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A Curious Case of Cooperation and Coexistence: Church–State Engagement and Oppositional Free Spaces in Communist Yugoslavia and East Germany

The communist parties of Eastern Europe sought to organize power relations to preclude potential opposition. While successful in aligning society, the economy, culture, education and politics in party institutions, East Germany and Yugoslavia approached the execution of religious policy from a contrasting perspective. Unable to marginalize religion completely, the party and national churches entered into a vibrant, incentives-based back-and-forth. Over time, Church–state accommodation crystallized, producing Church-based free spaces located outside of the standard communist power structure. However, the ways in which East Germany and Yugoslavia engaged their churches generated different forms of Church-based free space, which, by the late 1980s, produced variegated forms of anti-communist opposition.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Civil Society, Church, Communism, Religious Policy, Nationalism, Oppositional Movements

Introduction

Government policy affects the spaces in which social actors work, designates and delineates boundaries and creates distinguishable spheres in which stakeholders act. While laws and legislation demonstrate where the lines of acceptable political behavior lie, often they are subject to negotiation, mutual agreements or contentious dispute. These back-and-forth exchanges produce policies that rarely remain static. Over time, fluid, dynamic relationships evolve between key stakeholders and elites, which further modify the policy's trajectory, opening doors for new interpretations and new modes of acting.

Even in communist East Germany (GDR) and Yugoslavia, where authority was concentrated in single-party authoritarianism, power relations were neither a one-way street, nor were they monopolistic. There was one policy arena, in which one finds an illustrative example of fluid two-way, agent-to-agent engagement and cooperation: the arena of Church–state relations. Despite times of marginalization and suppression, it was the only policy arena that

necessitated negotiation and active *quid pro quo*.[1] This study claims that decision-making processes in East German and Yugoslav Church-state relations led to variegated forms of Church-based oppositional *free spaces,* in which people were able to plant the seeds of opposition to the legitimacy of communist rule.[2] In this essay, I claim that if religious policy allows Churches to influence social issues, it is more likely that free spaces will emerge in which principles of non-violence, peaceful resolution and human rights prevail, and these spaces may play active roles in mediation in times of unrest. If, however, religious policy excludes the Church on issues of social policy, this will lead to the emergence of free spaces, the actors of which will be less loyal and less invested as social stakeholders. Since its intermediary role is thwarted, the Church will be less interested in liberal-democratic reform and will make fewer demands based on non-violence, inclusion and peace.

Religion policy and Church–state engagement under a communist regime was highly unique. The GDR and Yugoslav communist regimes devoted tremendous human and financial resources to the regulation of religious life, entrusting the various tasks to state secretariats, commissions for religious affairs, and security agencies. Despite their monopoly on authority, these regimes were never monolithic and, in turn, Churches were never passive victims. Rather, there arose a pragmatic exchange and vibrant Church-state dialogue based on negotiated responses to incentives: the state needed the Church for popular legitimacy, the consolidation of power and international credibility, while the Church was dependent on the state for material goods, social services and sheer survival. Neither could function properly without the other, so a symbiotic necessity emerged, marked by micro-level discussions, communiqués, backroom deals and public deliberations. This fluid quality was the fundamental mechanism that linked a set of conditions to the outcome of free spaces.[3]

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1   Steve Bruce, *Politics and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 172.

2   Free spaces are an integral pillar for oppositional groups working in authoritarian societies, without which the chances of success in challenging, reforming or toppling illiberal regimes may be significantly lessened. The ability to organize, cultivate and articulate critical expression, free of governmental intervention or violent crackdown, are the very heart of what makes oppositional movements successful. While they may not be necessary for every movement and while each authoritarian regime may deal with its undesired, unsanctioned oppositional agents in different ways, the growing number of successful regime-critical groups which have demonstrated or currently demonstrate the usage of similar forms of free space, from Africa to Latin America, North America to Arab states, can no longer be ignored by social scientists.

3   Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, "Taking Process Tracing Seriously – The 'Mechanismic' Understanding and Tracing Causal Mechanisms," paper presented at the Southern Political Science Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, January 5–8, 2011.

Categorizing Conditions of Church–State Engagement

The first set of conditions accounts for the initial types of religious policy from 1945 to the early 1950s. The end of the Second World War constituted a clear historical break from the recent past and a new political existence for the GDR and Yugoslavia. Each state approached its Churches in unique ways, while trying to solidify the supremacy of the Communist Party. In the Soviet Zone of Occupation (hereafter, SBZ) that would become East Germany, German communists needed to have a steady hand in navigating the chaotic post-war waters. The Communist Party (hereafter, SED) was institutionally weak and lacked popular support. Hence, it sought to avoid unnecessary challenges from the Church in an effort to build support. As a type of *participatory religious policy,* the SED extended an olive branch to the Church and publicly supported its participation in the establishment of the new state.

Yugoslav religious policy from 1945 to the mid-1950s can be characterized as *extremely repressive.* Since Tito's partisans had secured Western support in their struggle against fascism, their power base required less consolidation in the post-war period. Still, Yugoslav communists viewed religious institutions with trepidation since some segments of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and, more notably, the Catholic Church had aligned themselves with anti-Yugoslav forces. Yugoslav religious policy in this initial period, by virtue of its repressiveness, re-entrenched the Churches in a critical posture vis-à-vis the state, giving them no other options but to embrace nationalism.

The second condition accounts for how the regimes dealt with their national Churches from the mid-1950s to the late-1980s. As public dissent against the regime and repression of the Church became repetitive, party leaders were forced to employ different methods to pacify unrest and suppress challenges to their authority. As a means of restoring order and preserving a good international reputation, the option emerged to engage the Church as the only mediator between the state and protestors. As multiple incidents of protest and unrest occurred and as non-Church oppositional groups sought protection in Church spaces, communicative cooperation between Church and state became more robust.[4] Each profited from this back-and-forth relationship: the state was able to re-establish its authority, while the Church received considerable concessions

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4   John T.S. Madeley, *Church and State in Contemporary Europe: The Chimera of Neutrality* (London: Cass Publishers, 2003), 13.

and established its role as chief mediator, thereby becoming useful to the state and indeed almost indispensable.

Within this second typology, my cases bifurcate along two distinct lines: inclusive and exclusionary engagement. Regimes that *inclusively engage* include their religious groups in ending periods of national unrest make them part of the confidence-building process after periods of violence. Going against Marxist ideology, the East German regimes willingly assigned the Church the role of primary negotiator in mediation. By the late 1980s, as the East German regime reverted to repressive measures against opposition, the Protestant Church carefully articulated liberal-democratic demands, such as respect for human rights, freedom of expression and non-violence, often phrased in masterfully-expressed socialist language. However, since the Protestant Church had experienced significant drops in Church membership, the SED was not constrained to seek out the Church's good offices for challenges to regime authority. The weak position of the Church meant that inclusive regime engagement was possible. Moreover, East Germany could embrace a more receptive stance to the Church, when its own institutions were unsuccessful in responding to oppositional challenge. This institutional weakness necessitated *inclusionary engagement*.

