

## GOOD NEIGHBOR INCULTURATION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN WEST POMERANIA

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The praxis of religious communities is regularly centered in worship. Worship services meet spiritual needs, but are not required to inform the worshiper about the historical-geographical localization of its faith community. No worship participant would expect the pastor to offer an answer to the question: "What binds our faith community historically with the region where we live?" Even when meeting with fellow believers from abroad, questions concerning the geographic presence of one's own congregation are usually deemed superfluous.

Until rather recently, for the Polish religious communities in the Oder-Neisse regions it was different. Two generations ago these regions were the staging place of a comprehensive "population exchange". The newly established Polish communities replacing formerly German ones, faced the challenge of localizing themselves in convincing manner. Not least did this serve to offer their members some psychic frames of reference. In political terms, this localization process proceeded by reliance on a strongly national politically accented interpretation of regional historical facts. Usually this meant highlighting the region's legal status as part of the Polish state for some duration during the Middle Ages. That is, to argue primarily for dissociating oneself from the region's German history and from Germany as such. This stance, typical for the early post war years, ended some time ago.

The religious communities within the Oder-Neisse regions now are active participants in good neighbor exchanges, possibly due to the general improvement of German-Polish relations. Relations between religious communities in that region (here in particular those around Stettin) and German speaking religious communities west of the German-Polish border are good, in some cases the relationships are intensive, and in general quite normal. This can be illustrated by the comparatively high, though not unusually close level of cooperation, in the good neighbor cooperation between the archbishoprics of Berlin and Stettin, or by means of the frequent and intensive relationships of Protestant communities in Stettin with the congregations of the Pomeranian Evangelical Church in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (*Vorpommern*). Today those relationships stretch across a broad spectrum of highly diverse activities: jointly organized worship services and pilgrimages, encounters between congregations and choirs, youth gatherings, as well as joint meetings. As a result of such established relationships, the issue of the local historical-geographic self-identification of the communities of Stettin no longer arises. Nor can one account for the determining factors of this self-identification on the basis of such established relationships anymore.

At the time of establishing the initial contact, however, it was different. At that point the question of how a religious community understands its presence in Stettin really mattered - with which institutions does one seek to establish relations? Which events from the pre-Polish history of Stettin provide a reason for either a singular organized event or regular joint events? Which jubilee celebrations, or which legal churchly linkages from earlier pre-Polish centuries should be

remembered together with German faith communities? The way these questions were answered provides an indicator of how the question of geographical self-identification had been seen at that time, and how it might be seen even today. In what follows some standard *topoi* will be described, which were of central importance for the establishment of such contacts. One community, which decided to cooperate with congregations from Wittenberg, once the long time place of service of the Pomeranian Reformer Bugenhagen, views its geographic localization differently, than would such a community - hypothetically speaking - that identified with a Slavic prince of the middle ages.

### **The Role of Geographic Proximity**

Cooperation within the more local geographic neighborhood, such as with Catholic congregations in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania or Berlin, or, on the Protestant side, with the Pomeranian Evangelical Church, scarcely lends itself to providing evidence for our theme. The establishment of neighborly cooperation has less to do with one's own historical-cultural awareness, than it does with logistical and purely practical considerations. Such working together surely can happen only under the rubric of a general cooperation friendly climate, but currently, that cooperation is happening without any particular inner motivations, but solely on the basis of the logic of geographic proximity, and the additional opportunities for activism that it offers. In the case of the Catholics, recent settlement of Poles west of the border, namely in Pasewalk, had the impact of stimulating the Catholic congregations there toward cooperation. Others also of the usually small, but geographically nearby Catholic congregations of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania maintain contacts with congregations in Stettin. Even an official partnership contract was signed between Catholic congregations in Heringsdorf and Miedzzydroje/Misdroy.

