Church History 79:4 (December 2010), 827–859.
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doi:10.1017/S0009640710001046

# *Holy Homeland: The Discourse of Place and Displacement among Silesian Catholics in Postwar West Germany*

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> *Faith and homeland* [*Heimat*] are not merely complementary terms, but rather are deeply interwoven with one another, especially in Christian areas. On account of this interdependence, when the inner connection to the homeland is abandoned, faith itself is exposed to grave danger. Far from being merely of this world, the homeland is linked to the beyond. It reminds us of where we have come from and where we are going, and it brings to conscious awareness that this world is merely a bridge to a higher world, that the earthly homeland is merely a symbol and likeness of our eternal home and destiny.[1]

The author of the above quotation, Rudolf Jokiel, was one of over twelve million ethnic Germans expelled from their homes in Germany's eastern provinces (East Prussia, Pomerania, Brandenburg, and Silesia), the Sudetenland, and other pockets of Eastern Europe at the end of World War II and resettled within the country's truncated postwar borders. The expellees bitterly lamented their enforced exile, and many Christians within this population shared Jokiel's sentiments concerning the connection between faith and homeland. Those who settled in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) developed an elaborate network of overlapping subcultures dedicated to preserving their memories of lost homelands and advocating for their right to return there. In the process, these lands came to acquire a distinctly religious aura, holy places that were integral to their spiritual well-being.

As they spoke of the importance of homeland, the expellees employed a trope that was common currency in West German society. "Homeland" is the most common English translation of the German term *Heimat*, but no one English word satisfactorily expresses the depth and range of meaning conveyed by

[1]Rudolf Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat: Anregungen zur Pflege des Volks- und Brauchtums der Heimatvertriebenen* (Munich: Eichendorff-Gilde, 1949), 11.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the German original.[2] In its most ubiquitous usage in the modern period, *Heimat* has referred to a place of conviviality and integration within a larger mental mapping of the world. The scope of that place has ranged from the intimacy of a specific house to the expansiveness of a nation-state or multinational region. However narrowly or broadly defined, *Heimat* has described a place where one feels rooted and at home.[3] *Heimat* also has signified an idealized place of security and innocence, unburdened by the ironies and ugliness of historical experience. In the *Heimat*, people understand each other reflexively, forge strong bonds, and function together seamlessly. As such, the concept has been routinely employed to critique the shabbier realities of everyday life.[4]

Under more ordinary circumstances, the arguments of the expellees concerning the significance of their lost homelands should have generated sympathy among the wider population in West Germany. But life in the years immediately following the war was hardly ordinary. The war had exacted a devastating toll, and West Germans generally resented the additional burden of taking in millions of eastern German expellees.[5] The indigenous population of West Germany often dismissed the lamentations of their new neighbors from the east as being excessive, irrational, and even un-Christian. The expellees were accused of failing to come to terms with the past and integrate into West German society. Such sentiments are captured well in the following excerpt from a letter printed in a German newsletter: "[The expellees] are so loud and lively compared to us, so unrestrained in expressing emotion, especially with their feelings of loss. Naturally it is difficult to be forced to leave one's homeland. But ultimately we all have suffered in the war, and as a Christian one is obliged to make peace with the past. We did not invite them here, and when we share what little we have with them, they should be satisfied and assimilate into our village and our way of doing things."[6]

[2]Andrea Bastian offers a valuable survey of the various permutations of meaning encapsulated in the term *Heimat*. See *Der Heimat-Begriff: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung in verschiedenen Funktionsbereichen der deutschen Sprache* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995).

[3]The spatial elasticity of the term has served an important purpose as Germans have navigated between regional, national, and supranational identities. The concept of *Heimat*, Celia Applegate notes, "offered Germans a way to reconcile a heritage of localized political traditions with the ideal of a single, transcendent nationality. Heimat was both the beloved local places and the beloved nation; it was a comfortably flexible and inclusive homeland, embracing all localities alike." See *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). The quotation above is found on page 11.

[4]See Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2002).

[5]See Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der Deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich: Siedler, 2008).

[6]Published in 1950 in *Christ Unterwegs*, a newsletter produced by and for Catholic expellees, this letter was not submitted by an actual reader, but rather was written by the editorial staff to reflect a common point of view shared by many indigenous West Germans. It was used to

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While Protestant and Catholic congregations and agencies in West Germany provided many critical services to the expellees, they were not particularly receptive to expellee claims regarding the inseparable link between regional culture and religious identity, as well as expellee desires to perpetuate the religious customs of their eastern homelands in a West German context. Many West German Catholics regarded the devotional practices of Catholics from the east—from the hymns they favored to their zeal for pilgrimage—to be overwrought and outmoded. West German priests and prelates pressed Catholic expellees to adapt to the standards of their new dioceses, warning that expellee attachment to the habits of their lost homelands contradicted the universal character of Catholicism. "A good Catholic finds his homeland before the tabernacle and at the altar rail!" This was the basic message many expellees heard from their coreligionists in West Germany.[7] Some clergy recognized in expellee attachments to homeland not genuine religious sentiment so much as political agitation. One priest lamented the efforts of expellee Catholics in his parish to organize special masses and devotions among themselves, especially when priests from their homeland happened to be in the area. Such activities, he noted, "regularly cross the line into the political."[8]

This article examines the discourse on homeland and exile articulated by one segment of the expellee population in West Germany: Catholics from Silesia, the largest of Germany's eastern provinces lost in the postwar settlement. My analysis is based on a variety of texts written by and for Silesian Catholic expellees in the first two decades after the war. I begin by describing the contours of this subculture, including the causes, social networks, and media organs that held it together. Next I identify the dominant themes that run through the Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland. These themes include the role of homeland in instructing Christians about the nature of God and human destiny, the spiritual dangers of exile, and the prophetic role that the expellees were destined to play in postwar German society. Finally I explore the varied motivations that inspired Silesian Catholics to keep talking about their homeland and the pain of exile. I conclude that this discourse was not rooted in an irrational obsession with the past and the inability to adjust to

illustrate the lack of understanding that existed between indigenous residents and expellees in West Germany. Qtd. in Michael Hirschfeld, *Katholisches Milieu und Vertriebene: Eine Fallstudie am Beispiel des Oldenburger Landes 1945–1965* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 104–5.

[7]Edmund Piekorz, "Heimat ist gottgewollt," in *Heimat und Glaube: Jahrbuch der katholischen Heimatvertriebenen*, ed. Johannes Smaczny (Lippstadt: St. Hedwigs Schriftendienst, 1953), 7.

[8]Qtd. in Klaus J. Bade, Hans-Bernd Meier, and Bernhard Parisius, eds., *Zeitzeugen im Interview: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im Raum Osnabrück nach 1945* (Osnabrück: Rasch Druckerei u. Verlag, 1997), 77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

postwar realities. Instead I suggest that it served three interrelated purposes: to preserve the psychological well-being of Silesian Catholic expellees, to advance their political interests, and to meet their religious needs.

## I. Defending Claims to the Holy Homeland

Silesia stretches some two hundred miles along the upper and middle Oder River basin. To the south it rises into the Sudeten and Carpathian ranges, and to the north it opens up to the plains of central Poland. Its capital, Breslau (Wrocław), ranked as one of the largest cities in interwar Germany, but much of the region had a distinctly rural character. While agriculture set the economic tone in Lower and Middle Silesia, vast coal deposits along the eastern edge of Upper Silesia provided a foundation for heavy industry. Despite considerable economic inequalities within the region, the population as a whole enjoyed a relatively high standard of living compared to neighboring regions in Eastern Europe. This good fortune continued throughout most of World War II. Silesia was not seriously affected by aerial bombing or ground combat until the final stages of the conflict.

As the Red Army advanced deeper into German territory in the early months of 1945, Stalin sought to reengineer the political map of Eastern Europe to Soviet advantage. He hoped to assign a large swath of German land east of the Oder and Neisse rivers—including almost all of Silesia—to a resurrected Polish state. This would serve as compensation for the Soviet absorption of Poland's prewar eastern territories. In essence, his plan called for shifting Germany's and Poland's borders several hundred miles westward. In order to encourage Britain and the United States to recognize this shift as a foregone conclusion, the Red Army and its Polish allies sought to alter the facts on the ground. Terrorized by occupying armies, millions of Germans living east of the Oder and Neisse fled westward for shelter. Meanwhile, large numbers of Polish refugees were transferred into the region. When American, British, and Soviet delegations met in Potsdam in the summer of 1945, they jointly endorsed the border revisions Stalin had been seeking. They also assented to the ethnic cleansing of Germany's erstwhile eastern territories. Ethnic Germans who remained east of the Oder and Neisse were to be peacefully and systematically deported to the territories of occupied Germany. All told, over twelve million ethnic Germans were expelled from their homes, including some three million from the province of Silesia.[9] Approximately

[9]See Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, eds., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

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eight million of these expellees ended up in West Germany by 1950, constituting 16.1 percent of the country's population.[10] As of 1953, an estimated 1,083,000 Catholics from Silesia had migrated to West Germany.[11]

Expellees who resettled in West Germany had to endure a very difficult transition. Most arrived virtually penniless into a war-ravaged country that did not possess sufficient resources to care for a large refugee population, including adequate housing. France, which did not take part in the Potsdam Accords of 1945, formally disavowed the expulsion process and therefore refused to accept German expellees into the French zone of occupation. Expellees were funneled instead into the American and British zones, and certain provinces in particular received them in large numbers.[12] Anglo-American policy dictated that they be widely dispersed in order to facilitate their rapid integration into western German society. Many expellees languished for months or even years in one of hundreds of refugee camps established across the country. Life in the camps was usually primitive and quickly acquired a negative stigma.[13] Other expellees were billeted in the homes of West German families, especially in rural areas not destroyed in the war. Host families deeply resented the impositions this placed on their resources and way of life. As Rainer Schulz notes, "The refugees had corrupted a world which had previously remained intact and isolated, and had brought with them other ways of life, models, and standards. In consequence, the native inhabitants grew to regard them as threat to their own existence, both material and philosophical."[14] Regardless of where they happened to first land, expellees typically migrated at the earliest opportunity, especially to newly emergent cities where work was soon plentiful and migrant populations were common.