Yugoslavia's *exclusionary regime engagement* stands in stark contrast. High levels of Church repression from 1945 to 1953 were replaced in the mid-1950s by liberalization and political decentralization within the party and its federal-level and republic-level institutions. After two decades of repression, church life was suddenly allowed to expand, and this opened the door for initial critical expression. Congruent with its refusal to incorporate the Churches into the governance of immediate post-war Yugoslavia, Tito and Yugoslav communists never looked upon Church leaders as mediators in times of unrest. Unable to erase prior repression and having offered a maximum amount of space for Church activity, the regime could neither regain the confidence of the Church, nor could it offer concessions. The regime lost the carrot *and* the stick. This opened up avenues for Church spaces to embrace critical stances against religious policy by using language and symbols that questioned and ultimately rejected the supra-ethnic Yugoslav mantra of "brotherhood and unity." Since both the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and the Croatian Catholic Church had been thoroughly excluded from statecraft, there was neither significant sympathy nor convincing incentive for them to intervene on behalf of a weakened regime, which they had never viewed as a social partner.

East German Participatory Church–State Engagement: 1945–1953

From its inception, the SED was faced with the daunting task of convincing the public of its socialist mission, while concomitantly discrediting Western democratic legitimacy. Working from such a weakened position in an ideological minefield, it was necessary to concede substantial points from its party platform by acknowledging "a special German road to socialism."[5] SED General-Secretary Erich Honecker reflects:

> We calculated that the situation in Germany at that time did not provide the necessary requirements for the immediate establishment of socialism. That's why the goal of the German Communist Party (KPD) was to create an antifascist, democratic regime, a parliamentary republic with all the democratic rights and freedoms for the people.[6]

Behind the façade, hardliners altered the party's institutional core, securing a maximum amount of space in all realms of political, public and private life.[7] Religious policy would be the only exception. In July 1946, Central Committee documents demonstrate the policy of the regime of binding the Church to the new state:

> Churches have a stake in East Germany's reconstruction. Their positive cooperation is to be welcomed… Reasonable requests by the Church for the return of occupied Church buildings for religious purposes should receive support from our representatives in administration, in command structures and in the SMAD.[8]

Spaces for political participation corresponded to physical spaces at the national level. Properties belonging to convicted Nazi party members and estates larger than 100 hectares were summarily brought under governmental

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5   Monika Kaiser, "Change and Continuity in the Development of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 688.

6   Erich Honecker, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1988), 181.

7   Monika Kaiser, "Die Zentrale der Diktatur – organisatorische Weichenstellung, Strukturen und Kompetenzen der SED-Führung in der SBZ/DDR," in *Historische DDR-Forschung: Aufsätze und Studien,* ed. Jürgen Kocka (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 78–79.

8   Gerhard Besier, *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche: Der Weg in die Anpassung* (Munich: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1993), 55.

administration.[9] However, so as not to disturb the delicate Church-state balance, the SED exempted *all Church properties* from land reforms.[10] As a further measure of avoiding confrontation, GDR security organs protected the Church from intervention. In January 1947, Soviet and East German officials established the K-5 security apparatus (a precursor to the Ministry for State Security, or Stasi) under the command of the Soviet–East German Central Administration of the Interior.[11] K-5 contained special units for de-Nazification, the elimination of political opponents and monitoring the Evangelical Church.[12] To avoid potentially explosive situations, all interaction between K-5 officials and the Church required high-ranking approval from the Ministry of Interior.

Not only were its institutional autonomy and organizational structure left intact, but the Church reclaimed and expanded its pre-war position. Properties confiscated by the Nazis were returned to the Church and theological centers, which had been closed during the war, reassumed full activity.[13] The SED granted construction permits for new buildings and provided funding for damaged dioceses.[14] With state collection agencies placed at the Church's disposal, Church coffers were replenished with the reintroduction of Church taxes. Moreover, unlike the other Allied sectors, the Evangelical Church was free to introduce pastoral care service for university students.[15] Lastly, Church radio programs, newsletters, periodicals and newspapers further attest to the regime's desire to avoid conflict with the Church.[16]

The official founding of the GDR on October 7, 1949 and the period of Stalinization rapidly consolidated party structures and vigorously centralized all state institutions. The SED injected a new ideological moniker in public debate: pacifist policy (*Friedenspolitik*), upon which it crafted its utopian commitment

9   Arnd Bauerkämper, "Bodenreform und Kollektivierung," in *Handwörterbuch zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland,* ed. Stephan Beetz, Kai Brauer, and Claudia Neu (Berlin: VS Verlag, 2005), 17–18.

10   Clemens Vollnhals, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation: Zur Kirchenpolitik von KPD/SED und SMAD in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone," *Deutschland Archiv* 27 (1994): 486.

11   Monika Tanztscher, "In der Ostzone wird ein neuer Apparat aufgebaut: Die Gründung des DDR-Staatssicherheitsdienstes," *Deutschland Archiv* 31, no. 1 (1998): 48–49.

12   Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Maasenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv/SAPMO-BArch, nr. 002071, Establishment of Division E in Department V, 1947.

13   Detlef Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft: zum Wandel der gesellschaftlichen Lage der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (Berlin: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1994), 95.

14   "Kirchen entstehen neu!" *Die Kirche,* October 30, 1949, 1.

15   "Tätigkeit des Evangelischen Konsistoriums Berlin-Brandenburg," *Provinzialsynode Berlin-Brandenburg 1951* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1951), 27.

16   Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft,* 96.

to the advancement of peace. 'Peace committees' and public panel discussions on non-violence were established statewide to disseminate the regime's pacifist message. Though aimed at external threats, East German pacifism discreetly targeted domestic provocateurs with links to the West.

During this *Kirchenkampf* period, the repression of the Church became more direct. Seeking to create a cadre of regime-friendly priests, the regime kept them under active surveillance and assessed their attitudes, which were characterized either as progressive or "reactionary" (critical of the regime).[17] This would later create fissures among East German bishoprics: Berlin-Brandenburg Bishop Otto Dibelius was a defiant critic of East German communism, while, for example, Bishop of Thüringen, Moritz Mitzenheim, followed a much more conciliatory, less-critical line.[18]

The 1949 East German constitution guaranteed the separation of Church and state. This afforded the SED a legal justification officially to include Marxist scientific materialism and atheism in all school curricula. This prompted several synods in 1951 to issue letters of protest:

> The constitutionally guaranteed right to the freedom of religion is effectively removed, so school lesson plans recognize only historical and dialectical materialism. We realize that belief is not for everyone… but we request that no one be pressured to accept the absence of faith. The freedom of belief in schools can only exist, if instruction in all subjects is carried out in such a way so that Christians and non-Christians can participate with the same amount of personal freedom.[19]

Still, the SED demonstrated veiled caution by instructing teachers and school directors to "avoid under all circumstances creating the impression of a state-controlled campaign against religion."[20]

The SED also pressured the Church to move its headquarters from the British Sector to the territory within GDR borders. Even before the 1949 state declaration, Evangelical leaders refused to recognize inter-zonal borders, since

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17   Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLA), Repository 203, nr. 144, *Positive zur Nationalen Front eingestellte Pfarrer des Landes Brandenburg.*

18   Pollack, *Kirche in der Organizationsgesellschaft,* 131.

19   Ralf Altenhof, "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland," *Die Enquetekommission des deutschen Bundestages* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993): 164.

