engaging in doctoral studies, who literally poured in from Latin America, Africa and Asia. They were essentially attracted by German theology, and they did not only come, as has been said malignantly, 'to worship the Holy Deuschmark' – from which they in fact benefited via *Misereor*, *Adveniat* and *Missio*, the German Catholic Aid agencies.³⁰ Due to the many German *Fidei Donum*-priests, who had gone to Latin America after 1957,³¹ the connection to Latin America was especially strong and resulted in a strong influx of students from South and Central America.³² Reciprocally, the reception of Vatican II in Latin America, as symbolized by the Latin American Episcopal Conference of Medellín in 1968 and the concept of the 'option for

²¹ Schmidtman, *Katholische Studierende*, 280-282.

²² The relative absence of Jesuits from the German theological scene until 1945 is in part a long-term consequence of their banishment from the German Reich in 1872. For a full treatment of German Jesuit history, including the theological activity of the Society of Jesus in the context of Vatican II, see Klaus Schatz, *Geschichte der deutschen Jesuiten (1814–1983)*, 5 vols. (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013).

²³ For a preliminary overview, see Erwin Gatz (ed.), *Priesterausbildungsstätten der deutschsprachigen Länder zwischen Aufklärung und Zweitem Vatikanischen Konzil* (Rome/Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1994).

²⁴ On Küng, see his autobiographies: Hans Küng, *Erkämpfte Freiheit* (München: Piper 2002), and Hans Küng, *Umstrittene Wahrheit* (München: Piper, 2007).

²⁵ Karl H. Neufeld, *Die Brüder Rahner. Eine Biographie* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1994).

²⁶ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theologie ist Biographie. Erinnerungen und Notizen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006).

²⁷ Tiemo Rainer Peters, *Johann Baptist Metz. Theologie des vermissten Gottes* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1998).

²⁸ For a contemporary overview, see Herbert Vorgrimler and Robert Vander Gucht (eds.), *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert. Perspektiven, Strömungen, Motive in der christlichen und nichtchristlichen Welt* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1969/70).

²⁹ See his early sociological writings, Norbert Greinacher, *Soziologie der Pfarrei. Wege zur Untersuchung* (Colmar: Alsatia, 1955).

³⁰ Sylvie Toscer, *Les Catholiques allemands à la conquête du développement* (Paris: Harmattan, 1997).

³¹ This topic has not been studied yet; but note some pertinent observations in Margit Eckholt and Regina Heyder (eds.), *In der Freiheit des Geistes leben. Peter Hünemann im Gespräch* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2010), 53. *Fidei donum* priests are priests who responded to Pope Pius XII's encyclical of 1957, *Fidei donum*, in which he called for diocesan priests to engage in missionary work in Asia, Africa and Latin America, without thus relinquishing their diocesan ties.

³² This connection was institutionalized already in 1968 through the foundation of the "Stipendienwerk Lateinamerika-Deutschland e.V. (Intercambio Cultural Alemán Latinoamericano – ICALA)" by the theologians Bernhard Welte and Peter Hünemann. It continues to provide scholarships for young Latin American theologians, philosophers and other academics who want to study in Germany. See Margit Eckholt (ed.), *„Clash of civilizations“ - oder Begegnung der Kulturen aus dem Geist des Evangeliums? Bernhard Weltes Impulse für den interkulturellen Dialog mit Lateinamerika* (Münster: LIT, 2009).

the poor', found great interest in Germany and became fundamental for the theological identity of many German priests and theologians.³³