Like the rest of the expellee population, in the early postwar years Silesian Catholics found themselves strewn widely across West Germany, mired in

[10]Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe, 1945–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20–21.

[11]Michael Hirschfeld, "Die Schlesischen Katholiken nach 1945 in Westdeutschland," in *Erbe und Auftrag der schlesische Kirche: 1000 Jahre Bistum Breslau/Dziedzictwo i posłannictwo śląskiego Kościoła: 1000 lat diecezji wrocławskiej*, ed. Michael Hirschfeld and Markus Trautmann (Dülmen: Laumann-Verlag, 2001), 262.

[12]According to census data from 1950, expellees constituted 33 percent of the population of Schleswig-Holstein, 27.2 percent of the population of Lower Saxony, and 21 percent of the population of Bavaria. Hans Neuhoff, *Die deutschen Vertriebenen in Zahlen* (Bonn: Osmipress, 1977), 19.

[13]Indigenous West Germans routinely applied derisive names to expellee settlement camps, such as New Poland, New Korea, Gypsy Housing, the Chinese Colony, and so forth. Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 135.

[14]Rainer Schulz, "Growing Discontent: Relations between Native and Refugee Populations in a Rural District in Western Germany after the Second World War," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 67.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

poverty, and generally alienated from the native population. Not surprisingly, a large majority focused their hopes on a future return to the homeland where they had earlier known security and a sense of rootedness.[15] Refusing to accept exile as a permanent condition, many Silesian Catholics supported initiatives designed to preserve their bonds as a community and their commitment to their Silesian homeland.

Central to this effort was the preservation of the Archdiocese of Breslau as an integral part of Germany. At this time the boundaries of the archdiocese were roughly coterminous with the province of Silesia. Although a substantial minority of its members spoke one of a number of Slavic dialects, most claimed German as their mother tongue.[16] The hierarchy was composed overwhelmingly of ethnic Germans, and its most recent archbishop, Adolf Cardinal Bertram, served as chairman of the Fulda Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1919 to his death in 1945. By defending the prewar boundaries and character of the archdiocese, Silesian Catholics sought to buttress the view that Silesia remained an indelible part of Germany.[17]

The significance of this effort was magnified by the changing facts on the ground in the archdiocese. With the Oder and Neisse rivers serving as the de facto border between Poland and Germany, most of the archdiocese now stood in Poland, with only a small rump extending into the Soviet zone of occupied Germany (the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, as of 1949). After the expulsion of ethnic Germans and the resettlement of ethnic Poles into Silesia, the population of the archdiocese was now largely Polish. The same was true of the Catholic hierarchy in the region. At the end of the war, Pope Pius XII commissioned August Cardinal Hlond, the primate

[15]According to one survey, 82 percent of expellees wanted to return to their original homelands in 1949. That figure fell to 50 percent by 1960. Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 88.

[16]The most common Slavic dialect in the region was a version of Polish known derisively in German as *Wasserpolnisch*. Silesians typically spoke German with a distinctive lilt that reinforced the sense of difference between them and the indigenous population of West Germany, which sometimes complicated the process of integration. The German historian Lutz Niethammer recalls a telling incident from his time in *Gymnasium*, when he and his fellow students made common cause against their new German teacher, an expellee who spoke with an Upper Silesian accent, making it known that they "did not want the Polak any more, and certainly not in German class." To the students' surprise, their teacher, Herbert Czaja, soon left his post after being elected to serve in the Bundestag. He eventually emerged as one of the most prominent expellee leaders in West Germany. Niethammer, "Flucht ins Konventionelle?: Einige Randglossen zu Forschungsproblemen der deutschen Nachkriegsmigration," in *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte: Bilanzierung der Forschung und Perspektiven für zukünftige Forschungsarbeit*, ed. Rainer Schulze, Doris von der Brelie-Lewien, and Helga Grebing (Hildesheim: A. Lax, 1987), 316–23.

[17]In an effort to reinforce the commitment to the archdiocese among Silesian Catholics in exile, Fr. Johannes Kaps compiled an exhaustive survey of the personnel, administrative divisions, and religious houses of the archdiocese prior to the end of the war. See *Handbuch für das katholische Schlesien* (Munich: "Christ Unterwegs," 1951).

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of Poland who had spent most of the war in exile, to return to Poland in order to reestablish the organizational structures of the Church there. Hlond interpreted his mandate to include the German territories east of the Oder and Neisse that had been assigned to Poland at Potsdam. He divided this territory into five apostolic administrations and appointed Polish prelates to lead them. German priests and prelates who remained in the region were generally excluded from positions of influence, and many were deported.[18]

In their defense of the prewar archdiocese, Silesian Catholic expellee leaders in West Germany and their allies in the German Catholic hierarchy challenged the canonical legitimacy of Hlond's administrative changes in Germany's lost eastern provinces. In response to this pressure, the Vatican withheld its formal recognition of the ecclesial units Hlond had created, and for over two decades after the war the Vatican continued to refer to the Archdiocese of Breslau as a part of Germany in its annual yearbook. Many Silesian Catholic expellees clung tightly to the belief that, in theory at least, nothing had changed in their archdiocese: the same parochial and diocesan boundaries were in place, and the same pastors were in charge. In an article published in a newsletter popular among expellees, an unnamed author noted: "Canonically speaking, the dioceses located in the eastern German territories are still registered in the Papal Yearbook as German dioceses. According to the Vatican, expelled German priests may not abandon their parishes east of the Oder–Neisse and in the Sudetenland. They are to this day the legitimate pastors of their eastern German parishes."[19] Many Silesian Catholic expellees also rallied around the spiritual leadership of Capital-Vicar Ferdinand Piontek, the ranking member of the archdiocesan hierarchy after the death of Cardinal Bertram. Piontek was deported from Silesia in 1946 and eventually settled in Görlitz, a city located in that portion of the archdiocese that extended into East Germany. The Vatican recognized Piontek as the apostolic administrator of the German remnant of the Archdiocese of Breslau, and he was eventually named a titular bishop. Tense relations between East and West Germany prevented Piontek from exercising any real authority over Silesian Catholic expellees in West Germany, but many within the expellee population revered him as a living link to their beloved archdiocese. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination, an organization of Silesian Catholics in West Germany presented him with a relic of St. Hedwig. In a message accompanying the gift, they noted: "Thousands of Silesian Catholics and hundreds of Silesian priests have sacrificed to present this gift to their

[18]A thorough and highly critical analysis of Hlond's actions can be found in Franz Scholz, *Zwischen Staatsräson und Evangelium: Kardinal Hlond und die Tragödie der ostdeutschen Diözesen: Tatsachen, Hintergrunde, Anfragen*, 3rd rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1989).

[19]"Neue Etappe im polnischen Kirchenkampf," *Christ Unterwegs* 5, no. 2 (February 1951): 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

homeland's lead pastor, Capital-Vicar Bishop Piontek, as a sign of reverence for his person and office. We live in exile and hold the ecclesial homeland of our archdiocese close to our hearts. The archdiocese lives within us, because we know that it was faithful and vital to the bitter end."[20]

In addition to resisting any changes to the canonical status of the Archdiocese of Breslau, many Silesian Catholic expellees sought to sustain the social bonds they had forged in their homeland. Johannes Kaps and Gerhard Moschner spearheaded a drive to maintain a vital spirit of community among their fellow priests from the Archdiocese of Breslau who had resettled in West Germany. Kaps relocated to Munich after the war and devoted much of his energies to preserving the historical legacy of the Breslau Archdiocese and documenting the fate of those who remained in Silesia after the Soviet invasion.[21] Moschner landed in Cologne, where he took a leading role in, among other organizations, the Katholische Arbeitsstelle (Nord).[22] Together they arranged a session of spiritual exercises in 1946 for fellow priests from the archdiocese living in exile. This meeting eventually resulted in the creation of a formal organization known as the Schlesische Priesterwerk. The organization's annual meeting in the Hessian town of Königstein and the related activities it sponsored enabled hundreds of priests from the archdiocese—most of whom were officially incardinated into new dioceses in West Germany—to remain in contact with one another and to promote appreciation for and understanding of Catholic life in Silesia.[23]

Another concern of the Silesian clergy in West Germany was the formation of seminarians from Silesia and the cultivation of new vocations among the younger generation of expellees. The legacy of the Archdiocese of Breslau would endure only if a new generation of clergy emerged who understood and identified with it. Toward that end, Silesian clerics worked with clergy expelled from other regions to found a seminary specifically for the Catholic expellee population. Situated in a barracks complex in Königstein, the seminary eventually would train hundreds of future priests for ministry to the displaced Catholic population.[24]

Leaders within the Silesian Catholic expellee population also founded a variety of organizations designed to maintain solidarity among lay Silesian Catholics. One of the most notable was the Eichendorffgilde, created in

[20]Qtd. in Gregor Ploch, *Heimatwerk schlesischer Katholiken: Anfänge—Verlauf— Aussichten* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2006), 62.

[21]See "Johannes Kaps (1906–1959)," in *Schlesische Priesterbilder*, vol. 5, ed. Joseph Gottschalk (Aalen/Württemburg: K. Theiss, 1967), 221–25.