20   SAPMO-BArch, Sensitive Information – Directive from the Central Committee of the SED and the Department of People's Education to regional SED party offices and Departments of People's Education, January 7, 1950.

several parishes straddled the frontiers.[21] Party leaders demanded a relocation so that

> priests in leading positions of the National Front and peace committees will no longer be hindered by restrictions, reprimands and threats from the Church leadership in West Berlin… The ministerial council for the province of Brandenburg is of the opinion that it is no longer tolerable that the West Berlin Church administration threatens its priests, citizens of the GDR, simply because they fight for peace.[22]

The SED countered with threats of allocating funding only for religious groups that were in SBZ.[23] Pastors and theology students from the West were prevented from entering the East.[24] While workers easily traveled to their factories in East Berlin, Church employees were singled out as undesirable visitors.

Against this growing tension, high-ranking Evangelical officials agreed on June 6, 1952 to an informal exchange with state representatives in the home of Brandenburg General-Superintendent Braun. Despite the informal nature and the palpable strains, both entities conducted an unexpectedly cordial discussion. The Church emphatically expressed its concerns regarding the wellbeing of its youth, travel restrictions for West Berlin priests and the party-run Free German Youth's agitation against the Church youth movement (*Junge Gemeinde*).[25] Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg and chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany Dibelius unambiguously confirmed the Church's bond to the Holy Scriptures as its sole source of guidance. He reiterated the independent nature of the Church and its resistance to political manipulation.[26] Provincial Vice-Minister Jahn of Brandenburg urged the Church to repeal its 1950 consistorial order blocking priests from joining political groups.[27] Though it concluded with little more than a handshake, this micro-level encounter proved that informal agent-to-agent dialogue was not only possible, but would be the necessary mechanism for future interaction and reconciliation.

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21   Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949–1989* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998), 76.

22   "Kirchenleitung gehört in das Land Brandenburg!" *Märkische Volksstimme* December 6, 1950, 2.

23   BLA, Repository 202A, nr. 531, Letter from the Brandenburg Provincial Prime Minister to Evangelical Superintendents, Priests and Parish Commissioners, Pg 2. January 26, 1951.

24   BLA, Repository 202G, nr. 45, Special Report on the meeting between state representatives and those of the Church on 06.06.1952 in the home of Superintendent-General Braun, Potsdam, June 10, 1952.

25   Ibid.

26   Ibid.

27   Ibid.

By 1953, East German mismanagement had produced a struggling, dysfunctional economy that ideologically diverted resources to heavy industry instead of addressing consumer needs, and this in turn created shortages of basic goods and food, as well as prohibitive taxes. Over 330,000 young, educated members of the East German workforce left for the West. Due to overzealous goals, the SED brought the country to near economic collapse. According to an SED document, Ulbricht recognized the possible gains to be won from policy "liberalization":

> It is not necessarily effective to lead a campaign of protest resolutions and demonstrations against Church leadership. Instead of intervening in religious events and Church services, religious policy should publish concrete evidence of the subversive activity of individual priests."[28] We are neither leading a Church conflict, nor do we recognize any such Church conflict. We are simply looking for certain bases of the enemy… And when the Church positions itself in solidarity with such people, well then it's too bad for the Church.[29]

Ulbricht and other high-ranking SED officials were ordered to report to Moscow on June 2, 1953. Fearing a collapse of the GDR, the Soviet Council of Ministers demanded a reversal of SED Church-state relations.[30] As a result, the SED announced a high-level church-state summit scheduled for June 10, 1953, just days before the June 17, 1953 Berlin Workers Revolt. However, the eleventh-hour implementation of the Council's orders proved to be insufficient in averting the revolt.[31]

Leading up to 1953, the Evangelical Church expanded its position and social presence to levels not seen since before the Third Reich and, as the only other significant social stakeholder, it tacitly participated in the formation of the new state. Moreover, the regime's calculated policy of non-confrontation allowed

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28   SAPMO-BArch, Repository IV 2/3/380, "Opinion of the Schwerin District Administration Report and the Gera District Administration on the Reactionary Activity of Priests," Protocol of the SEC Central Committee, May 4, 1953.

29   Martin Georg Goerner, *Die Kirche als Problem der SED: Strukturen kommunistischer Herrschaftsausübung gegenüber der evangelischen Kirche 1945 bis 1958* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 109.

30   Christian F. Ostermann, "Keeping the Pot Simmering: the United States and the East German Uprising of 1953," *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996): 63.

31   "Kommuniqué der Sitzung des SED-Politbüros vom 9 Juni 1953," *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands: Beschlüsse und Erklärungen des Zentralkommittees sowie seines Politbüros und seines Sekretariats* 4 (Berlin: Berlin, 1953), 428.

the Church to maintain institutional autonomy in its decision-making processes, social outreach and public activities. By actively seeking out the Church's support in crafting a new, socialist German state, the SED's overarching design of integration produced only low-levels of anxiety among its decision-makers. At the time of Stalin's death in March 1953, Church-based free spaces were intact and vibrant.

East German Inclusive Engagement from 1953–1989

As part of the SED's *inclusive engagement,* two salient features emerged in this period. Firstly, the state sought to elevate socialism above religion by coopting progressive pastors from ones that were critical of the regime. This *policy of differentiation* gave rise to the second feature of this period: conciliatory, cooperative factions in Church ranks, which led to visible fissures among Church leaders. Inclusive engagement could take place with a weakened Church not only because secularization became an increasingly measurable characteristic of East German society after the mid-1950s, but also because the state had succeeded in changing people's attitudes toward religion.

State-lead high-level talks of June 10, 1953 signaled the adoption of an approach based more on dialogue. The resulting communiqué codified an agreement, whereby both entities negotiated a halt in all repressive action against Church youth. Imprisoned Church members were released without delay[32] and students who had been expelled or blacklisted could resume their studies.[33] Teachers, sacked based on religious belief, were reinstated.[34] The Central Committee also promised to refrain from intervening in Church institutions.[35] In exchange, Church leaders agreed to temper their reproaches of the regime, limit the use of the pulpit and retract their criticisms of economic and political life.[36] Leaders from Church and state together released a joint statement celebrating

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32   Kommunique der Sitzung des SED-Politbüros, Juni 9, 1953, 428.

33   Ibid.

34   Ibid.

35   "Entschließung der 15 Tagung des SED-Zentralkomitees vom 24. bis. 26. Juli 1953 – Der neue Kurs und die Aufgaben der Partei," *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands: Beschlüsse und Erklärungen des Zentralkommittees sowie seines Politbüros und seines Sekretariats* 4 (Berlin: SED, 1953), 449.

36   BLA, Repository 530, nr. 2188, SED Provincial Secretariat's Report entitled "On the Activity of the Church after the Communique from June 10, 1953 and Suggestions for Improvements in the Arena of Religious Policy" Potsdam, January 8, 1954.

the fruitful discussions, in which the regime had re-instated the Church as a social stakeholder.[37]

The June talks proved to be nothing more than a stopgap measure. Stasi directives reveal that it maintained its prior characterization of Church leaders as "reactionary, imperialist intelligence agents working in support of criminal activities against the GDR."[38] Open conflict with the Church was to be replaced with a covert, operative approach: publicly demonstrating willingness to engage in dialogue, while remaining inwardly uncompromising.