Additionally, for the first time, around 1968 a real ecumenical collaboration with Protestants was obtained in universities like Tübingen, Münster or Munich – by professors and students alike. In Tübingen, an open-minded Catholic theologian would not only listen to lectures by Küng and Ratzinger, but also by the Protestant Ernst Käsemann and Jürgen Moltmann.³⁴ Especially Protestant exegesis was widely received and induced phantasies of meaningful Church reform on the basis of the New Testament – with a stress on *Gemeinde* (parish community)³⁵ and 'base communities', an interpretation of scripture which took up proactively *die Sache Jesu* (the cause of Jesus) instead of handing on a static and authoritarian *depositum fidei*. But also theologians who came from the old German Catholic university tradition, like Walter Kasper, a pupil of Josef Rupert Geiselmann – one of the inventors of the construct of the so-called 'Catholic Tübingen School' –,³⁶ were actively engaged in changing Catholic theology. Kasper's pupil Hans Kessler produced a hotly contested thesis with the title 'Salvation as Liberation',³⁷ which argued against old theories of redemption, such as Anselm of Canterbury's theory of satisfaction, because the latter were too focused on sin and gave little attention to the meaningful liberation of humanity and society. Josef Nolte, a pupil of Hans Küng, published his thesis 'History and Dogma',³⁸ a radical historical relativization of ecclesiastical dogma, eventually proving to be too radical even for his master. Küng himself had earlier profited from the revisionist Church history of his Tübingen colleague Karl August Fink, who introduced him to the problems of interpreting the Council of Constance's decree *Haec sancta*³⁹ Sociology and Psychology were now introduced into Pastoral Theology, for instance by Norbert Greinacher.⁴⁰ Thus, radical revisionism was appearing everywhere, and much seemed possible.

The central figure of theological inspiration and orientation for decidedly "left" theologians appears to have been Karl Rahner. He had famous pupils and his lectures were followed by individuals like Leonardo Boff and Johann Baptist Metz, the latter propounding his new political theology. But also less famous personalities were

³³ Thomas Schreijäck (ed.), *Stationen eines Exodus. 35 Jahre Theologie der Befreiung in Lateinamerika; Lernprozesse - Herausforderungen - Impulse für die Weltkirche* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2007).

³⁴ As can be easily seen in the libraries of theologians who studied at Tübingen at the time, e.g. the one of my uncle, Pfarrer Wilhelm König (+ 1987), a former student and assistant of Hans Küng.

³⁵ See Peter Hoffmann, *Amt und Gemeinde in der Sicht der sog Papiere* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986).

³⁶ Stefan Warthmann, *Die Katholische Tübinger Schule. Zur Geschichte ihrer Wahrnehmung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011).

³⁷ Hans Kessler, *Erlösung als Befreiung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1972). See also Hans Kessler, "Erlösung als Befreiung? Zu einer Kontroverse" in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 191 (1973): 849-853.

³⁸ Josef Nolte, *Dogma in Geschichte. Versuch einer Kritik der Dogmatismus in der Glaubensdarstellung* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1971).

³⁹ Heribert Müller, "Konzilien des 15. Jahrhunderts und Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil. Historiker und Theologen als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenossen," in Dieter Hein *et al.* (eds.), *Historie und Leben. Der Historiker als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenosse. Festschrift Lothar Gall* (München: Oldenbourg, 2006), 115-135. The decree *Haec Sancta* was issued by the Council of Constance in 1415 and addressed the highly controversial issue whether Council decisions could have priority over papal decisions.

⁴⁰ Norbert Greinacher, "Die Kirche in der städtischen Gesellschaft," in *Schriften zur Pastoralsoziologie* Vol. VI (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1966).

among his audience – such as Kuno Füssel,⁴¹ perhaps the only real theological Marxist in Germany, and Johannes Caminada, the father of the Calama-Project which was transferred from Chile to Mannheim, and which has been studied recently by Martin Janik.⁴² Rahner's attractiveness is not easily explained. He showed sympathy towards the radical priest groups, and he reflected on a theology of revolution,⁴³ but perhaps more generally the anthropocentric turn of his theology appealed to progressive theologians, who wanted to change the present world and did not want to rely solely on improvements in the world to come. Perhaps a certain optimism was present in Rahner's theology, which did not focus on the sinfulness of man, but rather on the self-communication of God in man.⁴⁴ From 1967 to 1971, Rahner was in Münster, at the center of activity in reform-oriented German Catholic circles in more ways than one, and this brief burst of activity in a German Catholic state university faculty of theology had spectacular effects. Many of the leading figures in the aforementioned radical priest groups had come to know him there as students and as university assistants. Rahner, Metz and Kasper were involved, for instance, in the formation of the circle of critical priests in the diocese of Münster, the 'Freckenhorster Kreis', perhaps the most important group of reform-oriented priests in Germany.⁴⁵ During the aforementioned October 1969 Rome Conference, Rahner and Yves Congar met with the solidarity priests and expressed their sympathy.⁴⁶