[22]See "Gerhard Moschner (1907–1966)," in *Schlesische Priesterbilder*, 5:230–35.

[23]See Werner Marschall, "50 Jahre Schlesisches Priesterwerk," *Schlesien in Kirche und Welt* 4, no. 4 (August 2003): 64–66.

[24]See "50 Jahre Königstein," *Königsteiner Rufe* (special edition, May 1997), 4–15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Munich in 1947 at the instigation of Johannes Kaps and the journalist Rudolf Jokiel. Named after a nineteenth-century romantic poet famed for both his Catholic piety and his love for his Silesian homeland, the organization was designed to promote an appreciation for Silesia, to improve the welfare of the Silesian expellee population and their relations with their West German neighbors, and "to raise awareness of the question of the preservation and recovery of the German East . . . as the shared responsibility of the entire German people."[25] Local branches of the Eichendorffgilde cropped up across West Germany wherever Silesian Catholics lived in sufficient numbers. A second such organization, the St.-Hedwigs-Werk, was founded around the same time in order to facilitate the creation of "a spiritual homeland for the eastern expellees."[26] While open to all expellees, in its early years the St.-Hedwigs-Werk was led by two priests from the Archdiocese of Breslau, Wilhelm Trennert and Johannes Smaczny, and it attracted a predominantly Silesian Catholic membership. The organization was especially vibrant in the dioceses of Osnabrück, Paderborn, and Münster. In 1953 it claimed eighty-two local chapters in the Diocese of Osnabrück alone.[27]

In addition to founding organizations, Silesian Catholic leaders encouraged commitment to the Silesian homeland through an extensive print culture. The St.-Hedwigs-Werk started publishing a monthly newsletter, *Heimat und Glaube*, in 1949. The Eichendorffgilde followed with its own newsletter, *Der schlesische Katholik*, in 1952. A related initiative of a more scholarly nature was the journal *Archiv für schlesische Kirchengeschichte*. First launched in 1936, the journal was suspended at the height of the war, only to be launched again in 1949 by Silesian Catholic scholars living in West Germany. Silesian Catholics also published a wide variety of books and pamphlets devoted to their homeland, including novels, memoirs, and studies of Silesian Catholic culture.

Pilgrimage was yet another strategy many Silesian Catholics relied upon to sustain solidarity. Before World War II, Silesian Catholics were known for their enthusiasm for pilgrimage, and Silesia was home to numerous pilgrimage sites.[28] In the years following the war, strained relations between West Germany and Poland prevented the expellees from frequenting the holy places of their homeland, but they quickly gravitated to alternative sites in

[25]*Schlesien als Erbe und Aufgabe: Was ist und will die Eichendorff Gilde?: Grundsätze und Werkmaterial* (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Eichendorffgilden, n.d.), 3–4.

[26]Qtd. in *25 Jahre St.-Hedwigs-Werk der Diözese Osnabrück: Eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück: St.-Hedwigs-Werk der Diözese Osnabrück, 1972), 12.

[27]Ibid., 30.

[28]See Paul Mai, "Die Entwicklung der Hedwigswallfahrten in Deutschland nach 1945," in *Das Bild der Heiligen Hedwig in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Eckhard Grunewald and Nikolaus Gussone (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 247–48.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

West Germany. Silesian Catholic expellees recognized pilgrimage as an ideal method to meet the specific religious needs of their community. The resettlement process had dispersed Silesian Catholics across many different towns and villages, and large numbers found themselves in predominantly Protestant regions, such as Schleswig-Holstein, the eastern reaches of Lower Saxony, Hesse, Württemburg, and Central Franconia.[29] For those who had ready access to a Catholic Church, they were often disappointed to discover that songs and pious practices popular in Silesia were not honored in their new parishes. Pilgrimage allowed Silesian Catholics from across West Germany to gather together periodically and to practice their faith on their own terms and in a distinctly Silesian key.[30]

Large-scale, organized pilgrimages by Catholic expellees from Silesia and other regions east of the Oder–Neisse border were especially popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sometimes attracting tens of thousands of participants. Involvement gradually declined thereafter, but the practice stabilized into an elaborate culture and remained an integral part of the lives of many Silesian Catholics.[31] They used the practice to carve out a sacred landscape in West Germany that was charged with symbolic associations with Silesia. Of the dozens of sites visited by Silesian pilgrims, one of the most popular was the Cloister Church at Andechs in the Augsburg Diocese, the birthplace of St. Hedwig (d. 1243), a Bavarian princess who moved to Silesia after marrying its ruler, Duke Heinrich I, and eventually earned the status of a saint on account of her piety, charity, and generous patronage to the church in Silesia. Her cult was never very large in West Germany, but Hedwig emerged as one of the most revered Silesian saints and the official saintly patron of the region. Many Silesian Catholics in West Germany found in the Cloister Church at Andechs a locus for their devotion and transformed it into a pilgrimage center of some note. Another popular destination for Silesians was Annaberg bei Haltern, a hilltop chapel dedicated to St. Anne in the Münster Archdiocese. Of limited resonance for most West German Catholics, for Silesians the name and hilltop setting

[29]Hirschfeld, "Schlesischen Katholiken nach 1945 in Westdeutschland," in *Erbe und Auftrag*, 268.

[30]Indicative of the appeal of pilgrimage for Catholic expellees in West Germany is the following excerpt from an announcement concerning a 1951 pilgrimage to a Marian shrine in Hessen: "Pilgrimage! Our hearts are filled with joy when we hear this word. We have left behind our own holy Marian sites and miss them dearly. . . . For we wandered through the wilderness seeking the peaceful chapels of holy places with the image of our heavenly Mother, and all we have found are the chilly spaces of Protestant churches without her image." Qtd. in "Wallfahrt zur Schmerzensmutter der Heimatvertriebenen in Grünberg/Hessen," *Königsteiner Rufe* 3, no. 2 (February 1951): 61.

[31]Georg Schroubek, *Wallfahrt und Heimatverlust: Ein Beitrag zur religiösen Volkskunde der Gegenwart* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1968), 327–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recalled to mind the most important pilgrimage site in Silesia, also called Annaberg. They eagerly ventured to the nearer Annaberg and symbolically made it their own, funding an outdoor altar for large gatherings, a stele decorated with motifs related to the church in Silesia, and a copy of a famous statuette of St. Anne holding the infant Mary and the infant Jesus.[32]

Leaders from Silesia and other regions of Eastern Europe enjoyed considerable success in their efforts to maintain cohesion and a sense of shared purpose among the expellees in the first two decades of the postwar era, but they also fell well short of their hopes. One tribute to the effectiveness of expellee organizing can be found in the political arena, where the expellees came to be respected and feared as a potent voting bloc. The major political parties in West Germany all went to great lengths to court the expellee vote, routinely acknowledging expellee suffering and endorsing their right to return to their original homelands.[33] The expellees also managed to extract significant financial compensation for their lost property from the West German government through a program known as the "equalization of burdens" (*Lastenausgleich*).[34] On the other hand, only a fraction of the expellee population actively participated in the expellee movement at its zenith in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[35] At this time, tens of thousands of Silesian Catholic expellees could be mobilized to support events, groups, and periodicals organized expressly for them. For a variety of reasons, the large majority of the Silesian Catholic expellee population either maintained a more passive attachment to their former homeland or else ceased to identify with it in a significant way. Many found themselves living in relative isolation from other Silesian Catholics, a condition that encouraged the formation of new forms of social identification.[36] Others were inspired to cut their ties with the past by the negative stigma that surrounded the expellee community. Yet another factor at work was the secularizing impact of the expulsions. According to Helmut Schelsky, the religious piety of many traditional Christians from the eastern provinces was "socially conditioned and rooted," and the rending of the social fabric that once had enveloped them led in many cases to a general decline in religious

[32]Schroubek, *Wallfahrt und Heimatverlust*, 252–55.

[33]See Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*.

[34]See Michael L. Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[35]Kossert notes that only 19 percent of expellees belonged to one of the twenty homeland societies (*Landsmannschaften*) founded at this time. See Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 89.

[36]In the western zones of occupied Germany, the resettlement process was designed to disperse the expellee population as broadly as possible in order to promote integration into western Germany and hinder the emergence of expellee subcultures based around lost homelands. Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 54–61.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

commitment.[37] Michael Hirschfeld reaches a similar conclusion in his study of expellees living in the Oldenburg region. Before the expulsion, eastern German Catholics adhered to a set of religious beliefs and practices that were deeply embedded within an all-encompassing social and cultural milieu. When that milieu was dismantled through the expulsions, "the secularization process advanced rapidly among a not insubstantial portion of eastern German Catholics." A segment of the Catholic expellee population successfully resisted this process, in part through the creation of intimate Catholic subcultures.[38]

## II. On Homeland, Homesickness, and Faith

A distinctive discourse on the importance of homeland and its integral role in a life of faith animated the efforts of Silesian Catholic expellees to preserve their community in exile and to maintain their claims to Silesia. This discourse formed a central component of the Silesian Catholic subculture that coalesced in postwar West Germany. Its advocates were diverse and did not always agree with each other in every respect, but they tended to reiterate a common set of themes that helped unify the community and define its profile in West German society.