In 1954, alongside the Ministry of Interior, other state institutions were to craft religious policy. The Department for Church Relations served as the government mediator between the General-Secretary, the politburo, the Central Committee and the Church. The regime then established the Working Group for Church Questions of the SED's Central Committee (*die Arbeitsgruppe für Kirchenfragen* or AK), which was to handle Church–state relations, monitor the political activities of religious groups and report their findings directly to the highest levels of government. While the AK set the overall policy tone,[39] the Council of Ministers created the State Secretariat for Church Questions (SSCQ) in 1957, which served as the state contact and intermediary for Church leaders.[40]

By 1960, several theologians began to search for an identity in the now solidified Communist state. Günter Jacob, Evangelical General-Superintendent of Cottbus, introduced the first interpretations of the Scriptures into the Church–state debate. By liberating itself from political manipulation, the Church could create a space for itself in which "the true, apolitical message of the Evangelical scriptures" could find expression.[41] At an extraordinary session of the EKD 1956 Synod in Berlin, the Union of Evangelical Priests in the GDR (Bund evangelischer Pfarrer der DDR or BEP-DDR) claimed that "concessions for greater religious freedoms within the realm of dialectical Marxist authority"

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37   BLA, Repository 530, nr. 2187, Bishop Otto Dibelius' pastoral letter entitled "To all Parishes in Germany," Berlin, June 12, 1953.

38   BLA, Repository 530, nr. 2188, SED Provincial Secretariat's Report entitled "On the Activity of the Church after the Communique from June 10, 1953 and Suggestions for Improvements in the Arena of Religious Policy" Potsdam, January 8, 1954.

39   SAPMO-BArch, Repository DY 30/J IV 2/2/516, Protocol nr. 62/56 of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee, November 27, 1956.

40   SAPMO-BArch, Repository DC 20/4/228, Decision 53/14 of the Council of Ministers for the Appointment of a State Secretariat for Church Questions, February 21, 1957.

41   Günter Jacob, *Der Christ und die Mächte* (Stuttgart: Lettner Verlag, 1960), 330.

were only possible if the individual… respected and reciprocally recognized the given borders between public life and the space of pure religion."[42]

> We are separate from any hyphenated-form of Christianity, unbound from a fantastical, civic-capitalist system, foreign to Evangelicals. We seek neither to be a center of conspiracy, nor a state-run propaganda institute. Rather, we in the BEP-DDR seek to offer brotherly help, to ponder theologically the existential question of the Church in our republic and at the same time to be active as loyal and responsible GDR citizens. This union works for freedom in the world and supports the efforts of the German Democratic Republic towards this end, while being obligated to the social renewal that is taking place in the GDR.[43]

The Church's contribution to the new path took form in the first observable expressions of a *Kirche im Sozialismus,* a position that was neither supportive of the regime, nor ostensibly against the regime, but rather existed parallel to it.

Due to the SED's initial skepticism, Church leaders sent a delegation led by bishops from Thuringia and Pomerania to participate in discussions with the Ministry of Interior, SSCQ and the Council of Ministers.[44] The delegates at the Church–state talks agreed to a monumental joint communiqué on July 21, 1958. Unlike the June 10, 1953 agreement, the church successfully weakened the state. The Church offered its most demonstrative statement yet:

> The representatives of the Evangelical Church in the GDR declare that the Church, with all means at its disposal, strives for peace amongst all peoples and hence is principally in agreement with the peaceful efforts of the GDR and its government. In accordance with their conscience, Christians shall fulfill their civic duties based on the legal foundations. They respect the socialist development and shall contribute to the peaceful construction of civic life.[45]

Short of declaring loyalty, the Church recognized the existing political conditions and Marxist socialism. Regime officials promised only to review

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42 Günter Jacob, "Der Raum für das Evangelium in Ost und West," *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1956* (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1956): 13.

43 Evangelisches Zentralarchiv Berlin (EZB), Repository 4, nr. 666, Newsletter nr. 1 from BEP-DDR in the German Democratic Republic to all Pastors, June 19–20, 1958.

44 Besier, *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche,* 71.

45 *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1958,* 241.

certain measures taken in public education and reiterated their constitutional responsibility to protect the rights of religious practice.[46] This stood in stark contrast to the 1953 point-by-point retraction of repressive measures against the Church. The policy of differentiation had accomplished its goals. Church membership and congregations fell rapidly throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[47] Only one-third of the children from religious households were confirmed in the Church, while the *Jugendweihe* exploded in popularity from 26 percent of school classes in 1955 to over 80 percent in 1960.[48] With the beginning of the construction of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, rather than expand its administrative reach to near totalitarian domination, the regime chose begrudgingly to accommodate the Church.[49]

Under state expansion, the SED began to militarize society: military service in the People's National Army (NVA) was mandated for all men in January 1962 without the option of conscientious objection.[50] Since the majority of objectors were from Christian households or theology students, the move gave the Churches a new lifeline. Church leaders approached the regime about the negative effects of forcing Christians to carry arms against their will.[51] Ulbricht and the National Defense Council, keen on avoiding confrontations, conceded their position to the Church on September 7, 1964 and ordered the creation of unarmed NVA 'construction units' that exempted Christians from weapons exercises. The *Bausoldaten* were tasked with building military installments, housing units and transporting material. With this, the GDR became the only Communist state that allowed for conscientious objection.

By the late 1960s, the Evangelical Churches decided territorially and institutionally to re-organize themselves from the all-German Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD). After much debate, East German bishops in 1969 formally separated themselves from the EKD, establishing the regime-friendly Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK-DDR). Despite the BEK's separation from the EKD, the two entities maintained close lines of communication up to 1989.

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46 Ibid.

47 "Statistical Report on Exiting the Church – 1950 to 1956," *Amtsblatt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* 19. no. 6 (1958): 17.

48 Pollack, *Kirche in der Organizationsgesellschaft,* 150.

49 "Programm der SED," *Neues Deutschland* January 25, 1963, 1.

50 Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949–1989,* 187.

51 Ibid.

In 1971, Walter Ulbricht's successor, Erich Honecker, sought a more conciliatory approach to Church–state relations. His approach included the establishment of a Church media service,[52] construction permits and the expansion of the Church's presence in religion-free "workers cities." Moreover, in hopes of improving the GDR's international image, Evangelical bishops' were encouraged to participate in international ecumenical conferences.[53] Church–state interaction demonstrated the GDR's new readiness to seek a modus vivendi. For its part, the Church again expressed its readiness to

> neither inflate, nor downplay the existing contrasts between Marxist-socialism and theology. Neither option is in our interest. Rather, we need better to understand what occurs in this country, which is also our home. We shall soon discover the real commonalities in our responsibility to man and those social areas, where we are needed. In the past, anti-communism distorted our vision from our real opportunities and true challenges.[54]

The purpose of the Church was to be firmly located in working within East German society for the good of its citizens.[55]

On August 18, 1976, Church–state relations were profoundly unsettled by an act of self-immolation. Before pouring petrol over himself, Pastor Oskar Brüsewitz had unrolled a banner with the words "the Church in the GDR condemns communist repression of school children!" While the regime claimed the priest suffered from delusion, it feared a public protest, a damaged international image. Honecker and Church representatives met for another round of talks on March 6, 1978, which introduced conditions that set the stage for the largest expansion of Church space.[56] In quid pro quo, the Church agreed to respect the SED's request to halt all political criticism and accept the existing power relations of the GDR. In turn, the SED offered a lengthy list of concessions and policy liberalizations, including more construction permits, 2.2 million Marks for

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52   EZB, Repository 4, nr. 304, Letters between the Berlin Church Council and Reinhard Henkys of the Berlin Arbeitsgemeinschaft für kirchliche Publizistik, July 12, 1973.