The Priest Groups in West Germany

The formation of radical priest associations was a European phenomenon,⁴⁷ and the German groups shared many of the characteristics of the other groups. The keywords of the German 'solidarity groups' were democratization, humanization and the re-interpretation of faith.⁴⁸ The Church was to become a community of free human beings, who would decide on their affairs together, rationally, publicly and responsibly. Thus, the Church should become a group within the larger society, a milieu where respect and human behavior would be prominently present, a free church for a free world. The third keyword, "Interpretation of Faith", arose straightforwardly out of the new exegesis and theology. Not ecclesiastical dogma, but the "cause of Jesus" – *die Sache Jesu* – was to be made plausible and accessible for the world as it existed in real life. Jesus of Nazareth was seen as the incarnation of God's solidarity with all the disadvantaged and unhappy. The purpose was thus not

⁴¹ Kuno Füssel and Michael Ramminger (eds.), *Zwischen Medellín und Paris. 1968 und die Theologie* (Luzern/Münster: Edition Exodus, 2009).

⁴² Martin Janik, "Die Utopie eines radikalen Ortswechsels der Kirche. Vom Calama-Experiment zur Projektgruppe Industriearbeit Mannheim-Ludwigshafen (1968-1998)," (PhD diss., faculty of theology, University of Mainz, 2013). Calama aimed at creating a public space for radical pastoral work on the factory floor, engaging worker priests and lay activists in a common project.

⁴³ Karl Rahner, "Zur Theologie der Revolution," in *Schriften zur Theologie* 10 (1972): 568-586.

⁴⁴ Jun-Hyung Jhi, *Das Heil in Jesus Christus bei Karl Rahner und in der Theologie der Befreiung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). See now also Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Left Catholicism in the Long Sixties, 1959-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31-36.

⁴⁵ Thomas Grossbölting, 'Wie ist Christsein heute möglich?' *Suchbewegungen des nachkonziliaren Katholizismus im Spiegel des Freckenhorster Kreises* (Altenberge: Oros, 1997).

⁴⁶ Raske et al., *Eine freie Kirche*, 159-161.

⁴⁷ Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 86-109.

⁴⁸ Raske et al., *Eine freie Kirche*, 28. See now the new synthesis in Voges, *Konzil, Dialog und Demokratie*, 87-100.

primarily to modernize the Church, but to serve all mankind in the spirit of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*. Democratization, humanization and re-interpretation of faith was thus summed up in the overall principle of solidarity, and the groups therefore called themselves solidarity priests.

Apart from these abstract principles, what were the main concerns of the German priest groups? Two pastoral issues were quickly named:⁴⁹ first the confessionally mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants, which had been fought against for decades by both Churches, and which were now to be radically re-valued and revalidated as ecumenically valuable.⁵⁰ The second pastoral problem was living proof that, in some respects, German Catholicism had not moved forward in the last fifty years. It was the topic of *wiederverheiratete Geschiedene* (Catholics, who had remarried in civil ceremonies) and their access to the sacraments. A third pastoral problem concerned the priests themselves: celibacy⁵¹ – another eternal problem of the Roman Catholic Church, and the related question of how pastoral work of priests could be organized professionally.⁵² The *Basiserklärung* (fundamental declaration) of the German solidarity priests added a more general perspective: it alluded to the problems of mankind, for instance population growth and the arms race. They accused the Church of not reacting sufficiently to these and other challenges in the spirit of Vatican II.

