

sen lassen, kann sich selbst vom Jenseits seiner brüchigen und ephemeren Existenz her denken, deren vorzeitigem Ende durch einen leichtfertigen Umgang mit Technik ganz gewiss kein sinnstiftendes Element innewohnt.

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## 7. Anhang

### 7.1 Englische Zusammenfassung

The question and morality of the use of nuclear energy was a hot-button issue within West German Protestant churches from the early 1970s until German reunification in 1989. In this study I analyze the historical causes and processes of this debate, offering a critical examination of the theological, political and cultural understanding of anti-nuclear activism that emerged. I trace the new culture of protest and environmental activism among Protestants and the major impact these churches have had on the decision in Germany not to further expand nuclear technology but instead to move on to renewable sources of energy.

This study investigates the anti-nuclear protests within the Protestant churches (simply referred to as »the church« or »the churches« in what is to follow) from three different perspectives. First, it deals with theological and ethical perceptions of nuclear energy. From the point of view of the mandate for pastoral care within the churches, the positions were rather unproblematic. The churches were to offer comfort and shelter for those in fear; they were to listen, to mediate, and to console. However from the point of view of scripture, the case of nuclear technology was more complicated. Several environmental activists held the churches responsible for a technical civilization out of control. The argument, as it became popular then, went as follows: The seminal cause for the predicament of God's creation was seen in Genesis 1:28, *dominium terrae*. In the wake of this mandate to act as a ruler over the entire creation, according to a common interpretation, Judeo-Christian culture destroyed the old animistic cults that had held nature sacred, initiated the unhealthy separation of nature from man, and degraded nature to the status of resources and objects, a path that would lead directly to the foundation of technocracy. The church, and with it the environmental activists, argued for stewardship as outlined in Genesis 2:15, which refers to a mandate of cultivation and caretaking.

However, many theologians opposed the effort to use scripture as the basis for rejecting nuclear technology, calling this hermeneutic exercise »eco-Biblicism«. They noted that both references to Genesis stand in the context of mankind's position before the expulsion from paradise. Indeed, after the fall, the Bible explicates a human condition in conflict with nature, with humans neither as stewards nor as rulers, but instead as suffering mortals captured in drudgery until inescapable death. Thus,

critical theologians argued, a state of harmony of mankind and nature was not to be expected in this life, it could indeed only be interpreted as an eschatological promise for what comes afterwards. In the same vein, tendencies towards neo-animistic, esoteric readings of the Bible, as popular as they were in the 1970s and '80s were also met with theological skepticism.

The main thesis of this study, namely that nuclear technology in Germany was religiously and culturally encoded, has another root, and that is the apocalyptic character of a major disaster. To some extent Christian tradition supplies the graphic imagery of a collapsing society, together with prophets of doom. Here too, direct references to Biblical texts seemed problematic for many. The secular apocalypse, it was argued, was void of any redemptive qualities, and it was passed without judgment. As everywhere else in modern German Protestantism, the mytho-poetical stories of the Bible were meant to be understood metaphorically, and the books of revelation had nothing to offer for those who feared atomic annihilation. Thus, most theological foundations for the protest against nuclear technology and the preservation of the environment remained somewhat eclectic and constructed through the means of more general ethical concepts and powerful images like Noah's ark or the tower of Babel.

The second part of this book deals with the specifically German elements of historical trauma and fear that pervaded the discussion of the political technology of nuclear energy. This cultural code served as a key, opening gates of memory that took the debate far beyond technical discussions. It can be shown that nuclear technology carried a deep political and ethical burden, resonating with the lasting discussion about what kind of society Germans wanted to live in. After 1945, the churches too, as many other institutions in German society, suffered from a crisis of legitimacy, one redeeming factor being that a few brave men and women in the Protestant church, especially those of the so-called Confessing Church, had resisted submitting their faith to the doctrines of National Socialist ideology. In the early days of the Federal Republic the members of the Confessing Church played an important role in the process of reconstructing the churches and their moral authority. Part of this reconstruction involved contesting and revising the Lutheran doctrine of obedience towards worldly rule. Under National Socialism, theologians argued, disobedience and resistance would not just be legitimate but also obligatory. In the postwar period the question for churches and their members was the point at which a position of faith would demand a clear taking of political sides. This question was raised several times, for exam-

ple when dealing with apartheid in South Africa, against which the Protestant churches in Germany took a clear stand in the 1970s. It was very controversial, however, when it came to the discussion about the civil use of nuclear energy.

A third aspect of this work pertains to the political and societal changes West Germany underwent in the wake of the 1968 student revolt. Large influential institutions like the churches resonated with all the major shifts in political culture of an increasingly secular society. The very common accusation of that time, that the churches might have abandoned their traditional conservatism in favor of a more progressive stance, was probably more of a polemical statement from the right than social reality. What is true, though, is that the churches opened up to the left, finally speaking to the skeptical trade unions and seeking an amicable relation to social democracy, with the old animosities towards organized labor slowly subsiding. The churches also accepted new forms of social protest, colorful and soaked in popular culture as they were in the 1970s.

The churches eventually became meeting points and even recruiting grounds for the new ecological movement, reflecting the notion that it should and could not abstain from activities with profound ethical ramifications. Was the church thus politicized? Many on the more conservative side thought so and complained bitterly. Yet not until public opinion in Germany swung towards a critical stance towards nuclear technology after Chernobyl would the church as a whole find the courage to go along. Until then, the conflicts within the churches at times took on such a bitterness and vehemence that the bishops had to intervene and repeatedly call for civility and respect in the debate. The churches felt obliged to mediate, they were to provide neutral ground where the technocratic elite could meet with environmentalists and ecologists to conduct discussions moderated by church officials.

The churches were well equipped to host such events since after the war they founded the so-called Protestant Academies. Those were not, as the name suggests, institutes of research, training or higher learning, but rather lecture halls with adjacent accommodation, club houses, and libraries, designed as retreats where for a few days and in an atmosphere of conviviality opponents in all kinds of social strife would meet and talk. The proceedings of these meetings would then be published, and they are a magnificent source of information about the self-understanding of a rapidly changing modern society. Especially the Protestant churches learned to live as a *Konfliktgemeinschaft*, a »community of conflict«. That was not the outcome of unwelcome division; it was a mode of existence

in a changing society where not all controversies could be solved to the satisfaction of all factions and where compromise was at times difficult to reach. Many conferences in these academies, and especially those dealing with environmental problems and nuclear energy, ended with an agreement to disagree.

However, a minority of pastors and church employees called for more spectacular acts of civil disobedience, modeled after the civil rights movement in the United States and protest movements in former European colonies overseas. A debate on the legitimacy of resistance and the limits of political activism ensued that would eventually embolden a new culture of protest in Germany and lead to a more confident and persistent citizenry, both within and outside of the churches.

Finally, the thesis concerning the cultural encoding of nuclear technology in Germany points to the more general observation historians should always take into account, namely that technology has a cultural meaning that runs deeper than its obvious functions and applications. In Germany, nuclear technology brought about a time of anxiety evoking political conflicts that reached far beyond the actual problem. The fear of complicity and political guilt stemming from historical experience, the Biblical proportions of the perceived threat, prophecies of doom and damnation, accompanied with the loss of pastoral landscapes; all these elements were a challenge to the churches as well, which were still seen as sources of ethical orientation and forums of debate in times of discontent.

## 7.2 Literatur

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