The missing suitability factor of mere geographical nearness as indicator for historical-cultural self identification is not even compensated for by a specific legal qualification of this nearness. The Christian churches around Stettin in the pre-Polish time had been part of legally unified territorial entities embracing territories west of the present border. On the Catholic side, Brandenburg and all of Pomerania had been part of the bishopric of Breslau since 1821, while Pomerania became part of the newly created diocese of Berlin after 1930. The pre-1945 history of the Evangelical Church of greater Pomerania reaches back even as far as the Reformation. In both cases the *de facto* heritage takeover by Polish confessional bodies in 1945 provided for all of them, Catholic and Protestant bodies as well, an occasion for an emphatic dissociating oneself from this past. The decades long attempt by the Polish Catholic church to get the Vatican to establish separate, Polish Catholic dioceses disregarding the old, cross Oder-Neisse functions, only bore fruit after the German-Polish Agreement of December 7, 1970.

Similar to the Catholics, dominant among the Polish Protestants after 1945 was the desire to distinguish oneself from the region's pre-war times.<sup>1</sup> When a more positive reference to the *status quo ante* became possible after the political turn of 1990, it now gets formulated in ways that go beyond those of the Catholics. In 1999, the Evangelical-Augsburg congregation of Stettin, represented by the diocese of Breslau, plus congregations in Kóslin and Stolp that were outside the Breslau diocese, concluded a partnership agreement with the Pomeranian Evangelical Church. In doing so the agreement refers to some extent to the pre-1945 situation. Envisioned is a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gaś 2003.

comprehensive partnership, that according to the text of the agreement<sup>2</sup> includes joint worship services, joint activities for children, youth, and students, shared continuing education programs, and the continued development of ecumenical cooperation.

Nevertheless, practical Polish-German church cooperation seemed to be much more dependent upon geographic proximity than upon references to a historical-geographic past. This is substantiated by the intensity with which the cooperative praxis of the Evangelical congregation in Stettin<sup>3</sup> distinguishes itself from the co-signers of the partnership further to the east. Representatives of the Stettin church frequently take part in programs of the German Pomeranian churches, an important and valuable experience, psychologically speaking, for a small parish of only 400 members. Youth activities are organized jointly with the Evangelical congregation in Anklam, West Pomerania. Protestants from Stettin are often invited to church concerts in German congregations - in turn the latter were invited to the Bugenhagen-Memorial celebration in 2008. Even church choirs from farther afield, that tour German Pomeranian churches, often include Stettin in their schedule.

Then there is the case of Buddhism in Stettin, that reveals the degree to which geographic proximity, quite independent of the issue of cultural self-identification, favors contacts.<sup>4</sup> Given the distance separating Polish Buddhism from society in general, it would presumably not be a big problem for them to adapt local pre-Polish Buddhist traditions.<sup>5</sup> In point of fact however, Buddhist beginnings in Stettin in the 1970s as well as its present day cooperation with groups in Berlin, have little to do with attempts at historical renewal, nor with present day cooperation with Buddhist groups in Berlin, but rather with small, decentralized emergences. In Poland it was the Zen Buddhist tradition that arrived through western Europe, or from America (Philip Kapleau) in the early 1970s, which resulted in the founding of Buddhist groups.<sup>6</sup>

Crucial for Stettin were encounters with Danish Buddhists and the Tibet expert Ole Nydahl during the second half of the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Also in subsequent years Nydahl was a guest at the Buddhist center formed in 1979 by the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa as the point of crystalization of Buddhism in Stettin, naming it Kharma Gyurmed Ling [meaning place of unchanging activity of the Buddha]. During the years following the transformation of 1989, Buddhist teachers visited Stettin, including some from Berlin. Local organizational consolidation of Polish Buddhism soon made supportive involvement from outside superfluous. A localization that was free of deep ties to one's own national and ethnic narrative, as well as free from juridical points of reference in the past, enabled them to develop along purely logistical viewpoints. In the end, it was the close proximity to Berlin, that made possible the frequent appearance of Buddhist teachers in Stettin, even thereby teachers from Asia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Partnerschaftsvertrag zwischen der Diözese Wroclaw und der Pomorsko-Wielkopolska der Evangelischen Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses in Polen und der Pommerschen Evangelischen Kirche vom 17. Oktober 1999 (Abl. 1999 S. 180)." accessible at <http://www.kirche-mv.de/911-Partnerschaftsvertrag-zw-Dioezese-Wroclaw-und.13644.0.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Information from the pastor of the Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession) of Stettin, Slavomir Sikora, January 28, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Maslowicz, 2009. At present there are about 500 practising Buddhists in Stettin, according to statistics provided on March 4, 2010 by "Kanzen", leader of the misja buddyjska in Stettin.