One of these themes was the assertion that a strong emotional attachment to one's homeland is a fundamental human need, woven deeply into the fabric of human essence. While the course of life may force people to pull up their stakes from time to time, perpetual itinerancy does not belong to a normal, healthy life. In a documentary account of the deportation of Silesian Catholics, Johannes Kaps argued that a "normal person" requires a sense of rootedness in place (*Bodenständigkeit*). "A person must maintain regular contact and deep integration with a place and a community. It is simply a matter of well-being that he have a homeland."[39] Drawing upon core religious beliefs, many Silesian Catholics conceived of the human need for rootedness not merely in biological or psychological terms but rather as the result of God's design. God formed humankind, not as an undistinguished mass of individuals, but as distinctive societies shaped by shared cultures, experiences, and landscapes. In expressing this point, Kaps quoted approvingly from the work of the Jesuit Alfred Delp: "That a person must enter into relationships is the result of the fact that he has always been a part of something larger, that he is tied to his land, his people, his history, and his

[37]Schelsky, *Wandlungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart: Darstellung und Deutung einer empirisch-soziologischen Tatbestandsaufnahme* (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1954), 268–70.
[38]Hirschfeld, *Katholisches Milieu und Vertriebene*, 526.
[39]Qtd. in *Schlesien als Erbe und Aufgabe*, 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

culture. It is the result of the fact that God has placed us together as people of the same blood, the same manners, the same land, and the same history."[40]

Silesian Catholics often combined the argument regarding the human need for rootedness in place with self-congratulatory assertions that their community honored this need better than most. A good example can be found in an essay written by Gerhard Kluge on the history of the pilgrimage site of Wahlstatt near Liegnitz (Lignica) in Lower Silesia. Echoing a narrative commonly found in popular German histories, Kluge described how the thirteenth-century ruler of Silesia, Duke Heinrich II, sacrificed his life to check the advance of the Mongol Horde at the Battle of Liegnitz in 1241, thereby saving Silesia and the rest of Western civilization. Kluge suggested that Heinrich's commitment to the homeland was reflective of Silesians in general. "For us, homeland and community is the holy inheritance of our ancestors."[41]

If a strong attachment to homeland was taken as a fundamental component of a healthy existence and the God-given order, it should come as no surprise that many Silesian Catholics also viewed it as an important virtue in the Christian life. Leading voices in the community repeatedly made the case that love of homeland and Christian piety are linked in a symbiotic relationship. Human societies must draw from deep spiritual resources in order to maintain a vital regional culture and a genuine appreciation of place. The appreciation of regional culture and place, in turn, can nourish one's understanding of God and the ultimate destiny of humankind.

In an article concerning the divinely ordained nature of human attachment to homeland, the Silesian priest Edmund Piekorz argued that Jesus Christ set an example that Christians should strive to follow: "Jesus Christ is thoroughly of man of the homeland. . . . [He] cries over Jerusalem not only on account of the hardened hearts of his people, but also because of the destruction of his holy homeland that he foresaw. . . . Our divine redeemer is deeply rooted in his earthly homeland, which serves as the basis for his ascent to God. In so doing, he demonstrates how we also are to draw our strength from our homeland."[42] In his leading role in the Eichendorffgilde, Rudolf Jokiel urged his fellow Silesian Catholics to preserve their memories of the homeland and to sustain the distinctive cultural forms that thrived there. In a widely distributed pamphlet he asserted, "We need to speak once again in our language, to sing our songs, to celebrate our festivals the way we were accustomed to do back home." These practices, he insisted, are "a part of

[40]Ibid., 9.

[41]Gerhard Kluge, "Wahlstatt bei Liegnitz," in *Heilige Heimat: Von Schlesiens Gnadenstätten*, ed. Johannes Kaps (Stuttgart: Brentanoverlag, 1949), 60–66.

[42]Piekorz, "Heimat ist gottgewollt," 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

our essence."[43] The success of this endeavor, however, requires a vital religious faith. The cultural life of the homeland "can only emerge from a confessional, that is to say an unambiguously religious, foundation, from which the deepest powers of the soul are summoned and community-building energies are released."[44] But just as a dynamic regional culture requires religion, Jokiel argued that religion requires roots in a specific place. In driving home this point, he cited the Catholic author Peter Paul Pauquet's definition of homeland: "Homeland is the place where, on account of my nature and through natural means, I am closest to God."[45]

Echoing a sentiment often expressed in Silesian Catholic circles, Johannes Kaps argued that the human relationship to homeland has considerable theological significance, for it can serve as an analogue to an eternal home with God. The peace and security felt in an earthly homeland foreshadows the heavenly peace Christians hope to experience with God for all eternity. "There is something holy about the love for one's earthly homeland, when like Christ we consider it from an eternal perspective, as a means to an eternal end," Kaps asserted. "We are always wanderers between two worlds, journeying ever homewards, toward the eternal home from which we will never again be banished. For in the final analysis, homeland . . . is not space, friendship, or love, but rather peace, and the soul's longing for home can only be stilled by a return to the place of eternal peace." Kaps suggested that Silesian Catholic expellees should "recall the holy places of our Silesian homeland with gratitude and wistfulness," for these places "instruct us about our eternal goal and offer the strength to reach it."[46] Edmund Piekorz integrated the concept of homeland within the Christian narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. Humankind originally shared a homeland with God (the Garden of Eden), but through original sin they were rendered spiritually homeless. Developing a healthy love of an earthly homeland prepares humanity for the journey homeward to God: "He who loves his homeland and cultivates his dedication to homeland is the kind of person with whom God can venture toward heaven, toward home."[47]

In emphasizing the centrality of place in the religious life, many Silesian Catholics drew a logical conclusion about displacement: it is devastating not only from a material perspective but also from an existential and spiritual perspective. The forced removal from their homes stripped Silesians not only of their possessions and livelihoods but also of a homeland and indigenous culture that gave meaning to their earthly lives and foreshadowed a future

[43]Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat*, 5.
[44]Ibid., 11.
[45]Ibid., 16.
[46]Johannes Kaps, "Heilige Heimat," in *Heilige Heimat*, 10, 12.
[47]Piekorz, "Heimat ist gottgewollt," 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

life with God. It cast them headlong into an uncertain world and effaced their identities and values.

In an article in the *Königsteiner Rufe*, a magazine popular among Silesian Catholic expellees, an unnamed author reflected on the full ramifications of the expulsions: "It was a dark day, full of suffering and bitterness. It cast us into deep and endless physical crisis, including hunger, homelessness, and the dangers of life on the street. But it also cast us into a deep spiritual crisis. Our human dignity was trampled underfoot. We were separated from the people who were most dear to us." After describing the effects of forced deportation in such dark hues, the author then offered a hopeful note, describing the re-integrative power of the mere memory of the homeland for expellees: "And suddenly . . . the homeland stands vividly before us. The dreams of countless nights have led us back as we recalled the past, both beautiful and sorrowful. In countless discussions with friends and acquaintances we speak of it, and the stranger becomes a friend when he also knows our homeland and talks about it with us."[48]

Silesian Catholic expellees sometimes compared the spiritual plight of their community to grim portrayals of postwar German society as a whole, where the forces of modernization were steadily eroding communal bonds and rendering the population into a rootless, isolated, godless mass of individuals adrift in an uncaring world. The Silesian priest and theologian Georg Siegmund lamented how so many contemporary Germans were abandoning their original homelands in order to live in cities, a process that he believed led to a heightened individualism and materialism. "In the social life of people today, something old is being broken, bonds that restrain us and link us together. The result is atomization, every man for himself."[49] Another Silesian priest and theologian, Rudolf Lange, advanced a similar point in a monograph devoted to analyzing the theological significance of homeland: the loss of a homeland deprives one of needed social bonds and leads to an "unnatural isolation and loneliness."[50]

As they extolled the importance of rootedness in a homeland and warned of the dangers of displacement, at times Silesian Catholic expellees offered disturbing echoes of the *Blut-und-Boden* ideology in circulation during the Nazi era. That ideology, building upon earlier strains of discourse from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, celebrated the mystical bond that supposedly existed between the German people and the territory that was rightfully theirs. The lofty virtues of the German race were inseparable from

[48]"Zum Tag der Heimat," *Königsteiner Rufe* 4, no. 8 (August 1952): 228.
[49]Georg Siegmund, "Christliche Heimattreue," in *Heimat und Glaube*, 22.
[50]Rudolf Lange, *Theologie der Heimat: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der irdischen Wirklichkeiten* (Freilassing, Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1965), 77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the soil that nourished it. The Jews, by contrast, were caricatured as a people without a homeland and, as a consequence, without value.[51] A related set of associations repeatedly surfaced in the discourse of the expellees. A good example can be found in the statutes of the St.-Hedwigs-Werk: "Man bears within himself the deeply held conviction to remain true to his own kind [*Stammesart*]. . . . And so the expellee from the East cannot betray the tribe from which he has sprung. He cannot cut himself off from the earth of his homeland without living in a vacuum and wasting away as a 'citizen of the world.'"[52] To German ears, conditioned by years of Nazi propaganda, the contemptuous reference to "citizen of the world" had unmistakable connotations. To accept expulsion from one's homeland without resisting was akin to renouncing one's Germanic heritage and becoming a Jew.

Another argument that repeatedly surfaced in Silesian Catholic discourse concerned the nature and effects of homesickness (*Heimweh*). The indigenous population of West Germany routinely challenged the expellees to make peace with the loss of their homeland and property and to move on as assimilated members of a truncated postwar Germany. Many Silesian Catholic expellees responded defiantly to such pressure, often finding religious significance in their unwillingness to renounce their longing for Silesia.

