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Katholizismus in Deutschland

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The active involvement of Catholics in Church and society, what is known as »Catholicism,« has been one of the important sociopolitical influences on German history since the 19th century. To research this legacy and increase general awareness of its significance for the culture of the present, the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte (Association of Contemporary History) was founded at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria in 1962. Historical research into the most recent past that worked closely with original sources soon enabled the agitated controversies about the Nazi era to be based on a more solid scholarly foundation. By now, of course, the 1960s and 1970s have themselves become the subject of historical Catholicism studies. Since that era, the significantly transformed social, religious, and institutional church circumstances have caused fundamental change not only within the overall sociopolitical context but also within German Catholicism itself.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, this volume gathers articles by renowned historians, theologians, sociologists, and political scientists that illuminate shifts in the relationship between »Catholicism,« »recent history,« and »the present« from a variety of perspectives. What changes have taken place within German Catholicism, the Kommission's special field of enquiry, during the last half century? How has the research institute, as well as the context in which it has operated and the methods it has used, changed? And in what light does the history of the Kommission's founding appear from the perspective of today? What contexts and cultural perceptions – both of self and from outside – shaped the beginnings of modern historical Catholicism studies in 1962? Which ones are doing so today? And finally: Can historical retrospection and contemporary standpoints lead to constructive questions that will help advance the future studies of Catholicism?

The volume begins with a historical retrospective of the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte's founding years. *Mark Ruff* and *Hans Maier* examine the controversies and debates of the day about the Catholic Church in the Third Reich from various perspectives. Many of the conflicts over the recent Nazi past and the role of the Catholic Church that erupted during those years can be traced back to the first postwar decade. The dispute about the past itself became a part of the far-reaching social changes taking place at the time; it encompassed not only German Catholicism in its – as it had appeared to that point – self-contained, socially efficacious form but also the Catholic Church in its own self-understanding. *Antonius Liedhegener* examines active adaptation and transformation processes of Catholicism in democracy and (civil) society, which mostly confound such one-dimensional interpretative models as *Verkirchlichung* (the phenomenon of increasing institutional control of the Church over Catholics' affairs) and »secularization.« *Franz Xaver Kaufmann* recalls the optimistic renewal of the universal Catholic Church that proceeded from the Second Vatican Council; its German *Aggiornamento* at the Würzburg Synod, however, remained limited in the context of the post-modern 1970s.

The book's second section addresses questions and contexts that today shape the discourses in the field of recent history, as well within the Church itself. *Frank Bösch* examines the history of how the media has perceived Church and Catholicism. *Franziska Metzger* focuses on the transformation of religious language and its significance for understanding the changed cultural thinking within Catholicism. Both of these fields of inquiry manifest striking shifts during the 1960s. *Matthias Sellmann* sheds light on the situation of the Catholic Church in Germany today. His insights into the end of Catholicism as a self-contained »milieu« serve as a starting and reference point for organizational-sociological studies of its re-orientation within a pluralistic and secular society.

Future historical enquiry into the transformation of German Catholicism and its new, pluralistic form will require not only multifaceted methodical approaches. It will also need to extend research perspectives beyond the subject of German Catholicism as a sociopolitical entity, which has long been the primary focus. These developments are anticipated in the »Theses on Catholicism Studies« presented by *Ferdinand Kramer, Olaf Blaschke, Thomas Brechenmecher, Harry Oelke, and Thomas Großbölting*, who all raise the question: Will German Catholicism studies need to be broadened into a »religious history as a ›problem based history of the present« in order to remain viable?

In a dialogue that concludes the volume, *Wilhelm Damberg* and *Michael Kießener* explore the opportunities and limits of the spectrum of assignments for the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte that has emerged from these discussions. The present volume therefore provides not only a starting point for the current debates about the activities of Catholics in Church and society; it also points to new approaches for their future study in both European and international contexts.