<sup>5</sup> This in particular, since tolerance toward Buddhism remains relatively extensive in Stettin, according to Jan Gegalo in Rezpa, 1997:62f.

<sup>6</sup> Rzepa/Molenda/Dobinska 1997; 16.

<sup>7</sup> Maslowicz 2009: 26f; conversation with Jan Gegalo, in Rzepa 1997: 61f.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Conversation with the leader of the "misja buddyjska" in Stettin; see also Jan Gegalo in Rzepa 1997.

## Archbishop Majdański

Although geographical proximity (when presupposing favorable general political preconditions) seems to be a cooperation fostering factor in itself, yet it scarcely lends itself as indicator for the regional self-identification of cooperating actors. What speaks louder are relationships that stretch over a greater distance. Here, the establishment and sustenance of such relationships necessitates more energy, and therefore gives better indicators in order to identify factors of self-identification. The striking ambivalence, through which such "distant relationships" had been established out of Stettin, comes together in the case of the Stettin Catholic Church, through the person of its previous Archbishop Majdański (1916-2007, who was the archbishop of Stettin-Cammin between 1979 and 1992).

His relationship to Germany was tainted, thanks to a six year imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. There Majdański had suffered medical experiments on himself, that had been fatal for many others.<sup>9</sup> In spite of that he later spoke in favor of German-Polish reconciliation, giving a practical example of forgiveness in 1975 during the trial of a medical doctor of Dachau. Generally speaking, according to the evaluations of his colleagues, he avoided any enmity toward the Germans.<sup>10</sup> In the declaration, upon being awarded the Grand Order of Service with Star, by German President von Weizsäcker in 1991, it was stated that "in spite of suffering, humiliation and torment, he consistently remained an advocate of German-Polish reconciliation."<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, Majdański's stance as church leader was strongly national. One sympathetic contemporary saw him as a bishop in whom "Christian concern for the individual and for the people (Volk)"<sup>12</sup> were close to his heart, as someone he viewed having a "charismatic sense of responsibility for his own people."<sup>13</sup> Former Polish senator Mieczysław Ustasiak spoke of him as "greatest protector of Polishness in the Stettin region."<sup>14</sup> This strong link between responsibility for the church and responsibility for the people became concrete in Majdański's actions on family politics. This was also driven, to some extent, in light of the sacrifices of Polish clergy in the Nazi concentration camps.<sup>15</sup> Above all, they were motivated by anxiety about the demographic collapse of the Polish people. Even his activities against abortion Majdański justified with the argument that this threatened "the existence of the people" [Volk]. Thus a position against abortion for him was "in the interests of Polish *raison d'état*" and it "expresses concern for the fatherland".<sup>16</sup>

This biographical background becomes relevant often in the policies of the Stettin-Cammin archbishopric toward the German bishoprics. This becomes clear in relations to the archbishopric of Berlin, with whose leader, Archbishop Meissner, Majdański had a "very hearty" relationship.<sup>17</sup> Already his first appearance as bishop in what was then East Berlin, stood under the memory of

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Stahl, *Przezyl "Holocaust"*. Kazimierz Majdański - Biskup Pojednania, pp 194-196 in Kłys 1995: 194.

<sup>10</sup> Kazimierz Drzazga, *Miałem to szczęście...*, p. 229-240 (231) in Kłys 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Based on reverse translation into Polish in Kosłowski 2007: 257.

<sup>12</sup> So the formulation of Archbishop Gulbinowicz of Breslau in Kłys 1995.: 60

<sup>13</sup> Gulbinowicz in Kłys 1995.: 61.