At the October 1969 Conference in Rome, the German priests took up these topics once more, and they spoke of the “liberation of humanity” from the dangers of a totalitarianism which could be economic, political, technological and/or ecclesiastical. With regard to structural reforms within the Church, they showed themselves as somewhat less radical than, for instance, some Italian innovative priests present in Rome, who aimed at a church without money and structure. Such far-reaching goals went too far for the Germans present in Rome.⁵³ Nevertheless, they continued to actively engage in international discussions and to show their concern even in the aftermath of the October 1969 Conference, as is witnessed by their publication of a collection of writings on “Totalitarian Theocracy”, aimed against the perceived quasi-fascist union of State and Church in Spain and Portugal.⁵⁴

It is important to note that the ideas of the West German Solidarity Groups found a direct and positive reception in the German Democratic Republic. Sebastian Holzbrecher has recently studied the so-called *Aktionskreis Halle*, a group of reformist clergy and laity which, amongst other things, asked for the open election of bishops by their ‘constituencies’. The *Aktionskreis* became part of the Peace Movement in the GDR and was later on subject to operations by the East German intelligence agency, the *Stasi*. Holzbrecher reports a collusion of sorts by the

⁴⁹ Raske *et al.*, *Eine freie Kirche*, 48-55.

⁵⁰ See Lukas Rölli-Alkemper, *Familie im Wiederaufbau. Katholizismus und bürgerliches Familienideal der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1965* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

⁵¹ Raymund Kottje *et al.*, *Ehelosigkeit des Priesters in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1970).

⁵² Michael Raske, “Berufstätigkeit von Priestern,” in Ferdinand Klostermann (ed.), *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, Vol. 5: *Lexikon der Pastoraltheologie* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1972), 53-4.

⁵³ Raske *et al.*, *Eine freie Kirche*, 114-116.

⁵⁴ Michael Raske, Klaus Schäfer and Norbert Wetzel *et al.* (eds.), *Der totalitäre Gottesstaat. Die Lage der Christen in Portugal, Spanien und im Baskenland. Eine Dokumentation* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970).

Archbishop of East Berlin, Cardinal Joachim Meisner, and the *Stasi* against the *Aktionskreis* with its turbulent priests and laity.⁵⁵

The Reception of the Council and Polarization in German Catholicism after Vatican II

The wide field of post-Vatican II conflicts in Catholic Germany is being studied intensively in recent years.⁵⁶ A prominent example of progressive Catholicism on the diocesan level⁵⁷ at that time was Limburg. Here, Bishop Wilhelm Kempf,⁵⁸ personally a rather conservative *alumnus* of the *Collegium Germanicum* and a former assistant secretary of the Second Vatican Council, narrowly escaped destitution in 1973, when denunciations by Nuntio Corrado Bafile against him were published in the German press. The warning had come from Rome; in a way it can be regarded as an early *Vatileak* scandal. Bafile's points against Kempf concerned the latter's intention to convert Catholic Action into a synodal organisation of the diocese with councils on every level. This would have come very close to a parliamentarisation of the diocese. The proposed new 'synodal order', laying out the new structure, was published with some modifications of the most radical edges of the original plans in 1977.⁵⁹ At the same time, the diocese celebrated its 150th jubilee, in the process re-inventing its history and trajectory. Former jubilees were presented as having concentrated too much on the memory of Catholic unity and mobilization in the Prussian *Kulturkampf*; now the *Zeitgenossenschaft*, the contemporaneous community of the People of God, engaged in a pilgrimage of its own, was celebrated as the central point of diocesan identity.⁶⁰

