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Kathleen M. Brown. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xvi + 496 pp.p. DM 98.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-525-55724-2.

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A. Silomon: Synode und SED-Staat

This volume was produced under the auspices of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland as one response to the sensational and wounding allegations of complicity between the churches in the former East Germany and the SED's notorious agency, the Stasi. Coming to terms with the record of the forty years endured by the churches under Communist rule is a mammoth task, for which these churches, apparently, had neither the resources, nor the will, to undertake in a systematic and objectively scholarly fashion. So instead, the EKD's council agreed to publish a "Stichprobe" which would clearly illustrate the complexity of the relationship between church officials and the SED regime, and would indicate the extent to which the former had succumbed to, or resisted, the intrusive machinations of the latter.

For this purpose, the deliberations of the 1987 Synod of the Federation of East German Churches were chosen for close scrutiny and analysis. Two young researchers were given the task of assessing all the available documentation, so as to avoid a one-sided reliance on the Stasi records alone, as had been the case in the much criticized book by Professor G.Besier and Stephan Wolf, "Pfarrer, Christen und Katholiken. Das Ministerium fuer Staatssicherheit und die Kirchen", (1991). The records of this Synod seemed to offer the opportunity to present a microcosm of the whole eventful period by clearly indicating the kind of forces and pressures which were expressed both openly and behind the scenes. The objective was to clarify the extent to which the behaviour of the churches on this particular occasion could lend support to the charges of subservience and collaboration with the regime, or alternatively justify the claim that the churches' activities were an integral part of the resistance movement which, two years later, successfully toppled the regime in what has been called the "Protestant Revolution". The result is now published in the prestigious series of Darstellungen put out by the EKD's Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer kirchliche Zeitgeschichte, which arose out of the earlier desire to provide scholarly studies of the Protestant churches under National Socialism, and is now extending its work beyond 1945.

In 1987 the SED appeared to be fully in command. No one foresaw its future collapse only two years later. Its foreign policy seemed successful, and its control over internal dissidents was highly developed through the vast network of informers deployed by the Stasi. Nevertheless the churches remained objects of suspicion, being allegedly manipulated or at least influenced by West German or other foreign opponents of the G.D.R. state. For their part, the churches were conscious of their increasingly problematic situation with markedly declining support, internal dissension, and differences in the ranks between their expectations and the reality they had to face. All these factors were to be reflected in the speeches and manoeuvring at this meeting in the small town of Goerlitz.

One of the central, but controversial themes of the Synod was the question of "Witnessing for Peace". Earlier the churches had declared their vocal opposition to the concepts of mutual deterrence, the deployment of nuclear weapons and the militarisation of the education system. Such policies would contradict Christian doctrine, would be disastrous for the populations of central Europe as the first victims of any such escalation of military hostilities, and would further frustrate the long-held desire of the churches to seek reconciliation between the peoples of the two Germanies. The SED regime was particularly concerned lest the Synod should be used as a focal point for rallying resistance to its so-called "Peace Policies". A whole team of officials was therefore mobilized to interview Synod delegates in order to persuade them to adopt the "correct" ideas needed for the "defence of Socialism", as the SED Party saw it. The leaders of the churches were also to be left in no doubt about the Party's wishes, with the clear warning that the church meeting should not be "misused" for political purposes, lest the

earlier "fruitful relationship" between the state and the churches be endangered. "Negative forces" were to be kept under close surveillance by the Stasi's informers, including several high-ranking churchmen (here listed in the book's index), who were expected to send in extensive reports, including the proposed texts to be brought forward by the alleged "reformers'. So too the officials of the regime's fellow-travelling Christian Democratic Party were told off to seek to influence Synod delegates along the right lines, and to report back.

The extensive paper trail left by all these carefully-planned measures is here documented in the book's appendices. But there is no evidence at all that any delegate's mind was changed. The whole massive effort was a failure. The actual debates of the Synod, as the regime feared, soon took on a highly explosive character, centring around the "Witness for Peace" theme. Silomon gives a day-to-day, blow-by-blow account with extracts from many of the speeches, so that a comprehensive picture emerges. On the one hand, the frustrations and resentments of the more idealistic delegates were expressed in moral and theological terms. On the other side, prudent caution and expediency characterized the church leaders' responses, even when they sympathized with the intent. Because of the diversity of views expressed, the conclusion can hardly be sustained, either that the Synod delegates were all intimidated by the SED's pressure to be mere accomplices of the regime, or that the Church stood up resolutely for revolutionary change. Rather the debates show a remarkably open climate of high-minded consideration for a church caught up in a repressive system and anxious to present a faithful and thoughtful witness which would be true to the Gospel and responsive to perceived needs of their society. In other words, the delegates refused to be cow-towed into a pietistic self-centred concern with personal salvation, as the regime would have wished. On the other hand, they were also cognisant that the pastoral needs of their followers should not be endangered by flamboyant challenges to the existing political structures.

Silomon's detailed account of the Synod itself is followed by two interesting chapters on the reactions, first within the churches, and then by the regime's officials. The Synod's organisers hoped that ist moderate tone would lend strength to their moral appeals. But the fact that, for the first time, the Synod had publicly discussed issues critical of the government afforded a platform around which new opposition groups were able to mobilize. The dilemma of the church hierarchy in trying to play a reconciling role was therefore only made more acute. For its part, the regime reacted with increased irritation and suspicion against the "provocative" statements of such churchmen as Provost Falcke. The Politburo itself resolved on steps to counteract the Synod's "negative campaign". The hardliners in the Party stuck to their rigid position that no concessions to the churches should be made, regardless of the consequences. The subsequent escalation of measures to quash popular dissatisfaction, both in or outside the churches, only served to discredit the more conciliatory approach of the SED's State Secretary for Church Affairs, Gysi. Not long afterwards, Gysi was summarily dismissed.

Silomon's conclusion is evenly balanced. The Synod delegates gave expression to the popular and widespread concern about the regime's policies, but for moral not political reasons. On the other hand, the church leaders' caution was prompted, not by complicity, but by awareness that the SED could, and did, implement even harsher measures against the churches. Anyone wanting to see this Synod in a broader and more theological perspective would do well to turn to the new book by Gregory Baum, The Church for Others. Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany, Eerdmann Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996.

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