53   "Hohe DDR-Kirchenvertreter besuchen Genf – Ökumenische Verbindungen sollen ausgebaut werden, Werben für Anerkennung," *Frankfurter Rundschau* March 22, 1972, 1.

54   SAPMO-BArch, Repository DO4/320, State Committee for Radio Services – Department of Monitoring, July 2, 1971.

55   "Kirche will in der Gesellschaft der DDR künftig mitreden," *Der Tagesspiegel* July 6, 1971, 45.

56   SAPMO-BArch, Repository DY IV 2/2036/49, Our Approach to the Talks with Representatives of the Evangelical Church of the GDR, May 10, 1977.

restoration projects, lifelong health care for all Church employees, pastoral care in prisons and retirement homes, pay increases for priests[57] and greater access to state media for holy days.[58] While Honecker viewed the talks as a "crowning moment and new beginning," the Church secured a long sought after document that better outlined its legal position in the GDR.[59]

Despite the March 1978 talks, the SED became increasingly suspicious of Church-based peace initiatives[60] and "the serious security concern of broader peace movements solidifying around Church."[61] Indeed, by 1982, a number of students, theologians, Church congregants and veteran Bausoldaten had found a protected space in the Church.[62] Ulrike Poppe, founder of "Women for Peace" and the "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights," recognized that the existence of these groups was best guaranteed under the protective umbrella of the Church.[63] Equally, Church leadership was aware of the fate that would await these individuals, if the activism and pacifist message of these groups were to take on stronger contours. The Church's protective stance assumed a more communicative quality, acting as the mediator and 'translator' between the two entities.[64] Bishops oversaw cooperation among the groups, warned of risks, advised the opposition and the regime on better forms of communication and diluted their messages in the interest of maintaining public order. Despite this protective cover, oppositional groups had grown skeptical of becoming too compromised by the Church. Poppe was aware that "oppositional groups were at times afraid of the Church's paternalist role vis-à-vis East German human rights groups."[65] Hence, the relationship between Church and opposition was not without contention. Nevertheless, if peaceful resolutions to conflict and

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57   SAPMO-BArch, Repository DY 30 IV 2/2/1740, Decision of the Politburo supporting an increase in basic wages of Evangelical regional Churches, August 22, 1978.

58   Ibid., Addendum 1 on the Commitments to Concerns Brought by the Union of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic.

59   Bundesbeauftrage für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, (BStU), Protocol from a speech held by Bishop Albrecht Schönherr on the importance of the March 6, 1978 talks, MfS Document 8103, October 10, 1986.

60   SAPMO-BArch, Internal Party Document – Information on the Relationship between State and the Evangelical Church in the GDR, DY 2/3/119, December 2, 1980.

61   Ibid.

62   Interview with Manfred Stolpe and Joachim Heise, July 14, 2008.

63   Interviews with Ulrike Poppe, December 2008 and January 2009.

64   Interview with Manfred Stolpe, July 14, 2008.

65   Interviews with Ulrike Poppe, December 2008 and January 2009.

the avoidance of human rights violations were topics for both Church and opposition, they had now become salient issues between Church and state.

The SED's lack of preparation in adapting to a third, new critical element became apparent. By 1982, Stasi documents warned of Church-based "enemy-negative forces attempting to establish an independent movement for peace under the guise of pacifism."[66] Attempts were made to remove students from schools and universities based on membership in illegal organizations, while other peace activists were taken into police custody. The SED resorted to more extreme measures: the regime quietly offered leading members of oppositional groups travel permits or stipends to study in the West; others were forcefully expatriated.[67] But even state security organs feared that overt repressive measures could push the Church to become confrontational. Intelligence reports pressed the SED to engage in another round of talks with the SSCQ and Church leaders to ease tensions. Stasi reports even suggested using the Church leadership to steer the peace movements away from the public sphere.[68] The regime desperately resorted to its old Janus-faced playbook: it actively engaged with Church leaders, using their mediation between regime and opposition, while cracking down on those who drifted beyond the accepted boundaries.[69] Police and Stasi units increasingly stormed Churches and parish halls and confiscated printing presses and Church libraries. At the Zionskirche in East Berlin, Stasi units arrested members of a Church-based environmental initiative. The regime's desperate show of force not only made it more dependent on the Church's communicative role, it also improved the Church's image and increased the public's solidarity with it.

By late 1989, Evangelical Churches were ready to channel massive public frustration peacefully and prevent a potential violent state intervention. In Leipzig, Monday prayers for peace at the Nikolaikirche by October 9, 1989 drew 70,000 demonstrators; one week later, over 120,000 gathered before the Church. Trying to stave off unrest, the politburo replaced Honecker with Egon Krenz on October 18. With change evident, over 320,000 called for peaceful reforms in Leipzig. Tensions grew to a fever pitch as rumors spread amongst the peaceful

66   BStU, Internal document from Ministry of State Security to all working units of the Stasi, MfS Document 7604, March 17, 1982.

67   Interviews with Ulrike Poppe, December 2008 and January 2009.

68   BStU, Suggestions of talks with the State Secretary for Church Questions, Comrade Gysi, with the bishops of the provincial Evangelical Churches in the DDR, MfS Document 7605.

69   BStU, Quarterly Report – Church and Religious Communities in the GDR – Excerpts of an interview with Berlin-Brandenburg Bishop Albrecht Schönherr, MfS Document 8103, April 1985.

protestors that units of the NVA, riot police and undercover Stasi agents had been given orders to use force to control the growing protest.[70] But by now, word had spread throughout the GDR that Church buildings and squares were safe areas for expressing popular frustration and desires for reform.

The GDR reached a point of no return on November 9, 1989, when Party Secretary Krenz ordered the opening of border crossings between East and West Berlin. Upon hearing the news from West German media sources, East Germans gathered at the border crossings by the thousands. Overwhelmed East German border guards, at first unsure how to proceed, yielded to the swelling masses. Once the barriers were raised, West and East Berliners were united in a celebration of peace.

Post-War Yugoslav Religious Policy: More Soviet than Thou

In this section I claim that a unique set of processes stemming from Yugoslavia's particular Church–state engagement planted the seeds for the exclusionary characteristics of Church-based free spaces that later generated nationalist sentiment. Yugoslav religious policy was not marked by public agreements or joint communiqués resulting from regular high-level Church-state negotiations. Once the country swung from a repressive model to an open, quasi-Western one, freedoms in economics, labor, media and travel undermined the necessity to lodge human rights complaints. By liberalizing religious policy, Yugoslav communists gave up an important bargaining chip: they could not offer concessions to Churches, since the Churches already enjoyed the most open religious atmosphere in the communist world.