<sup>14</sup> "Wielki strażnik polskości tej ziemi" was his remark at the conference on "arcybiskup Kazimierz Majdański - obrońca życia i maż stanu," March 4, 2010, Stettin. cf also *Ewangelist Waligórski, Wspomnienie o księdzu arcybiskupie Majdańskim*, pp 223-228 (226) in Kłys 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Czachorowski 2007: 265f, see also the website of "Instytut studiów nad rodziną": [http://www.isnr.uksw.edu.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=4](http://www.isnr.uksw.edu.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=4)

<sup>16</sup> Pastoral letter of May 21, 1989 ("Bóg miłości i życia") in *Prezbiterium* 17 (1989) pp 179-184, as quoted in Offmanski, 2010:7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Cybulski 2010:1.

the transport of Polish priests to Sachsenhausen in 1940.<sup>18</sup> References to National Socialism also dominate his sermon in the East Berlin Maria-Magdalena-Kirche on April 4, 1987. That also applied to his speech the following day at the dedication of a memorial to honor the dead, held at the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen on April 5, 1987. This strong dominance of National Socialism in contacts with Berlin later led back to the theme of catholic universality.<sup>19</sup> German Catholic priests also, who became victims of National Socialism, have been honored for some time, at the annual memorial in Stettin on November 13. On November 12, 1994 an appropriate commemorative tablet was unveiled in Stettin's parish church of St. John the Baptist.<sup>20</sup> A day later, a high mass was con-celebrated by Berlin Cardinal Georg Sterzinsky and Stettin Archbishop Marian Przykucki, at which over 1000 guests took part.

### The Slavic Epoch in Pomerania

Still another area of interest for Majdański, namely the preoccupation with the history of Stettin and Pomerania, illustrates the shift from the self-referential attitude toward a more empathetic one without any change in the thematic basis. Just like the historically interested part of his contemporary political leadership, Majdański linked the Polish presence in Pomerania back to its old Slavic phase, the emergence of Pomeranian rule in the high middle ages.<sup>21</sup> The spiritual linkage between a Polish settlement and this old Slavic past was close to his heart.<sup>22</sup> Also when he interpreted the history of the subsequent centuries, he tended to highlight this Slavic aspect, identifying the history of the post-Reformation Catholic church in Pomerania with the past of the then marginal - Polish speaking church.<sup>23</sup>

The felt mental proximity to the Pomeranian-Old Slavic past, at the same time fosters a link to the missionary to the Pomeranians, Otto von Bamberg (ca 1060-1139).<sup>24</sup> What also fostered this tie was the fact, that on his first mission journey Otto presented himself as sent by the Polish duke.<sup>25</sup> Around 1122 or 1123 Otto had been asked by this duke to attempt a mission to the Pomeranians.<sup>26</sup> On his first trip, his route took him from Bamberg via Bohemia and Silesia to Posen and Gnesen, where he was received by the Polish Duke Boleslav. Boleslav assigned persons to accompany him, and handed the official leadership to one of his trusted officials.<sup>27</sup> So Otto was accompanied by 60 Polish soldiers, which should be understood as a warning (Mahnung) of a possible repetition of

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<sup>18</sup> Short sermon on March 31 1986, Eastern Monday, in the Hedwigskirche; cf. Cybulski 2010:4f, who was relying on *Prezbiterium. Pismo Urzędowe Diecezji Szczecińsko-Kamińskiej* Nr. 4-6, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> This universality was precipitated in the Pastoral Constitution of *Gaudium et Spes*, of Dec. 7, 1965. (In AAS 58 (1966), pp 1025-1115). There is says (GS42), "the Church is not tied to any particular form of human culture, but because of this universality it can form a 'very tight bind' among the various human communities and nations. It is not bound exclusively to any race or nation, it is conscious much more of the universality of its sentness (GS58).

<sup>20</sup> Roman Kostynowicz in [www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art\\_id=9](http://www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art_id=9), also in Klingbiel 2003:73.

<sup>21</sup> Kazimierz Kosłowski, *Biskup szczeciński-kamiński - o historii narodu i dziejach regionu (w latach 1989-1992)*, pp 356-363 (358f) in *Kłys* 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Kozłowski 2010:11.

<sup>23</sup> Kazimierz Kosłowski, *Biskup szczeciński-kamiński - o historii narodu i dziejach regionu (w latach 1989-1992)*, pp 356-363 (357) in *Kłys* 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wejman, *Kim był św Otton?*, [www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art\\_id=6](http://www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art_id=6).

<sup>25</sup> On his second missionary journey, after war had broken out again between Pomerania and Poland, Otto was sponsored by Emperor Lothar and Albrecht the Bear. Cf/ Kümmel 1926:29.

<sup>26</sup> Wehrmann 1924:27.