In one notable defense of homesickness, Johannes Kaps called attention to biblical examples of homesickness in order to reinforce the argument that it is entirely appropriate for Silesian Catholics to experience the same feelings. "There is something distinctly holy about homesickness, a feeling that is as old as the human race. The holy scriptures portray . . . in Psalm 136 the homesickness of the Israelites for the land of their fathers and the unforgettable holy city of Jerusalem." In the New Testament, Christ's deep love for his homeland is displayed in "the many intimate characterizations of its people and landscape in his speeches and parables."[53] In another essay, Kaps compared the expulsions of his fellow Silesians and the devastating wartime damage to the Breslau Cathedral to the fate of the ancient Israelites, who also endured exile and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Kaps urged his readers to take comfort from a passage in Haggai that records God's promise to the Israelites regarding the Temple: "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former."[54] The editors of the expellee newsletter *Christ Unterwegs* prominently featured an article by Wilhelm

[51]See Uwe Mai, *"Rasse und Raum": Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplannung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2002).

[52]Qtd. in Johannes Smaczny, "Das St.-Hedwigs-Werk: Ein Bildungswerk der katholischen Heimatvertreibenen," in *Heimat und Glaube*, 51.

[53]Kaps, "Heilige Heimat," 9–10.

[54]Johannes Kaps, "Von Dom zu Breslau," in *Heilige Heimat*, 20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Heinen, a priest and theologian from Westphalia, in which he offered a sympathetic analysis of homesickness in general and the longing of expellees in particular. Homesickness, Heinen argued, often has a metaphysical dimension "that can only be quenched by the wellspring of Christian faith, by a lively trust in the triune God, and by the indomitable source of divine love."[55]

A final theme one encounters in the discourse of Silesian Catholic expellees is the claim that through their suffering they have been called to witness to the religious significance of place in a world very much in need of the message. According to this argument, only those who have lost their homeland truly understand the full scope of its importance. Moreover, only exiles understand that, while homeland is vitally important, in this life human beings are all exiles and pilgrims, forever unsettled until they find their ultimate home with God. In witnessing to these truths, Silesians and other exiles are modern-day prophets, and postwar German society would do well to heed the message.

"It is a general fact of life that one must stand at a certain remove from one's homeland in order to truly and fully comprehend its riches."[56] So noted Oskar Golombek, a priest of the Archdiocese of Breslau, who from his postwar base in Cologne served as one of the most prominent leaders of the Silesian Catholic community in exile until his death in 1972. Yet the understanding of place was not the only wisdom that Silesian Catholics gained from their bitter experiences. They also earned a deeper appreciation of the fleeting nature of one's earthly homeland. The expulsions must have a "deep meaning," asserted the author of a 1952 article in the *Königsteiner Rufe*, for God does not torture people without a higher purpose. "Rather, through this affliction God wants to say something, not only to the expellees but also to their brothers and sisters in the German fatherland among whom they have been forced." At the heart of this divine dispatch is a warning that nothing on earth is certain except for God. "Ownership is no guarantee. House and home, property and estate, a large bank account, pearls, jewelry and brilliant gold, all of this can disappear in a moment."[57] As he attempted to make sense of the expulsions, Johannes Kaps discerned a similar message: "We expellees have been entrusted with a great mission: to bring contemporary society to an awareness of a truth that has been forgotten. Namely, that on this earth we are only pilgrims and vagabonds en route to our home with the Lord."[58]

[55]Wilhelm Heinen, "Heimatliebe und Heimweh," *Christ Unterwegs* 5, no. 2 (February 1951): 4.
[56]Oskar Golombek, *Heimatliches Brauchtum auf fremden Boden—Begegnungen und Spannungen* (Neuß: Gesellschaft für Buchdruckerei, 1965), 12.
[57]"Zum Tag der Heimat," *Königsteiner Rufe* 4, no. 8 (August 1952): 28.
[58]Kaps, "Heilige Heimat," 11.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

## III. Displacement and Replacement

In the early years of the postwar era, the indigenous population of West Germany often criticized the expellees for their excessive and irrational attachment to lost homelands and their inability to integrate into postwar West German society. Such criticisms reflect the resentment many West Germans harbored toward the expellees, whose needs required further sacrifice from a population already coping with heavy burdens. These criticisms also obscure the complex motivations that inspired the expellees to focus on their losses. In the case of expelled Silesian Catholics, these motivations can be broken down into three interrelated categories: to preserve their psychic well-being, to advance their political interests, and to meet their religious needs.

To appreciate the psychic value of Silesia, it is important to keep in mind that most Silesian Catholic expellees arrived in West Germany with little more than the clothes on their backs. Officials in charge of the resettlement process intentionally dispersed them throughout the country in order to lessen the threat of political unrest from within their ranks. Expellees generally found themselves relegated to substandard housing and sustained by the meager support provided by public and private organizations. Their efforts to find a footing in the postwar economy were hampered by the disdain they encountered among the indigenous population. They also struggled to feel at home in the Catholic Church of West Germany, where many of the most cherished hymns and devotions of their homeland were unknown.[59] Deprived of material well-being, the social networks they had relied upon, and the strains of piety that had enriched their lives, it is no wonder that Silesian Catholics clung to their lost homeland. In recalling it to mind, they routinely subsumed unpleasant aspects of their old lives under an idealized vision of economic security, social warmth, and religious piety. Such memories provided comfort in the midst of suffering, affirmed their worth as a people, and reiterated their hopes and values.

One prominent practitioner of this art of memory was Carl Ulitzka, a priest and politician from the Archdiocese of Breslau who relocated to Berlin after the war. He wrote a brief article about the Mother of God Chapel, a Catholic shrine of regional renown located in his hometown of Ratibor (Racziborz). For Ulitzka, the significance of the chapel extended far beyond the architecture of the building or the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin housed therein. In his memory, this place remained forever tied to the piety instilled in him as a child by his mother and the religious career he would eventually

[59]See Sabine Voßkamp, *Katholische Kirche und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland: Integration, Identität und ostpolitischer Diskurs 1945 bis 1972* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

embrace. "My childhood is linked to this church in the deepest and most personal of ways. It was here that my deceased mother begged me to consider a clerical vocation. It was here that I so often prayed and where my mother gave me flowers to place on the altar. And it is here that the dearest memories from my life and work as pastor of St. Nicholas Church [in Ratibor] are found."[60] Ulitzka was one of thousands of Silesian Catholics who shared their memories of the homeland in expellee media organs and social gatherings in a collective effort to encourage each other and to assuage the wounds of exile. In an open letter to his fellow expellees published in a West German newspaper, Ulitzka urged them to "preserve the love of the homeland, even when it brings you pain. It sustains you and is a perpetual source of joy. The homeland loses its reality only to those who forget it."[61]

In sharing their memories of the homeland, Catholic Silesians engaged in a still more ambitious project: reassembling the remnants of their shattered society. Starting with the groundbreaking work of Maurice Halbwachs, theorists of collective memory have argued persuasively that memory is a profoundly social act. In recalling past events, even those of a private nature, we order our memories in ways that are largely determined by our social milieu.[62] According to Jan Assmann, "the individual remembers in order to belong." The act of memory leads one into "a system of memory sites, a system of markers that enables the individual who lives in this tradition . . . to realize his potential as the member of a society in the sense of a community where it is possible to learn, remember, and to share in a culture."[63] As Silesian Catholics recalled their homeland privately and with each other, they perpetually remapped the contours of a shared landscape that remained vividly alive, however divorced from contemporary reality. In exercising their memories in this fashion, Silesian Catholics preserved the foundations of their social identity.

Remembering the lost homeland served another purpose within the interior lives of Silesian Catholics: it enabled them to better cope with wartime guilt. Silesian Catholic expellees had been well-represented in the Nazi party and in the various military and paramilitary units that conquered much of Europe and executed Hitler's brutal social engineering schemes. Very few could reasonably claim to have offered any kind of resistance to Nazi crimes,

[60]Carl Ulitzka, "Die Muttergotteskirche," in *Heilige Heimat*, 109.

[61]Qtd. in Guido Hitze, *Carl Ulitzka (1873–1953) oder Oberschlesien zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002), 1257.

[62]See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[63]Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 7–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

including the annihilation of Silesia's Jewish population.[64] Furthermore, a substantial percentage traced their roots back to Upper Silesia, a border region where markers of German, Polish, and Czech ethnicities routinely overlapped. In an era when ethnic ambiguity often proved perilous, many Upper Silesian Catholics with potentially compromising family names and backgrounds went to great lengths to prove their German bona fides, and they turned a blind eye to erstwhile friends and neighbors who, unable to escape the taint of Polishness, faced deportation and worse fates.[65] The homeland that Silesian Catholic expellees so fondly recalled was defined by strategic forgetting. It was almost always a land of earnest German Christians, as devoid of Nazis as it was full of innocent victims.

Earlier we encountered such a claim to victimhood in the comparisons Kaps drew, without a trace of irony, between the Silesians and the ancient Israelites. An equally bold claim can be found in an essay by Christian Gündel, in which he described a disturbing historical pattern: every five hundred years or so, eastern hordes ("Huns, Hungarians, Mongols, Czechs, Poles, and Russians") have rampaged their way through the "Christian homeland" of Silesia and Germany. Gündel portrayed the Soviet invasion of 1944–1945 as the culmination of a much longer *Drang nach Westen*:

> The invasion of Soviet Russia with its Asiatic face is indeed the worst one, impacting not only Germany but all of Europe. It is not only a matter of the capture and plundering of territory, but entails as well a thorough ideological conquest linked to the destruction of all cultural and intellectual values. It is the hardest blow that the East has ever dealt to the West. As always, Germany has suffered the most from it. This is not only because large parts of ur-German territory have been cut off from the culture of the West and large numbers of Germans have been violently expelled from their homeland. No, for Asians have been transplanted in these lands, people who never lived here and have no right to it.[66]

[64]One notable Silesian example of resistance to Hitler's regime was the Kreisau Circle. See Volker Ullrich, *Der Kreisauer Kreis* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008). An estimated 17,257 Jews lived in German-controlled Silesia in 1939. See Karol Jonca, "Die Vernichtung der schlesischen Juden 1933–1945," in *"Wach auf, Mein Herz, und Denke": Zur Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Schlesien und Berlin-Brandenburg/ "Przebudź się, serce moje, i pomyśl": Przyczynek do historii stosunków między Śląskiem a Berlinem-Brandenburgią* (Berlin: Gesellschaft für interregionalen Kulturaustausch, Stowarzyszenie Instytut Śląski, 1995), 318. Roughly 100,000 Jews lived in Polish-controlled East Upper Silesia in 1939. See Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 206.