Although the liturgical and pastoral reception of Vatican II in most West German dioceses was relatively moderate,⁶¹ the diocese of Limburg, in addition to the controversy alluded to above, witnessed one particularly famous example of liturgical progressivism, which caught the attention of the entire German press in 1971: the Hofheim Mass Festival.⁶² This event, organised for the Catholic Youth of the diocese, attempted to combine the Eucharist with an Open-Air-Festival. Because of bad weather, the event had to be moved to a nearby church. Vicar Herbert Leuninger presided over the Eucharist in street clothes and formulated the prayers freely. During mass, crates with soft drinks and sausages for the ensuing *Agape* had been

⁵⁵ Sebastian Holzbrecher, *Der Aktionskreis Halle. Postkonziliare Konflikte im Katholizismus der DDR* (Würzburg: Echter, 2014).

⁵⁶ See the recent synthesis by Voges, *Konzil, Dialog und Demokratie*. A further comprehensive project on this field is being prepared by Wilhelm Damberg and Florian Bock.

⁵⁷ See, in general, Joachim Schmiedl, *Dieses Ende ist eher ein Anfang. Die Rezeption des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils durch die deutschen Bischöfe (1959-1971)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014).

⁵⁸ Herman H. Schwedt, "Kempf, Wilhelm," in Erwin Gatz (ed.), *Die Bischöfe der deutschsprachigen Länder 1945-2001. Ein biographisches Lexikon* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002), 319-321.

⁵⁹ Klaus Schatz, *Geschichte des Bistums Limburg* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1983), 331-343.

⁶⁰ Claus Arnold, "Bistumsjubiläen und Identitätsstiftung im 20. Jahrhundert am Beispiel der Diözesen Rottenburg-Stuttgart und Limburg," in *Römische Quartalschrift* 100 (2005): 313-332.

⁶¹ See Martin Belz, "Der Tiber fließt in den Main – Pastorale Entwicklungen in der ersten Nachkonzilszeit in Frankfurt," in Joachim Schmiedl (ed.), *Der Tiber fließt in den Rhein. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil in den mittelrheinischen Bistümern* (Mainz: Gesellschaft für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 2015), 175-196.

⁶² Schatz, *Geschichte*, 347-8. Note also "Herbert Leuninger Archiv," <http://www.leuninger-herbert.de/herbert/archiv/Navigation/Biografie/index.html> [accessed 27 October 2015].

placed around the altar. The *Agape* witnessed also some incidents of kissing and smoking in the church. Bishop Kempf intervened rather meekly, but the “event” triggered a traditionalist reaction in the diocese. One additional controversy drew attention to the diocese of Bishop Kempf. In Frankfurt, the largest city in the Diocese of Limburg, the progressive Catholic student community transformed the University Chaplaincy into a grass-roots-oriented ‘base democracy’. However, the intensive discussions within the community – sometimes 10 hours long – eventually proved to be too tiring, and the project collapsed already in the course of 1971.⁶³

The Catholic student milieu also gave rise to radical intellectual progressivism with a Marxist touch. A group in the Bochum *Studentengemeinde* contributed significantly to the launching of the journal, *Kritischer Katholizismus: Zeitung für Theorie und Praxis in Gesellschaft und Kirche*, which began to appear after the famous *Katholikentag* in Essen 1968.⁶⁴ The publishing house was Pahl-Rugenstein, largely financed by the East German government. Under its various editors, among them Richard Faber, the journal openly criticized the CDU, which was still closely linked to German mainstream Catholicism, and *Kritischer Katholizismus* understood European Unity as a capitalist and ultimately fascist *Abendland* – or *Reich*-project. The journal’s overall anti-Americanism and anti-Imperialism likewise became more prominent over the years. Freedom of speech within the church was another platform point and central demand of this iconoclastic journal. In contrast to mainstream Catholicism, the journal likewise fought for a redrafting of the laws governing abortion in West Germany, and *Kritischer Katholizismus* accepted the solution proposed by the SPD-FDP (FDP = Free Democratic Party, the classical liberal party in West Germany) coalition of allowing abortions during the first three months of pregnancy (*Fristenlösung*). The journal collapsed in 1973-1974, the years which marked the end of the radical phase of Vatican II-reception in many European Catholicisms. In Germany, the reform discussion which had begun to affect mainstream Catholicism, was eventually successfully contained by the bishops at the ‘German Synod’ at Würzburg (1971-1975).⁶⁵ The groups of ‘turbulent priests’ worked on nonetheless,⁶⁶ producing journals like *Imprimatur*,⁶⁷ actively engaging in the promotion of Liberation Theology, and collaborating with the *Kirche von unten*-movement (since 1978) or *Donum Vitae* (since 1999).⁶⁸ On Pentecost 2015, however, almost 50 years after the end of Vatican II, the umbrella association of the German groups (AGP) dissolved itself, taking note of the increasing old age of its members.⁶⁹