<sup>27</sup> Wehrmann 1924:30. For a differing view of Otto's role, Matthes (1939: 10ff). According to that version, Otto was merely "the organizer of the Pomeranian church, in which Polish power strongly supported him," because "there is scarcely a town in Pomerania, in which Otto had already encountered previous traces of Christianity." Instead of Otto, Matthes sought to describe Reinbern, born in Hessen, then as Bishop of Kolberg named by Gnesen, as the real apostle to the Pomeranians.

the horrors of war that had invaded Pomerania shortly before, during the war with Poland.<sup>28</sup> To any doubts and resistance Otto responded by pointing to the power of Poland in the missionizing of Stettin. Already in its peace treaty with Poland, which had reduced its Prince Wartislaw to a Polish vassal, the Pomeranians had committed themselves to Christianity.<sup>29</sup> So the Pomeranians heard the Gospel through a Polish initiative and under Polish directives. On the whole this mission work relied on drawing attention to the political power behind the missionary<sup>30</sup> and the entire endeavor therefore took on, to some degree, the character of a political act.<sup>31</sup>

This closeness to Poland may not only have influenced Majdański's interest in Otto, but also Otto's newly rising popularity in Western Pomerania. In the early post war years, Otto's biographical details were not known in Stettin, so that the buildings dedicated to Otto - with the exception of the Ottokirche in Stolp - were seen by the Polish settlers as relics of an enemy cult.<sup>32</sup> This view got expressed in the way the buildings of the Otto foundation in Pyritz were handled, serving for many years for housing purposes, then becoming dilapidated and largely destroyed.<sup>33</sup> Only in 1991 were what remained registered for protection as historic buildings. Already during socialist times the memory of Otto was slowly renewed. Without a pro-Slavic spin on his historical role, this would not have been possible. Already in 1966 during the millennial celebrations of the Christianization of Poland, Otto's missionary journeys were officially remembered by suffragan bishop Jež.<sup>34</sup> Then in 1972, with the creation of the Stettin-Cammin diocese, Otto von Bamberg, together with the Mother of God became the official patrons of the new diocese. This became visible on a larger scale with the grand festivities in 1974 on the occasion of the 850 anniversary of Otto's first mission trip. Fifty Polish bishops attended the celebration as well as Otto's successor in Bamberg, Bishop Josef Schneider.<sup>35</sup> For All Souls day in 1974, upon invitation of Bamberg Archbishop Josef Schneider, Bishop Jerzy Stroba of Stettin and Berlin Bishop Alfred Cardinal Bengsch visited Bamberg.<sup>36</sup> Four years later, in September 1978, a seven person group of pilgrims accompanied the transfer of Otto's relics to the St Jacobs Church in Stettin. Even Pope John Paul II, who visited the diocese of Stettin nine years later, in 1987, on his third visit to Poland as pope, honored Otto.

The coming together of several jubilee years in 1989 (850 years since his death, 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his canonization, and 865<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mission journey to Pomerania) accounted for the grandest Otto celebrations so far. Already in Greifswald there were gatherings of clergy from the archbishopric of Bamberg, the archbishopric of Berlin and the bishopric of Stettin-Cammin.<sup>37</sup> Stettin's suffragan bishop Galecki sent out invitations to the Otto celebrations in Stettin with the formula "Porta patet - Cor magis) (the gate is open - the heart even more so). At the main celebratory mass in Stettin, more relics of St Otto were officially presented. These were then placed in a reliquary specially prepared by Michael Amberg, goldsmith from Wurzburg. Then followed jubilee celebrations in 1994 and 1995. In 1997 on the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the archbishopric of Stettin-Cammin, two priests from the diocese of Bamberg were

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<sup>28</sup> Kümmel 1926:26ff.

<sup>29</sup> Kümmel 1926:13 m.w.N.

<sup>30</sup> Kümmel 1926:25f.

<sup>31</sup> Kümmel 1926:59.

<sup>32</sup> Wejman 2004:68.

<sup>33</sup> Wejman 2004:68.

<sup>34</sup> Kosłowski 2001: 67, fn 24.

<sup>35</sup> Kostynowics in: [www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art\\_id=9](http://www.szczecin.kuria.pl/index.php?art_id=9).

