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Barbara Theriault. *"Conservative Revolutionaries": Protestant and Catholic Churches in Germany after Radical Political Change in the 1990s.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004. vii + 188 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-667-2.

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Good Bye, Luther!

The drama of German reunification played out primarily on the main stages of politics and the economy. The bankruptcy of the East German model in these areas resulted in little opposition to the competing FRG model. By comparison, social institutions were a mere sideshow. Yet society and culture–less malleable to the pressures of the SED state–have by the same token been more resistant to merger on West German terms. Barbara Theriault analyzes the impact of reunification on two key social institutions, the Protestant and Catholic churches, looking particularly at three areas–chaplaincy in the military, religious instruction in the schools and social welfare institutions–in which the churches' interface with state and society created potential for political conflict. In each of these policy areas, the West German model of a highly visible, legally privileged social role for churches (*Volkskirche*) contrasted with the GDR model of churches largely disenfranchised in terms of social functions. Theriault's study is based largely on interviews and secondary source material. It is the only monograph in English to deal in depth with the consequences of German reunification for churches' role in society.

Employing a sociological framework, the author's main purpose is to explore the "politics of institutionalization, or the discourse and deliberation attendant to the resolution of these important policy issues. Theriault analyzes metaphors used by church groups as they sought either to legitimize the "institutional transfer" of the western model to the East or alternatively reject/alter this transfer. Protestants largely used the metaphor of "church within socialism," developed under Bishop Albrecht Schonherr following the accommodation with the regime during the 1970s (pp. 29-36); Catholics adhered to a strategy of "political abstinence" identified with Cardinal Alfred Bengsch (pp. 21-29). Although 1989 is usually viewed as the triumph of the Catholic metaphor over the Protestant one, there was in fact no "Stunde Null" after 1990. Thus, along with pragmatic considerations, these metaphors continued to hold sway. Theriault argues that these contrasting metaphors are to be explained neither by confession (Protestant vs. Catholic) nor by majority/minority status, but rather by the influence of key church leaders.

Based on these two metaphors, the author discerns two groups that remained relatively consistent in their views: those advocating adoption of the West German model (whom Theriault labels "reformers") and those rejecting this model and arguing for the retention of positive features of the GDR model (Theriault designates members of this group "conservative revolutionaries"). The fronts in this debate do not align neatly along East-West lines, although more conservative revolutionaries are to be found in the East.

In a most interesting aspect of the work, the author employs Albert Hirschman's typology of argumentation to organize the threads into a coherent whole and demonstrate a tactical consistency in the positions.[1] For example, the "reformers" argue (pp. 74-76) that the state-sanctioned social role of churches in the military, education and social welfare will provide opportunities for mission in the dechristianized setting of the GDR; failure to take advantage of such opportunities will leave Protestants vulnerable to resurgent Catholic influence ("imminent danger thesis"). For their part, the "conservative revolutionaries" argue (pp. 71-73) that the West German model will endanger the proven, parish-based models of the East ("jeopardy argument"), will cost the churches hard-won credibility and leave them dependent on the state ("perversity argument"). They are bound in any case to fail in the context of a secularized society ("futility argument").

Theriault shows that the resolution of these issues was characterized by more compromise and incrementalism than is generally assumed. To be sure, the western model regarding social welfare reigned supreme, largely for financial reasons. The churches deferred final resolution of the military chaplaincy issue until 2003, permitting a dual system in the interim. As a harbinger of broader challenges to the West German model from growing religious diversity in Germany, the issue of religious instruction in the schools produced the greatest political conflict: the proposal by the SPD government in Brandenburg to replace religious instruction with a secular course on ethics and religion was fought unsuccessfully by both churches in the courts.

Several omissions flaw this otherwise comprehensive and authoritative treatment. First, confessional differences *within* the Protestant camp should be highlighted more. The more socially and politically active Union churches (Berlin, Church Province of Saxony) are well represented among the "conservative revolutionaries," but voices of the more politically deferential Lutheran Churches (Saxony, Thuringia, Mecklenburg) seem missing in this narrative. Closer to the SPD even before 1989, the Union churches were naturally more critical of the FRG model in many respects. Second, more treatment is needed of the ambivalent role of Manfred Stolpe–chief lawyer of the GDR churches yet later (as MinisterprÃ¤sident of Brandenburg) head of the state that rejected the western model of religious instruction. Finally, Thierault leaves unaddressed the major issue of church finance. The resolution of this issue foreshadowed the extension of the West German model more generally. Having lost their official status in the 1950s, many Protestant "conservative revolutionaries" came to see the normative value of a church supported by "voluntary" contributions rather than a church tax collected by the state. Early in 1990, however, the West German churches made it clear that continuation of their substantial subsidies to the weaker eastern churches depended on restoration of the church tax system in the former GDR. This step, in turn, prejudiced the outcome on the issues Theriault treats.

Thierault's terminology may leave the reader (and the subjects themselves) somewhat confused. Extension of the West German *Volkskirche* model is labeled as "reform"; retention of the status quo, minority-church model of the GDR is propounded by "conservative revolutionaries." Illustrative of ensuing verbal contortions is the statement found on p. 77: "Reformers ... supported the West German status quo, thus becoming reactionaries themselves." Perhaps "restorationist" and "voluntarist," respectively, would have proven more apt characterizations, without doing injustice to the motives of the two groups.

In my view, however, the divide between these groups should not be overstated. Despite losing the privileges associated with the West German model and flirting with the notion of "free churches" in their dialogues with various American churches, GDR churches never relinquished their claim to speak for society as a whole, nor did they jettison the trappings of the *Volkskirche*. By the same token, West German churches had long been aware of the societal forces challenging religious *Modelldeutschland*. Theriault's conclusion that "defenders of the East German status quo were also successful in institutionalizing some principles" (p. 141) thus comports well with the notion of greater continuity in social-cultural life than in the political-economic sphere.

Note

[1]. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

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