⁶³ Torben Giese, “Die Frankfurter Katholische Studentengemeinde und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Glaubenswissen und gesellschaftlicher Wandel,” in *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 61 (2009): 289-312.

⁶⁴ Schmidtman, *Katholische Studierende*, 334-336, 355, 370; see also Voges, *Konzil, Demokratie und Dialog*, 141.

⁶⁵ Voges, *Konzil, Demokratie und Dialog*.

⁶⁶ See Utsch, *Dem Konzil verpflichtet*.

⁶⁷ See “Imprimatur,” accessed 27 October 2015, <http://www.imprimatur-trier.de/>

⁶⁸ *Kirche von unten* = Church from Below. The association *donum vitae zur Förderung des Schutzes des menschlichen Lebens* was founded in 1999 by Catholics refusing to comply with the 1999 decision by Pope John Paul II, who had cancelled the authorization of Catholic pregnancy counselors to issue so-called ‘certificates of advice’. Under German abortion law, women may obtain termination of their pregnancies only after undergoing pregnancy counselling by authorized institutions, which alone can extend the crucial ‘certificates of advice’.

⁶⁹ See “Informationsdienst der Arbeitsgemeinschaft von Priester - und Solidaritätsgruppen in Deutschland,” SOG Papiere 48 (2), 12 (2015), accessed 27 October 2015, <http://www.imprimatur-trier.de/2015/sog15-02.pdf>

L'auteur

Claus Arnold est professeur d'histoire de l'Église à la Faculté de théologie catholique de l'université de Mayence. Après des études à Tübingen et à Oxford, un doctorat en théologie à Francfort (1997), il a soutenu son habilitation à Münster en 2003. De 2004 à 2014, il a été professeur à la Goethe-Universität de Francfort.

Abstract

In the late 1960s, radical priest groups emerged in several European countries. Studying the mobilization of German priests in its social and ecclesiastical context reveals the degree to which Catholic mentalities changed across the Rhine before and after Vatican II. It also shows that the “anthropocentric turn” of Karl Rahner's theology and other theological advances significantly contributed to legitimating projects for radically reforming the Church. The real but limited changes affected by the “German synod” between 1971 and 1975 thus allowed the coherence of German Catholicism to be preserved.

Key words: Germany; Catholicism; Theology; Vatican II; Protesting Priests.

Résumé

L'apparition de groupes de prêtres contestataires à la fin des années 1960 est un phénomène que l'on observe dans plusieurs pays européens. L'étude de la mobilisation des prêtres allemands, située ici dans son contexte social et ecclésial, témoigne de la profondeur du changement des mentalités dans le catholicisme d'outre-Rhin avant et après Vatican II. Elle montre aussi que le « tournant anthropocentrique » de la théologie de Karl Rahner et d'autres avancées théologiques ont fortement contribué à légitimer les projets de réforme radicale de l'Église. Aussi les changements réels mais limités opérés par le « synode allemand », entre 1971 et 1975, ont-ils permis de maintenir la cohérence du catholicisme allemand.

Mots clés: Allemagne ; catholicisme ; théologie ; Vatican II ; prêtres contestataires.

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