<sup>36</sup> Illmann/Machilek 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

named honorary canons of the St. Jakob's Church in Stettin, conversely one priest from Stettin honorary canon of Bamberg as the first and so far only foreign honorary canon since 1818. A change towards continuity of Otto memorializing has become visible in Cammin since 1999 with the annual "Ottonalien" - days for Christian culture. Since 2002 such events also take place in Treptow on the Rega and in Cerkwica/Zirkwitz, a two day celebration in September in honor of Otto. The archbishopric of Bamberg financed the renovation of the Otto Spring (Ottobrunnen) in Pyritz, provided financial assistance for building a priest seminary in Stettin, and it helped to establish the Catholic radio station "As" in Stettin at the beginning of the 1990s.

Partnership pacts were signed between Catholic parishes in Hóchstadt/Aisch and Swinemünde/Swinoujście. The Otto Spring (Brunnen) in Cerkwica/Zirkwitz was renovated. A whole series of institutions were named after Otto. The diocesan publishing house in Stettin, later closed, was named "Ottonianum" in 1988.<sup>38</sup> There is a Catholic bookstore in Stettin's Adalbert Church named Otto. For a time after 2001 theologians in Stettin published a journal with the title "Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana". Finally we should note the medallion in memory of Otto's mission journey to Pomerania, that the Archbishop of Stettin commissioned on the occasion of the 880<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with a text that underscored Otto's services to the city.<sup>39</sup> With the raising of the diocese of Berlin to an archbishopric in 1994, Otto is now the patron of three archbishoprics - Bamberg, Stettin-Kammin and Berlin (including West Pomerania).

Whereas the Otto memorializing was initially driven by the Slavic (not German) references,<sup>40</sup> as it developed it opened a perspective toward the regularization of cooperative relationships with German bishoprics. Even here, over the course of time, Catholic universality wins out over national narrowing. It is true that what binds is Otto as patron of the archbishoprics of Stettin-Cammin and Berlin, but in the first place Otto's role as fostering cooperation began with Bamberg. As early as 1982, soon after becoming bishop and many years before Majdański's first official visit to Berlin, he had met with the archbishop of Bamberg. Those contacts quickly grew to a comparatively high level. At present there are regular meetings of youth groups from both dioceses. One or two priests from Stettin are regularly in Bamberg for research purposes. Even more intensive contacts to the archdiocese of Bamberg are fostered by the parish churches named "Otto", that are within the Stettin-Cammin archdiocese. Once more a geographical self-identification focusing on distancing oneself from the German past gradually became a force for cooperation.

### **The Protestant Case**

If the Catholic church in Stettin had developed a self-understanding that built on the church's closeness to national political goals, the Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession) had traditionally maintained a certain distance toward such goals. The tendency, generally speaking, since the era of the Reformation, had been to think of the Polish Protestants as Germans.<sup>41</sup> Even in

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<sup>38</sup> They took over the heritage of "Szczecińskie studia kościelne", which had also fostered the popularizing of Otto. (Information from Father Wittlieb).

<sup>39</sup> Wejmann 2004.

<sup>40</sup> The Pope himself underlined the importance of the Slavic element, when in his 1987 sermon in the Stettin Cathedral he set forth the pre-supposition, that Otto would certainly have rejoiced, had he heard "that in the old, 800 year Bishop's cathedral, the same language, or at least a similar language is spoken, as had been spoken at the time of Boleslav when he had proclaimed the Gospel to the inhabitants." Wejman, 2004:72.

<sup>41</sup> Kneifel 1964: 14.

later years the Evangelical Church was usually associated with Germanness.<sup>42</sup> That tendency increased as a result of the Second World War. Polish Protestantism was viewed by large parts of Polish society as “German Faith” and linked to National Socialism.<sup>43</sup> In Stettin in the early years the post-war state fostered an atmosphere toward Protestants of instability and provisionality. Officials felt a need to constantly prove their Polish identity,<sup>44</sup> to underline their closeness to state and people.<sup>45</sup> The relationship to the few Evangelical Germans who had managed to remain in Pomerania, and who were only able to organize themselves into church structures during a short period in the early 1950s,<sup>46</sup> began to improve substantively only after several decades. Initially, Polish and German Protestants, whose institutions had been absorbed into the Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession), lived parallel lives for decades.<sup>47</sup>