[65]Krystyna Mach-Biasion, the daughter of a prominent Polish activist based in the Silesian city of Katowice, recalls how after the German army occupied the city, once-friendly German neighbors turned into enemies seemingly overnight. See "Mein September 1939," in *"Wach auf, Mein Herz,"* 303–5.

[66]Christian Gündel, "Bedrohung der christlichen Heimat," in *Heimat und Glaube*, 34–37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In addition to its psychic utility, the Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland had political dimensions. Many of the tropes they employed were calibrated to resonate not only among fellow expellees but also within West German society and the Roman Catholic Church. Paeans to homeland exercised tremendous appeal in postwar West Germany, as illustrated by the large numbers who found refuge from the disconcerting features of postwar life in so-called *Heimat* films.[67] The image of "Christian" homelands being overrun by godless eastern hordes reinforced fears, widespread in West Germany during the early phase of the Cold War, that the Soviets might extend their domination over all of Germany. The charge that postwar West Germany was suffering from a rising tide of irreligion, rootlessness, and individualism echoed similar lamentations stirring in various sectors of society. By using such language, leaders within the Silesian Catholic expellee community sought to forge emotional connections with the indigenous population of West Germany and to win their support for expellee priorities, including social assistance of various kinds and, most notably, the right of expellees to return to lost homelands. In the summer of 1945, representatives from the United States, the U.S.S.R., and Great Britain met at Potsdam to work out various aspects of the postwar order, and they agreed that the Oder and Neisse rivers should serve as the new border between occupied Germany and Poland. This border was defined as provisional, however, pending a formal "peace settlement" signed by the legitimate government of Germany (which did not exist in the summer of 1945).[68] This peace settlement did not take place for decades, and in the interim expellees harbored hopes that their homelands might somehow be reunited with Germany or that they might be formally compensated for lost property. To succeed in this regard they would need powerful allies, starting with West Germany.

Silesian Catholic expellee leaders were often quite transparent about the political calculus embedded in their discourse on homeland. They repeatedly reminded their community of the importance of clearly signaling its claim to Silesia. The Silesians would find no support for their cause if they themselves did not enunciate their unbending commitment to the region and their desire to return. "The eastern territories [of Germany] can finally be written off only if and when there is no one left who regards them as their homeland and who remains committed to rebuilding them," warned Rudolf Jokiel. If it came down to a "peaceful contest" between various peoples for control of the region, as he hoped it would, Silesia would remain a part of

[67]See Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 148–68.

[68]See Alfred M. de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans: Background, Execution, Consequences* (London: Routledge, 1977).

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Germany only if there were sufficient Silesian families "bound together through loyalty and a sense of mission" and willing to take up the challenge.[69] The statutes of the Eichendorffgilde put members on notice: "No one will help us keep concern for Silesia alive if we ourselves do not engage with the issue. Silesia must and will survive, but it will only so long as the commitment to Silesia survives in us."[70] The Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland was a prominent means of sustaining the desire to return and of broadcasting that desire to the wider world.

Silesian Catholics sought to convince the rest of West German society that the Silesian cause was their cause as well, and that the expellees' "right to the homeland" (*Heimatrecht*) should be the unwavering policy of West Germany. This idea was advanced in part through veiled threats: if the Silesians and other expellees remained in West Germany, they could prove to be a disruptive force. In making this argument, Silesian Catholics sometimes pointed to grim prognoses of West Germany's future, such as the sociologist Eugen Lemberg's warning that the overpopulated, war-ravaged country was in no position to absorb and care for millions of expellees, and without proper care this population was liable to fall prey to revolutionary ideas or nihilism.[71] In other words, a neglected expellee population could compromise West Germany's efforts to become a stable part of democratic Western Europe. Georg Siegmund observed that those who become "inwardly homeless" often suffer from a "general lack of restraint" that can harm society. "'Homesickness and crime,'" he noted, is "a theme that is discussed time and again in the fields of psychiatry and criminology."[72] Such threats were balanced with more positive appeals to West German sympathy. Rudolf Jokiel traveled throughout West Germany giving slide lectures on Silesia. These lectures were targeted in part to Silesians, in order to strengthen their commitment to the homeland. But they were also intended to "convey the understanding of the united German mission in the East" to the indigenous population of West Germany.[73]

The society of West Germany was not the only audience that Silesian Catholic expellees sought to influence on their behalf: they also appealed to the Roman Catholic Church in Germany and around the world. Silesian Catholic leaders were especially eager to convince Rome to continue recognizing the dioceses that had existed in Germany's eastern provinces before the war, and to deny legitimacy to the new ecclesial units established

[69]Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat*, 10.
[70]*Schlesien als Erbe und Aufgabe*, 7.
[71]Eugen Lemberg, *Die Ausweisung als Schicksal und Aufgabe: Zur Soziologie und Ideologie der Ostvertriebenen* (Gräfelfing: Edmund Gans, 1949).
[72]Siegmund, "Christliche Heimattreue," 18–20.
[73]Rudolf Jokiel, "Ostdeutsche Lichtbildervorträge," in *Schlesien als Erbe und Aufgabe*, 37.

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by Polish prelates in the region. The survival of old diocesan boundaries helped bolster the claims of Silesian Catholic expellees to their lost homeland. Part of their purpose in creating Silesian Catholic organizations and taking part in high-profile public actions like pilgrimages was to demonstrate that the Archdiocese of Breslau was alive and well in exile. Some Silesian Catholic expellees combined these demonstrations of vitality with the warning that their faithfulness as Catholics was dependent upon their connection to the homeland: were they to lose all hope of returning, Silesian Catholic expellees might lose their religion in turn. "A man without a homeland and property is in danger of losing his natural relationship to God," warned Rudolf Jokiel.[74] Many prominent Catholic leaders in West Germany shared this worry. The Tübingen theologian Franz Xavier Arnold cautioned that the fate of the expellees was the "central problem of the present day" in Germany, and if their particular needs were not effectively met, the result could be "a catastrophe for society, the Church, and the Christian world."[75]

Finally, Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland often served to meet the religious needs of the community. In his study of the meaning of the German concept of *Heimat*, Peter Blickle makes the passing claim that for many Germans, *Heimat* came to stand in as a substitute for traditional forms of religious devotion. As the concept took hold, "Heimat moved into the position of religion—or, at least, began to share its berth—in many middle-class families and thus furnished a sense of the divine in the lifeless (and deathless) rooms of their new houses. . . . Where previously the crucifix hung above the kitchen table, now German interiors showed (and still show) comfortable representations of nature that every good person must admire. We know them well: the popular motifs of Alpine landscapes, Black Forest scenes, and cheerfully sunny hometowns nestled into bright green valleys."[76] I do not doubt that Blickle's claim reflects the experience of many German families, including Catholic expellees from Silesia, but one important qualification needs to be made: the prominence of the homeland in the culture of the expellees should not be taken as evidence of the loss of religion altogether. Depending on how one defines the nature and purpose of religion, a strong case can be made that as they celebrated the importance of their homeland, many Silesian Catholic expellees engaged in practices of a profoundly religious nature. In what follows, I offer four theoretical lenses that help to clarify this claim.

[74]Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat*, 16.

[75]Franz Xavier Arnold, "Das Schicksal der Heimatvertriebenen und seine Bedeutung für die katholische Seelsorge," *Christ Unterwegs* 2, no. 6 (June 1948): 1.

[76]Blickle, *Heimat*, 137.

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In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim advanced a theory of religion that has exercised tremendous influence in the field of religious studies since its publication nearly a century ago. His stated purpose was to identify the fundamental nature of religion, and to achieve that goal he proposed to analyze "the most primitive and simple religion which is actually known": the totemism practiced by aboriginal tribes living in remote regions of Australia.[77] What he discovered at the heart of totemism, and by extension of all religion, is the concept of the sacred. Religion, he proposed, is a system of beliefs and practices relative to that which is sacred. What makes Durkheim's theory so memorable is his suggestion that religion entails a kind of false consciousness. In honoring that which is sacred, what a religious group really is doing is celebrating itself, for the sacred stands as an embodiment of the spirit of the group. Religion thus serves as a means of extracting the devotion of individuals to the larger social unit to which they belong. This end is achieved most effectively in rituals, in which the excitement of collective action causes individual identities to merge into larger collective identities.

It is helpful to apply Durkheim's model to the case of Silesian Catholic expellees, because when they reflected on the homeland, very often their primary focus was on the people of the homeland: the expellees and their immediate relations. In their discourse, "Silesia" repeatedly served as a referent to German-speaking residents of the region who were forced to flee after the war. One clear example can be found in an article by the Silesian expellee Irmela Schneege, who in the early 1960s took advantage of looser travel restrictions to venture back to her homeland, and then reported on her travels in the expellee press. Writing of her visit to the alpine resorts of southwestern Silesia, she noted: "The blue of the mountains remains unchanged, and the green of the forests and valleys is no less brilliant than it was before. But it was the people who lived here and were from here that gave this landscape its soul, and sadly this soul is no longer to be found here."[78] As Silesian Catholic expellees insisted upon the importance of homeland, it could be argued that they were doing what Durkheim suggests all religious groups do: talking about the bonds that united them as a group, allowing their individual identities to fold into a larger collective identity. In the mass pilgrimages they undertook to sites linked to the old homeland, they drank deeply of the social effervescence that Durkheim identified as a

[77]Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965), 13.