From end of the war to the late 1950s, the Yugoslav regime maintained a posture of *extreme repression*. The decision to take immediate measures against the Catholic and Orthodox Churches was a manifestation of Tito's distrust and the Yugoslav Communist Party's (CPY) rapid consolidation of power. Neither the Catholic Church nor the SOC became participants in the reconstruction of the new Yugoslav state. As a result, the regime's position offered the Churches no other option but to look upon the authorities with suspicion, if not enmity. Such distrust bolstered the Churches' unwillingness to support the regime, which

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70   Interview with Hans Modrow, September 2008.

created a crucial by-product for later periods: the regime could never request the Churches' mediation in times of unrest.[71]

Two points are crucial to understanding the post-war phase in Yugoslav Church-state relations. Firstly, the CPY systematically applied the Soviet playbook, which erased the political landscape of subversives and prevented religio-nationalist rhetoric from challenging the state, a type of post-war *tabula rasa* devoid of opposition.[72] The second approach involved state institutions confronting the Churches through nuanced repression that targeted their greatest weakness. This individualized method removed the presence and visibility of Church space from the public sphere. In 1945, the Yugoslav Council of Ministers established the Federal Commission for Church Questions (SKVP), which passed down party directives to republic-level Commissions for Religious Relations (KVP), the purpose of which was to

> research all questions concerning life outside the religious communities, their inter-confessional relations and the position of the Churches vis-à-vis the state and the People's authorities, as well as the preparation for all legislative solutions on relations between religious communities and the state.[73]

Yugoslav authorities considered religious groups to be a security threat and therefore placed the SKVP under the command of the Ministry for State Security (UDBA). Authorities detained, physically assaulted and murdered hundreds of Orthodox and Catholic bishops, priests, nuns, and laypersons. Judges in politically rigged trials speedily handed down execution sentences and lengthy jail times.[74] Grand show trials served as a means of eradicating Church-

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71   Interviews with Bishop of Australia and New Zealand of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Irinej Dobrijevic, April 2007 and the Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sarajevo, Monsignor Mato Zovkić, September 2010.

72   Darko Bekich, "Soviet Goals in Yugoslavia and the Balkans," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 481 (1985), 2.

73   Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Repository 144, no. 1-1, The Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia brings forth the decree on the establishment of a federal commission for religious questions – Article 1 (Pretsedništvo Ministarskog Saveta Demokratske Federativne Jugoslavije donosi uredbu o osnivanja državne komisje za verska pitanja – Član 1), September 21, 1945.

74   AJ, Inventory 144, nr. 1-4a, Executive of the Bishops' Conference in Zagreb (Predsjedništvo Biskupih Konferencija u Zagrebu), no. 64, May 8, 1945.

linked regime-opponents.[75] In a politically rigged court in 1946, anti-communist Royalist Četnik commander Draža Mihailović was found guilty of collaborating with Nazi Germany and summarily executed by firing squad. Mihailović's stature in the SOC was considerable. The SOC leadership perceived the court's decision as a volley across its bow.

Similarly, the 1946 trial of Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb Aloizije Stepinac for his alignment with German and Croatian fascists highlighted the regime's intent to silence any opposition. On May 8, 1945, Stepinac publicly demanded an explanation for the maltreatment of Catholic priests,[76] which was followed by a pastoral letter slamming the regime's repression.[77] However, he offered no word of atonement to either the regime or the SOC for wartime atrocities perpetrated by Croatian clergy.[78] As a result, Tito personally engaged him to consider the possibility of an *independent, Yugoslav* Church.[79] Meeting with Stepinac, Tito states

> the Church should be more national, more adapted to the nation: perhaps you are surprised that I approach the subject of nationality with such emphasis. Too much blood flowed, I have seen too much suffering of the people, and I would like the Catholic clergy in Croatia to be more deeply linked in its national feeling with the people than it now is […] We want to create a great community of South Slavs in which there will be both Orthodox and Catholics […] linked with all the other Slavs.[80]

75   Dunja Melčić, "Abrechnungen mit den politischen Gegnern und die kommunistischen Nachkriegsverbrechen," in *Der Jugoslawien-Krieg: Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Konsequenzen,* ed. idem (Opladen: Westdeutsche Verlag, 1999), 198.

76   AJ, Inventory 144, nr. 1–3, Improving and renewing the Church – authorization for the collection of necessary resources (Predmet: Popravk i obnova crkvi – dozvola sabiranja portrebnih sretstava), Letter from Stepinac to the Vlada and the republic-level Commission for Religious Affairs of Croatia, August 14, 1945.

77   AJ, Inventory 144, nr. 1–4, Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishoprics of Yugoslavia, Publication of the Bishop's Conference in Zagreb (Pastirsko Pismo Katoličkih Biskupa Jugoslavije, Izdano s Općih Biskupskih Konferencija u Zagrebu), September 20, 1945. Also see, Zvonimir Despot, *Vrijeme Zločina: Novi Prilozi za Povijest Koprivničke Podravine 1941 – 1948* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Institut za Povijest, 2007), 258.

78   Milovan Djilas, *Jahre der Macht: Im Jugoslawischen Kräftespiel – Memoiren 1945–1966* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 56.

79   Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 562–63.

80   Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth: A Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 117.

This effort sought to "yugoslavize" the Church and, as was being done in the GDR, align it with the state's new identity.[81] After such repression, Stepinac refused any such agreement and was placed on trial for collaboration, the dissemination of Fascist ideology in Church media and the forced conversion of Orthodox citizens.[82] Stepinac was found guilty on all counts and sentenced to 16 years of hard labor followed by house arrest.

The CPY continued its drastic reduction of Church space. Religious instruction in state-run secondary schools was discontinued in 1945 without negotiation.[83] Partisan units physically removed all religious symbols from schools and public buildings and marriage documents were placed under civil code. A 1947 federal law prohibited the public celebration of religious holy days. Instead, the official Socialist calendar replaced holy days with workdays.[84] In 1949, the Ministry of Education declared all theological faculties private institutions and removed them from public universities.[85]

The nationalization of property rounded out the palette of policy instruments. In a move against the Catholic Church, the army and security forces placed all Church-administered hospitals, nursing schools and pension homes under governmental administration. Moreover, chapels, prayer rooms, religious artwork and crosses in hospitals were removed and nuns, though still allowed to work, had to remove their habits and other displays of religious symbolism.[86] The regime undertook a similar, nuanced measure against the SOC by targeting its property holdings, one of its sources of income. From 1946 onward, security forces again occupied hundreds of SOC buildings, parish halls, secretariats and residencies.[87] In Bosnia, over 140 Churches and offices were placed under rent-

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81   Margareta Matijević, "Religious Communities in Croatia from 1945 to 1991: Social Casualty of the Dissent Between Communist Authorities and Religious Communities' Leadership," *Časopis sa Suvremenu Povijest* 2, no. 1 (2006): 122.

82   Alexander, *The Triple Myth,* 146.

83   Katarina Spehnjak, *Javnost i Propaganda Narodna Fronta u Politici i Kulturi Hrvatske 1945–1952* (Zagreb, 2002), 187–90.

84   Thomas Bremer, *Kleine Geschichte der Religionen in Jugoslawien: Königreich-Kommunismus-Krieg* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag), 86.

85   AJ, Inventory 144, no. 2-46, Briefing for the head of the Federal Commission for Religious Questions on the current state of Orthodox Faculty (*Kratak referat o današnjem žalošnim stanju na našem Pravoslavnom Bogoslovskom Fakultetu*), July 7, 1949.