Also in the case of the Evangelical Church, the negative shaping force of the linkage to National Socialism retained its influence well past the transformations of 1989. The fact that Protestants in Stettin were finally ready, since the early 1990s, to make Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) their patron, can be understood in this connection. As a theologian with ever growing importance for Protestants globally, he was also a victim of National Socialism. Further, Bonhoeffer was biographically linked with Stettin, having led the Protestant seminary in Stettin-Finkenwalde between 1935 and 1937. Much more than did Otto von Bamberg for the Catholics of the region, for the Protestant churches of Stettin Bonhoeffer took on an identity fostering function.

Apart from that, Bonhoeffer also proved to be a suitable integrating figure for Polish and German Protestants in Stettin. Piotr Gaś, then the congregational pastor in Stettin, had devoted time during his student years to Bonhoeffer’s work. Since the 1970s, through the writings of Anna Morawska,<sup>48</sup> a journalist for the journal *Więź*, Bonhoeffer had become known to a wider Polish public. One symbol as sign for the uniting of both congregations in Stettin was the building in 1994, next to the Evangelical church, with major financial support from the North Elbing Church district, of a fellowship and service center (Gemeinde- und Diakoniezentrum) named in honor of Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer also turned out to function as bridge-builder with German congregations elsewhere. Annually the Stettin congregation hosts a three day Bonhoeffer Conference, that seeks to propagate Bonhoeffer’s ideas. Alongside a presentation of formal papers, there is always an excursion to Finkenwalde/Zdroje. In 2003, the “International Dietrich Bonhoeffer Study and Encounter Center” was opened in the house in which Bonhoeffer had written *Life Together* and *Cost of Discipleship*. Together with the leadership of the congregation in Stettin, a “Society to Support the International Dietrich Bonhoeffer Study and Encounter Center in Szczecin e. V.” (based in Hamburg) plans the conferences conducted in Stettin and also regular conferences in Hamburg related to Bonhoeffer.<sup>49</sup> It is this relationship to Bonhoeffer, that provides the international activities of the Stettin community so wide a radius, embracing German communities above all, but by now

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<sup>42</sup> One exception was the Warsaw congregation, which the public since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had referred to as the “Polish-Evangelical” Church. Kneifel 1964: 161, 173ff.

<sup>43</sup> Zurek 2005: 72, referring to Krebs in Greschat, ed. *Erfahrungen unter zwei Diktaturen*, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Grzywacz 2009: 387.

<sup>45</sup> At the time the church leadership in Stettin was spied on, cf. Gaś 2003: 157.

<sup>46</sup> In view of this situation, the pressure was greater, for the formation of non-Polish congregations such as in Stettin as far inland as central Poland at the beginning of the 1950s. The remnant of members of the Evangelical Church of the old Prussian Union, suddenly found it possible to form autonomous German speaking congregations. This lasted till the major out emigration wave of 1956-57. (Krebs 1999: 54).

<sup>47</sup> Gaś 2003: 156.

<sup>48</sup> In particular: *Chrześcijanin w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Warszawa, 1970.

<sup>49</sup> Records of the Verein zur Förderung des Dietrich-Bonhoeffer Studien- und Begegnungszentrums in Szczecin e. V. There were numerous lectures in 2003, 2004/05 and 2008.

extends well beyond Europe.

### Conclusion

The positioning of the Christian churches of Stettin, whether voluntarily or by force of circumstance, toward an emphatically national stance, did not hinder, decades later, the formation of comparatively intensive Polish-German cooperative relationships. The more formal major points of reference, on the basis of which the religious communities of Stettin localized themselves, have remained the same, formally speaking - the ethnically motivated resort to an earlier Pomeranian era, and as major dominance, the opposition to National Socialism. Within these boundaries, only understandable on the basis of maintaining strict ties to a specific national narrative, there is a selective drawing upon regional history. The *topoi* activated thereby, over the course of decades, have proved to be sufficiently open, to be filled also with content less oriented towards mental boundary setting. The formal maintenance of national political *topoi*, has not prevented a later cooperation praxis, which for the geographic potential of Stettin is much more adequate.

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