[78]Irmela Schneege, "Aus der alten Heimat: Eindrücke auf einer Fahrt," *Königsteiner Rufe* 15, no. 2 (February 1963): 54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

critical mechanism for reinforcing group identity. In his description of an early Silesian Catholic pilgrimage to Andechs, Johannes Kaps captured a sense of this blending together into one: "United by the same painful experiences, the same existential needs, and the same heavy burdens to bear, the pilgrims joined together their petitions to St. Hedwig in common prayer, sacrifice, and song."[79]

If the homeland as a *symbol* provided Silesian Catholics a means to affirm a common identity, the homeland as a *past* also can be read as serving a religious purpose. In *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Danièle Hervieu-Léger offers a definition of religion rooted in the cultivation of collective memory. At the heart of religion, she insists,

> there is belief in the continuity of the lineage of believers. It is affirmed and manifested in the essential religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future. The practice of anamnesis, of the recalling to memory of the past, is most often observed as a rite. . . . The regular repetition of a ritually set pattern of word and gesture exists in order to mark the passage of time (as well as the transience of each individual life incorporated in the chain) with the recall of the foundational events that enabled the chain to form and/or affirm its power to persist through whatever vicissitudes have come, and will still come, to threaten it.[80]

Religious authority is rooted in "the recognized ability to expound the true memory of the group."[81] Hervieu-Léger advances this argument in part as a response to traditional versions of the secularization thesis, which emphasize both the discrediting of religious frameworks of meaning through processes of rationalization and the disintegration of religiously sanctioned social networks through the growing emphasis on autonomy and individualism. She argues that an alternative model linking the purpose of religion to the cultivation of collective memory more accurately accounts for the complex patterns of religious change that have recently taken place in Europe. Hervieu-Léger notes that the evolving fortunes of religion in postwar Europe can be traced to complex social and cultural changes that have undermined widely shared models of collective memory. "The growth of secularization and the loss of total memory in societies without a history and without a past coincide completely; the dislocation of the structures of religion's plausibility in the modern world works in parallel with the advance of rationalization

[79]Johannes Kaps, "Andechs," in *Heilige Heimat*, 59.

[80]Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 125.

[81]Ibid., 126.

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and successive stages in the crumbling of collective memory."[82] Religious chains of memory endure, but increasingly they are more subjective and fragmented in nature. Religious belief and practice is sometimes sustained "*à la carte* in accordance with personal needs; and in its more extreme forms, where authorized memory no longer plays a role at all, there is a pick-and-mix attitude toward belief."[83] Elsewhere it blossoms anew within "elective fraternities" where "the relationship to the chain of belief is constructed—one might say, deduced—from the quality of the emotive relationship pertaining between members of a similar group. . . . The spread of voluntary groups offers a form of compensation for the anonymity and isolation resulting from the atomization and high degree of specialization that mark social relations."[84]

Hervieu-Léger's model helps illustrate the profoundly religious nature of the Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland. In reflecting on Silesia, former residents routinely recalled the traditions and symbols that distinguished them as a subculture in West German society. These traditions defined what it meant to be a Silesian Catholic, and they linked the expellees to earlier generations that honored the same conventions. By endlessly calling these markers to mind, Silesian Catholic expellees jointly engaged in the cultivation of collective memory, and in so doing they preserved a sense of sharing a common lineage. In the words of Herbert Hupka, a Silesian expellee who went on to become a journalist and politician in postwar West Germany, "The fact remains that Silesia has not disappeared, but instead lives on in those Silesians who speak up for it in the free part of Germany, in literary landmarks, and not least in indomitable memory."[85] In order to guarantee the survival of the collective memory of Silesian Catholic expellees in the inhospitable conditions of exile, Rudolf Jokiel urged members of the community to contribute their memories to a common catalog of songs, sayings, rituals, and other traditions linked to the homeland. "It is our duty to save what is still possible to save, and to nurture and develop it in a new environment."[86]

In addition to strengthening the ties that bind and the memories that link, their discourse on the homeland rooted Silesian Catholics in a meaningful universe. In *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*, Thomas Tweed echoes Jonathan Z. Smith in arguing that one of the integral functions of religion is to orient its practitioners in space.

[82]Ibid., 127.
[83]Ibid., 139.
[84]Ibid., 150.
[85]Herbert Hupka, "Vorwort," in *Leben in Schlesien: Erinnerungen aus fünf Jahrzehnten*, ed. Heinrich Hupka (Munich: Gräfe und Unzer, 1962), 7–8.
[86]Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat*, 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The myths, symbols, and rituals of a given religious tradition work together to build a symbolic landscape wherein members of the tradition dwell and from which they draw a sense of identity and purpose. "Religious women and men are most truly themselves when they are *in place*."[87] Tweed parts ways with Smith, however, when the latter posits the existence of two "existential possibilities" for religiously mapping the world: "a *locative* vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a *utopian* vision of the world (using the term in its strict sense: the value of being in no place)."[88] According to Smith, the former is typically manifested among communities rooted in a particular region, while the latter often finds expression within diasporic communities that have been deprived of their homelands and thus come to value the transcending of space. Tweed accepts that the utopian vision may accurately capture the experience of later generations of exiles, but it does not reflect the religious lives of first- and second-generation Cuban exiles that he analyzes in his study. Only recently displaced, members of this group have remained fiercely attached to their old homeland, and they have channeled much of their religious energy toward the construction of "cultic substitutes for the old sacred center." Tweed coins the term "diasporic religion" to describe a set of religious symbols and practices that is located in one context (for example, postexilic Miami) but functions to transport practitioners to another (for example, preexilic Cuba). "Diasporic time is fluid, slipping from constructed past to imagined future, and both the past and future inform the experience and symbolization of the present. Diasporic religion, in turn, negotiates diasporic identity as followers remember the homeland's past and imagine its future. Similarly, diasporic space shifts continually between here and there, Miami and Havana, homeland and exile. Diasporic religion is translocative."[89]

Inspired by his fieldwork among Miami's Cuban population, Tweed's concept of diasporic religion applies equally well to many Silesian Catholic expellees living in postwar West Germany. They, too, remained deeply attached to a time and place to which they could no longer return, and their religious lives were animated by symbolic evocations of the homeland that allowed them to retreat from the ignominy of their present exile to an imagined past and a hoped-for future where they were truly at home, to a place that nourished their sense of identity and purpose. The transtemporal and translocative character of the religious life of Silesian Catholic expellees is captured well in a poem by Georg Schmitt-Glatz entitled "The Pilgrimage

[87]Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93.

[88]Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 101.

[89]Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile*, 94.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the Exiles to St. Hedwig's Grave," which conveys something of the spiritual alchemy they sought to achieve during pilgrimages and other forms of communal religious life in exile. In this case, the image of St. Hedwig, the patron saint of Silesia, has the capacity to boost the flagging morale of the expellees and to transport them back to the spiritual solace of their homeland:

> They come with the pilgrim's staff,
> Tired from walking, covered with dust,
> Having lost their homes and possessions,
> And the happiness they once knew.
> Finally they reach their destination,
> And look upon a picture bathed in brilliant light.
> An icy coldness melts away from their hearts,
> A thrill runs through their ranks.
> St. Hedwig lives! She lifts her hands,
> And blesses those who approach her in petition,
> In a time of tumultuous change,
> The storm clouds begin to lift. . . .
> There rises her grave in the holy cathedral,
> As the church becomes a city of light.
> Music resounds among the throng of pilgrims,
> Who today have an hour in the homeland.[90]

Oskar Golombek related a similar incident that took place in the Cologne Cathedral in 1956. An expellee from Upper Silesia was visiting the cathedral's famous Shrine of the Three Kings, which reminded her of the Silesian custom of *Kolenda*, in which priests make home visits to families in the parish, pray together, and write the initials of the kings (C + M + B) on the lintels of the families' houses. That memory triggered an emotional response: "Presently she is kneeling before the relics of the wise men from the East and is—back home. Should we be surprised by the tears that are shed at such moments? Whoever finds the homeland can only respond with tears."[91]

If their discourse on the homeland helped root Silesian Catholics in a meaningful sense of place, it also demarcated alternative spaces that threatened to erode their social cohesion and religious commitments. Illuminating in this regard is the spatial methodology Kim Knott develops in *The Location of Religion*, which promises "a new perspective on the relationship between religion and the physical, social, and cultural arenas in which it is situated, and thus on the nature and presence of that which we in

[90]Qtd. in Schroubek, *Wallfahrt und Heimatverlust*, 313–14.

[91]Oskar Golombek, *Zeugnis für Glaube und Heimat: Die Heimatvertriebenen auf dem 77. Deutschen Katholikentag in Köln* (Cologne: Katholische Arbeitsstelle [Nord] für Heimatvertriebene, 1956), 19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the West call 'religion.'"[92] While drawing from many intellectual resources, Knott is indebted above all to Henri Lefebvre, who in his seminal work *The Production of Space* offers a model for approaching space simultaneously as a physical reality and a mental and social phenomenon. Knott demonstrates the relevance of Lefebvre's thought for the study of religion, including the categorical distinctions he draws between conceived, lived, and perceived space.