86   Matijević, *Religious Communities in Croatia from 1945 to 1991,* 125.

87   AJ, Inventory 144, Decrees from SKVP no. 534 and no. 68 of 1946 identified these measures.

free military and police occupation.[88] In cases where non-military individuals occupied Church land, the regime refused requests for compensation.[89] As the party predicted, critique of this measure remained limited only to protest letters by the synod[90] and Patriarch Gavrilo to the federal and the Serbian KVP.[91]

By 1953, the LCY had neutralized the last forms of domestic opposition and now had a free hand in pursuing socio-economic policies, which anticipated a sharp about-face from centralized resource allocation to one of "workers' self-managed" production.[92] They laid the groundwork for political re-adjustments in Church-state relations. In 1953, the Yugoslav Federal Assembly adopted the *Law Concerning the Legal Status of Religious Communities,* which formalized the separation of Church and state, guaranteed freedom of conscience and religious belief and stipulated the rights of atheists and the consequences of abusing religion for political purposes.[93] By the late 1950s, the regime had increased the number of construction permits and funds for damaged buildings.[94] Lastly, the weekly newspapers, the Catholic *Glas Koncila* and the Orthodox *Pravoslavlje* were allowed to circulate in larger numbers.[95]

The Rise of the Churches from 1966 to the Late 1980s

In 1966, the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee and the six republic Central Committees introduced extensive political liberalizations.[96] Centrist factions gave way to decentralist forces that favored devolution of powers to the

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88   AJ, Inventory 144, 1-9, List of Church Buildings Occupied or Used by State Authorities (Spisak Crkvenih Zgrada Zauzetih i Upotreblijvih od Strane Gradjanskih Vlasti), February 1947.

89   Ibid.

90   AJ, Inventory 144, 1-9, Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, no. 346, Letter of protest from the synod of the SOC to the republican-level KPV of Serbia with a request to reverse the decrees, February 11, 1947.

91   AJ, Inventory 144, 1-9, Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, no. 1147, Letter of protest to the Executive of the Federal Government, March 31, 1947.

92   Thomas A. Marschak, "Centralized versus Decentralized Resource Allocation: The Yugoslav Laboratory," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 82 (1968): 566.

93   Radić, *Država i Verske Zajednice, 1945–1970: Prvi Deo 1945–1953* (Belgrade: Institut za Novu Istoriju Srbije, 2002), 385–400.

94   Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121.

95   Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 194.

96   Radio Free Europe, Internal Affairs, *Central Committee Plenums of Yugoslavia's Six Republics Approve Purge of Ranković and Party Reforms*, October 3, 1966: 1.

republics.[97] With this came a new stance on Church-state policy: the SKVP and KVPs were removed from UDBA oversight and transformed into independent governmental units, ending the regime's security and intelligence gathering approach. State institutions were mandated to engage in dialogue, monitor media and manage Church life through *quid pro quo,* but also to prevent Churches from weighing in on social issues. With this change, the SOC and Croatian Church became less constrained in expanding Church media, holding public masses and criticizing the regime. One could hardly imagine a more comprehensive change.

Although calls for decentralization first came from the Serbian and Slovenian parties, Croatian communists most demonstratively demanded for a loosening, beginning with appeals for a constitutionally recognized Croatian language, separate from its almost identical Serbian counterpart. This peaked with the Croatian Spring or Mass Movement (*Masovni Pokret,* Maspok) from 1967 to 1972, which took on more alarming contours. Calls were made for the establishment of an independent Croatian national bank, greater autonomy in education and economic policy and territorial defense units.[98] Maspok supporters criticized the Yugoslav National Bank's distribution of federal development funds to poorer regions, while extremist fractions demanded a separate seat at the United Nations and revisions of official Yugoslav history.[99]

Maspok coincided with the rise of the Catholic Church's renewed organization of large-scale masses and celebrations. A symbolic start took place with the Marian Congress and the consecration of the holy shrine at Marija Bistrica in August 1971 in front of 150,000 pilgrims.[100] At the same time, *Glas Koncila* profited from limited state censorship by publishing criticisms of Yugoslav socialism, while celebrating the upsurge as solidifying the Croatian nation. As violent Maspok demonstrations in Zagreb threatened to destabilize the regime in 1972, Tito quickly purged leaders en masse and imprisoned activists.[101] Under the threat of irredentism, Tito and Executive Bureau Secretary Stane Dolanc cleansed the

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97   Sabrina Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 41.

98   Vjekoslav Perica, "The Catholic Church and the Making of the Croatian Nation, 1970–1984," *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 532.

99   Viktor Meier, "Der Titostaat in der Krise: Jugoslawien nach 1966," in *Der Jugoslawien-Krieg: Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Konsequenzen,* ed. Dunja Melčić (Opladen: Westdeutsche Verlag, 1999), 202.

100   Perica, "The Catholic Church and Making of the Croatian Nation," 540–41.

101   Holm Sundhausen, *Geschichte Serbiens: 19.–21. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 375.

Croatian League of Communists and other republican leagues.[102] Faced with the threat of violence, Yugoslav communists never requested mediation from the Church. Unlike in the GDR, in Yugoslavia there was no rapprochement between Tito and Catholic bishops to restore peace. Despite the regime's later inclusion of Maspok's demands in the 1974 constitution, the crackdown shifted outlets for critical expression into the hands of the Church.[103]

The Church wasted no time in expanding its free space. In September 1974, the episcopate began the Great Novena, celebrating 1,300 years of Christianity. The icon of Our Lady of the Great Croatian Christian Covenant was paraded around the countryside, accompanied by liturgical celebrations, pastoral theater plays and a children's educational course. Large Eucharistic festivals followed: the 1977 celebration of King Zvonimir, the 1979 declaration of the Year of Prince Branimir and the 1981 National Eucharistic Congresses in Split and Zagreb. The pinnacle was reached in September 1984 at the final celebration of the Great Novena, where over 400,000 convened at Marija Bistrica.

The SOC in this period became equally active with its social presence, organizing numerous public liturgies, jubilees and celebrations. In May 1968, the SOC organized a commemoration of the ancient Serb ruler, Czar Dušan. In September 1969, the SOC celebrated the 750th anniversary of autocephaly before a crowd of nearly 10,000 Orthodox faithful. The jubilee was continued at the Žiča monastery, where the conciliatory Archbishop German stated the following:

> All who live with us here in our common home, in our common fatherland of Yugoslavia want to live in concord with all, in brotherhood, in love, in community. We have in our present homeland many different nationalities and religious communities… We want to live with all as with brothers and sisters in one single house.[104]

Church-organized celebrations continued throughout 1970 as the SOC commemorated the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the Serbian patriarchate (1920–1970) and in 1971 the 300th anniversary of Saint Basil of Ostrog.[105]

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102   David Binder, "Marko Nikežic, Yugoslav Liberal Forced to Quit by Tito, Dies at 69," *New York Times,* January 9, 1991, 20.

103   Peter Palmer, "The Churches and the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia," in *Religion and International Relations,* ed. Ken R. Dark (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 87.