Lefebvre's notion of conceived space refers to abstract, theoretical representations of space designed by technocrats of various sorts (architects, engineers, scientists, planners, and so forth), often in the service of a dominant ideology and system of production. Lived space, by contrast, refers to more inchoate and overlapping spaces (physical, mental, and social) generated by lived experience. It is, in Lefebvre's words, "the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of some artists and perhaps those . . . who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects."[93] In contrast to conceived spaces, lived spaces "need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history—in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people."[94] While elaborate regimes of conceived space have defined the physical and mental landscape of Europe to a considerable degree in the twentieth century, lived space is ultimately indomitable and has retained the capacity to contradict the rational systems designed to tame it. Knott discerns within this spatial dynamic consequences and potentialities for religion. In twentieth-century Europe, "space continued to be assigned to religion, but, generally, religion was confined to its allotted (often historical) spaces. In the public sphere in many European countries, the discourse was of religious decline—secularization. . . . Certainly the conceived spatial order, of planners, policy makers, technocrats, architects, and scientists, was secular, if not actually anti-religious."[95] Yet myriad religious symbols and impulses have endured, and in certain instances they have contributed to lived spaces of resistance and disruption.[96]

Such stirrings of resistance and disruption can be discerned in Silesian Catholic discourse on homeland. In the first two decades after the war, the

[92]Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005), 1.
[93]Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 39.
[94]Ibid., 41.
[95]Knott, *The Location of Religion*, 44.
[96]Ibid., 54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expellees found themselves not only living in exile but also enmeshed in a milieu of hyper-modernization. West Germany quickly reclaimed the status of a major industrial power and passed through an era of blistering growth known as the "economic miracle" (*Wirtschaftswunder*). Sustaining this growth demanded ever higher levels of social mobility, urbanization, and rationalization of production, all of which contributed to the erosion of many traditional forms of community and cultural expression, including adherence to established churches. This wider context helps explain the steady, relentless decline of the Silesian Catholic expellee community in terms of active, committed members. Those who remained within the fold felt obliged to shore up the boundaries that defined them and to guard against the encircling danger of indifference. Their celebratory evocations of Silesia were often paired with damning portraits of life in postwar West Germany, which served to put their fellow Silesians on notice concerning the hostile environment that surrounded them. A telling example can be found in an article by Jokiel:

> The present atomization and dismantling of [postwar German] society has its primary origin in the fact that there are so many people who have no experience with organic relationships and structures. . . . This is a consequence of the great falling away, the wholesale secularization of our society and social life. In haughty ignorance the individual has set himself in the place of God and attempts to refashion human society . . . through his own reason and this-worldly orientation and according to his own designs. . . . As the individual abandons supernatural and natural bonds, he evolves from being an organic member to being an organized unit: a unit of society, a unit of the economy, a unit of the state, a unit even in the sphere of religion.[97]

Such rhetoric can be viewed as an attempt to carve out lived spaces that might offer refuge from the perfidious and seemingly all-pervasive conceived spaces of the modern industrial order.

## IV. Conclusion

"The expellees should assimilate!" According to an editorial in *Christ Unterwegs* in 1950, this was the refrain heard time and again by expellees in West Germany. "And it sounds so warm-hearted and selfless, as if a foster father were introducing his adopted child to the family and granting all the rights entitled to family members. If only this phrase were meant that way, one would have cause for joy. But strangely enough it is most often

[97]Jokiel, *Um Glaube und Heimat*, 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

employed to discourage or deny the expellees from making legitimate demands. The expellees believe that something else is intended . . . , and they are usually right. For this phrase . . . means nothing less than that the expellees should abandon their customs and allow their entire spiritual and physical being to be sucked dry."[98] These bitter words capture the mistrust and animosity that often defined the relationship between the expellees and the indigenous population of West Germany in the early years of the postwar era.

Despite accusations to the contrary, most Silesian Catholic expellees labored assiduously to assimilate into West German society—their well-being depended on it. They gained footholds in the West German labor market, found permanent housing, joined local parishes, and gradually laid down new roots. At the same time, many remained deeply attached to their Silesian homeland and forged social networks with other Silesian Catholics. These social networks gave rise to and were sustained by a common discourse regarding what it meant to belong to a homeland in general and Silesia in particular. At the center of this discourse was the insistence that the feeling of rootedness in a homeland is a fundamental component of a healthy existence, and as such it reflects the will of the Creator. This feeling is also integral to a virtuous Christian life: it nourishes the proper moral values, instructs humankind about the nature of God, and foreshadows an ultimate home with God in heaven. To be forcibly removed from one's homeland is thus a devastating experience materially, mentally, and spiritually, and it can lead to dangerous consequences on both an individual and societal level. Among exiles, an intense feeling of homesickness is a natural and even noble response to the pain of being separated from a homeland that is central to one's identity and being. Along with pain also comes wisdom, because exiles understand the importance of homeland more fully than those who have never suffered its loss. Expellees have a responsibility to share this wisdom in a postwar West German society marked increasingly by mobility, individualism, and materialism.

This shared discourse served in part as a balm for the traumas many within the community had suffered during the Soviet and Polish occupation of Silesia, the expulsions, and the exile that followed. It reminded them that the poverty, isolation, and disorientation they had to endure in the postwar era did not define them; they retained a dignity associated with the well-ordered and prosperous community of their Silesian homeland. It allowed them to retreat to an idealized Silesia of memory and to disassociate themselves from the ugliness of the Nazi era and the humiliation of exile. It also reinforced a powerful sense of

[98]"Die Flüchtlinge sollen sich eingliedern!" *Christ Unterwegs* 4, no. 8 (August 1950): 1.

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community within a population whose decimated ranks had been dispersed across West Germany.

The Silesian Catholic discourse on place and displacement was also directed toward a wider audience: the indigenous population of West Germany. Many of the core claims in this discourse—that one's homeland is of inestimable value, that Germans were victimized in the recent war, that the Christian character of Germany was under threat from the forces of Asiatic barbarism—were designed in part to win greater acceptance in West Germany and steadfast support for expellee priorities. In this respect, expellees from Silesia and elsewhere were quite successful, at least for a time. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s they gradually moved from being despised outsiders to increasingly respected and influential members of West German society. The historian Pertti Ahonen illustrates how the major political parties in West Germany showed tremendous deference to expellee concerns, offering them substantial financial assistance as well as rhetorical support for their most ambitious goal of returning to their lost homelands. The parties did so in part because the expellees were regarded as a powerful voting bloc, and in part because many of the principles the expellees had come to stand for were widely shared in West German society. The expellees, Ahonen argues, were a "core component of a broader segment of the electorate: the German nationalists. This crucial voter category—characterized by its members' devotion to the rebuilding of a strong German nation state through reunification, the reacquisition of the lost eastern territories, and other similar causes—encompassed major sections of several subgroups of the population."[99] Ahonen further speculates that expellee emphasis on the eastern origins of their suffering "facilitated anti-Communist mobilization, which, in turn, functioned as a vital social adhesive within West Germany and eased the country's integration into the cold war West."[100] The historian Robert Moeller argues that expellee claims to victimization came to serve as a central component of "one of the most powerful integrative myths" in West Germany in the 1950s. As West Germans sought to recreate a meaningful collective identity in an era when German nationalism had been largely discredited through its association with Nazi crimes, most of them found it in the "economic miracle" of the postwar era and the idea of German suffering in the recent war. In this wise, "the stories of the expellees … became the stories of all West Germans."[101]

[99]Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, 93.
[100]Ibid., 272.
[101]Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5–7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640710001046 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A second audience that Silesian Catholic expellees appealed to was the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican also accommodated the feelings of the expellees and their Catholic sympathizers in West Germany. It did so partly in response to the argument of expellee Catholics that their religious identities were inseparable from their homelands, and partly not to offend West Germany's Catholic population. For nearly thirty years, the parochial and diocesan boundaries that had existed in eastern Germany at the end of the war remained officially in place. The administrative arrangements that Polish prelates had established to minister to Catholics in the region were denied the Vatican's imprimatur.[102]

Starting in the mid–1960s, the political influence of the expellee movement began to wane in rather dramatic fashion. This was partly the result of changes within the expellee community itself: after two decades in West Germany, a dwindling percentage of expellees considered a return to their lost homelands either possible or desirable. It was also the result of attitudinal shifts in West German society—often linked to the coming of age of a new generation that was more inclined to revisit and critique the darker features of the Nazi era—which translated into declining support for key expellee causes, such as rejecting the Oder–Neisse border and maintaining claims to lost eastern provinces. These developments allowed political elites to embrace a new diplomatic approach to Eastern Europe (*Ostpolitik*), including recognizing the existence of East Germany and renouncing all claim to territory east of the Oder and Neisse, which was more in keeping with the growing interest in détente generally shared by the country's Western allies. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chancellor Willi Brandt put this approach into effect, which resulted in treaties with the Soviet Union (1970), Poland (1970), East Germany (1972), and Czechoslovakia (1973). In the wake of these treaties, the Vatican felt free to formally recognize the parishes and dioceses that had developed east of the Oder–Neisse border after 1945. Prior to this political sea change, large numbers of Silesian Catholic expellees had grown accustomed to drawing comfort and meaning from the dream of returning to an idealized Silesia. In this holy homeland, the individual and the collective dovetailed seamlessly, Catholicism and culture sounded in harmony, and disturbing contemporary trends were held at bay. By the early 1970s, that dream was for all intents and purposes dead, and the elaborate subculture it long had nourished entered a new phase of rapid decline.[103]

[102]See Hans-J. Hallier, "Der Heilige Stuhl und die deutsche Frage: Ein Kapitel vatikanischer Ostpolitik 1945–1990," *Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 90 (1995): 235–55.

[103]Ahonen offers one of the most lucid English-language accounts of these developments. See *After the Expulsion*, 243–65.

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