104   Perica, *Balkan Idols,* 51.

105   Ibid., 52.

This atmosphere empowered the SOC to articulate grievances vocally. It initiated criticism of the regime's inability to resolve brewing conflicts in regions considered important to the Church. Since Kosovo's post-war inclusion in Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanians had long been dissatisfied with its position as a non-Slavic minority without its own republic.[106] To ease tensions in 1966, Tito greatly expanded Kosovar rights and obliged the wealthier Northern republics to assist in the economic development of the territory. Nevertheless, Kosovo's frustration gradually became violent. Orthodox churches, shrines and gravestones were increasingly desecrated and priests, nuns and monks harassed. Tensions exploded in November 1968, when large-scale demonstrations and violent riots broke out.[107] Under media suppression, Tito deployed the JNA to quell the unrest. While quick to crackdown, Tito made no attempt to seek other forms of resolution. Despite being one of the targets of the riots, neither the SOC nor Kosovar party representatives were asked to cooperate to reduce the tensions. Again, an opportunity for inclusive Church engagement was missed.

On May 4, 1980, Josip Broz Tito passed away. Millions of shocked Yugoslavs gathered, tearfully laying flowers, holding military memorials and paying their last respects. However, the country would again be rocked by violent demonstrations in Kosovo. The March 1981 riots were fuelled by demands for republic status, only this time, accompanied with violence against Serb symbols and the SOC and rioters demanding "Unification with Albania."[108] Again, the regime answered with force, sending in militia and tank units and arresting hundreds of protestors.[109]

Less hindered by the 1966 accords, several SOC clerics penned an "Appeal for the Protection of the Serbian Population and their Sacred Monuments in Kosovo" on Orthodox Good Friday 1982 to the Presidency of the Yugoslavia, claiming that Albanian plans for "genocide" were being carried out.[110] Using its publication outlets, it published the entire text in *Pravoslavlje* and other media, as Church spaces increasingly became the only venue where grievances could be expressed. Once again, aside from heavy-handed repression, no efforts were undertaken to bring the major stakeholders together to calm Kosovo.

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106   Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 38–45.

107   Hugh Poulton, "Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992,* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 129.

108   Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 334–35.

109   "Belgrade Sends Tanks to Rebellious Region," *The New York Times,* April 4, 1981, 21.

110   Perica, *Balkan Idols,* 123–24.

The final years of the Yugoslav project were characterized by greatly expanded activities of protest. The federal SKVP and the republican KVPs were ineffectual in reeling in the Churches, which began to mobilize their spaces to fill the social vacuum. Tito's passing and his apparent indifference to grooming a successor left many asking what might become of Yugoslavia. The party's fear of a situation in which religion would align itself with anti-Yugoslav political forces would come true by the mid-1980s. The SOC Holy Bishop's assembly began publicly to chronicle criminal acts perpetrated by Kosovar suspects against the Church. *Pravoslavlje* echoed the Church's concern in regular columns and articles on the rise of the "Albanian terror," as well as in seminars and discussions on the topic held by the Church.[111] The Church submitted formal complaints to provincial authorities in Kosovo, the Serbian KVP and the republican government, but they were never thoroughly investigated. The continued failure by Yugoslav governmental structures to have at least a cursory review of the legitimacy of such claims and take measures against perpetrators contributed to the SOC's heightened sense of being placed at an institutional disadvantage. With no credible guarantor, the SOC gradually began to instrumentalize its rich nationalist history of suffering.[112]

By 1987, Slobodan Milošević had risen through the party ranks to become head of the Serbian Communist Party. His springboard to political power took place at the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Flanked by ranking party members from the republics and SOC bishops, Milošević addressed a crowd of nearly one million. Though sanctioned by the Yugoslav federal government and couched in socialist language, the event resembled a Church celebration. As one of the first high-ranking Serb officials to call for a comprehensive change in policy toward Serbia, Milošević found an ally in the SOC. Religion, religious symbolism and politics had now become inextricably intertwined in a self-reinforcing dance.

The Catholic Church also strengthened its social profile. By the mid-1980s, the large-scale Catholic celebrations began to take on more ethno-nationalist symbolism. While grand Church events continued to demonstrate the Church's organizational ability, *Glas Koncila* had become the key voice in Church media. With little governmental censure, *Glas* significantly contributed to creating a distinct Croatian identity. By 1989, the Catholic Church in Croatia had successfully

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111   Ibid., 124–25.
112   Mitja Velikonja, "*In Hoc Signo Vinces*: Religious Symbolism in the Balkan Wars 1991–1995," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 30–32.

carved out its own space for re-assessing the foundation of Croatian identity within a larger Yugoslavia. The rise of Croat nationalist Franjo Tudjman in the late 1980s corresponded with that of the Church. In 1987, Tudjman and his far-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) turned to ultranationalist diaspora Church centers in Western Europe, Australia and North America.[113] By 1989, the HDZ's platform was thoroughly laden with revisionist ideas of historical injustices, Croat nationalism, conservative Catholic values and anti-Yugoslav, anti-Serb populism. Like Milošević, Tudjman received massive support from all elements of the clergy. The marriage of growing political nationalism and a potent religious element gave even more popular credibility to the HDZ.

As the fronts began to harden between Serbia, which was seeking to re-centralize Yugoslavia, and an increasingly independence-minded Croatia, which sought to rid itself of the rest of Yugoslavia, each camp gained political legitimacy from their respective Church. Set in motion by Tito's liberalizations of the Yugoslav system 1966, the departure from a repressive to a open religious policy channeled Serb and Croat frustrations with the direction of Yugoslavia's path into the hands of national Churches.

Conclusions: Assessing Church–State Engagement and Free Spaces

Challenges to authoritarian rule can take on different forms, while factors that affect the complex institutional interaction between a regime and its stakeholders can be infinite. Moreover, anti-authoritarian opposition is made increasingly complex by case-specific experiences. Attempts to explain changes in power structures through the scope of elections, voter behavior, civil society, democratization, ethnicity and identity, revolution or violence have yielded endless lists of works from across the landscape of ancient and modern political science. It is a common trait of human behavior and demonstrates one of the most essential pillars of political science: the struggle to attain, maintain and challenge power and accommodate competing ideas.

To try to capture the vastness of this central component is beyond the scope of this article. However, I claim that the uniqueness of this study lies *not* in explaining the end of East German and Yugoslav communism, although it does contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this. I offer here an alternative

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113   Paul Hockenoos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 76.

explanation to a different question: which set of conditions and types of processes help us to temporally locate, theoretically identify and comparatively explain the variegated forms of Church–state engagement which brought forth Church-based free spaces. The momentous year of 1989 in Eastern Europe is not the point of departure here. Rather, it is the outcome of a near 45-year-long history of debate on religious policy.

The empirical focus of this study seeks to paint a picture in which free spaces are neither the natural outcome of private meetings between small numbers of individuals working in safe havens, nor do I claim that national Churches retained an innate oppositional quality. Contrary to the debate surrounding the development and role of civil society, which tends to overlook the precise policy mechanisms and agent-to-agent interactions at the micro-level, this contribution demonstrates that Church-based free spaces are in fact a constructed social phenomenon, resulting from negotiated, institutional interactions by Church and state elites. To conclude, the complex interaction between Church and state in the execution of religious policy across temporally organized periods offers us an additional tool in explaining the rise of Church-based free spaces in authoritarian societies and the relationships between the rise of these free spaces and end of the European communist project.

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