

**Resistance revisited and questioned.
Church and society in Scandinavia and
Europe**

Veranstalter: Royal Academy for Literature, History and Antiquities

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Bericht von: Andrea Varriale, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Around twenty professors and researchers met at the Royal Academy for Literature, History and Antiquities in Stockholm for a two-day conference on the role played by Church, faith and patriotism in anti-Nazi resistance in Germany and in Europe.

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the historiographical difficulty of using religious morality to explain people's and institutions' different responses to Nazism. GERHARD BESIER (Dresden) opened the conference with his talk on Christian morality and resistance to Nazism in Germany. According to the author, most church historiography relied on the (assumed) correlation between Christian values and resistance movements, especially before the discipline turned to more structuralist approaches in the 1980s. Yet, this logical shortcut is not the prerogative of some church historians or of ex-post observers: Both resistance fighters and the Nazi regime viewed Christian morality as an integral part of resistants' mind-sets. Besier thus claimed that interpreting resistance fighters' Christian beliefs as proof of their moral rectitude and equating the anti-Nazi resistance with Christianity and the Nazi regime with its anti-Christian policies are *faux-pas*. As recent historiography has shown, the Nazi regime itself used people's Christian belief as a resource for its persecution of Jews. Furthermore, Hitler himself drew upon elements of the Christian tradition to seduce his followers: His references to „Providence“ blessing the efforts of the German people and the personal cult he created around himself most probably drew upon his Catholic socialisation. The author concluded with a call to lower the scale of analysis, and to focus on people's personal motivations and fears as well as on specific contexts – rather than on cultural aspects or

on confessional differences – to understand people's choices under Nazism.

In her presentation on the variety of ways different Churches stood vis-à-vis governments in post-1989 Germany and post-2013 Ukraine, KATARZYNA STOKŁOSA (Sønderborg) also argued that there is no straightforward relation between Christian values and the choice to resist a regime. As the stream of refugees from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) into neighbouring countries grew stronger, the Polish Catholic Church and the Polish Red Cross actively contributed to provide the shelter needed. On the other hand, the Reformed Church of Hungary (another neighbouring country that faced a considerable inflow of GDR refugees) played a much smaller role, due to its tighter connection with the communist regime. Taking on the recent upheaval in Ukraine, Stokłosa showed that of the country's major Churches, both the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox Church have sided with the demonstrators as the government cracked down on the Maidan protests. On the other hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate proved more sensitive to Russian political pressure, and has condemned the protesters as belonging to „totalitarian sects“. The emphasis was placed on the need to consider the specific contexts in which choices and strategies of compliance/resistance are elaborated and carried out.

ANDERS JARLERT (Lund) followed a similar reasoning in his presentation on the bureaucratic practices adopted by the Church of Sweden after the country imposed marriage restrictions for those who married Germans that followed the so-called Nuremberg Laws. Faced with new bureaucratic procedures that implied a discrimination against Jews with Swedish citizenship, the Swedish clergy and laymen showed varied attitudes of bureaucratic resistance, reluctance, and acceptance.

ANDREA VARRIALE (Weimar) also emphasised the variety of individual experiences in his presentation on the Italian resistance. A variegated and at times improvised coalition of fighters with different political views, the Italian resistance fighters have often been lumped together into an imaginary block of class-conscious, politicised group

with a shared understanding of its historical mission. Whereas professional historiography has sometimes been reluctant to highlight the contradictions within the resistance movement or the conflicts between resistance fighters and civilians, some works of popular culture have been faster in providing more multifaceted representations of the movement.

ROBERT ERICKSEN (Washington) gave the conference a reflexive turn. In his autobiographical talk, Ericksen problematized the normative positions of historians as narrators of resistance movements. His was a very welcome contribution, and one that turned an important stone. Ericksen invited his audience to acknowledge that contemporary research on resistance movements stems from our post-war, clear-cut condemnation of Nazism and of its crimes, and that this condemnation sheds, by default, a favourable light on those who resisted Nazism. He also stressed that patriotism (and the legitimacy it may carry) can be very useful to explain differences in resistance movements in Germany as compared to anti-Nazi resistance in countries which had been occupied by Germany. This case was also made clear in the presentation of SVANTE LUNDGREN (Lund) on the case of 150 Jewish refugees in Nazi-allied Finland. Absorbed in its own patriotic mission to protect its Finnish followers, the national Lutheran Church failed to support this marginal group. Lundgren thus exposed the divides that patriotic resistance may create. The same point was raised by PALLE ROSLYNG-JENSEN (Copenhagen) in his talk on Denmark. In the Danish case, though, a divide opened and widened within the Danish Church itself. The Nazi regime had invaded Denmark in 1940, while at the same time providing the Danish Government and Church with some degree of autonomy. In order to adjust to the conditions imposed by Germany, and thus to preserve Denmark's limited autonomy, the Danish Government and most high-ranking members of the Danish National Church sought to limit the Church's activities, and especially those which were critical of the German invasion. On the other hand, pastors and local churches adhered to the development of popular opinion more closely, and gradually supported re-

sistance practices. Roslyng-Jensen's research echoed Ericksen's remark on the patriotic quality of resistance to Nazism in occupied countries. Yet, a united Church and a religiously homogeneous society do not automatically translate into a united religious front against Nazism, as TOLEIV AUSTAD (Oslo) showed in his presentation on occupied Norway, where the national Lutheran Church had to justify its intent to resist the Nazi occupation on theological grounds. Bishop Berggrav thus put forward a new interpretation of the doctrine of the two realms. He argued that it is the Church's right and duty to resist a State that does not respect „justice“ and „law“. The Norwegian Church's resistance was thus a double enterprise, aimed as it was against both the Nazi occupiers and the Norwegian Government's compliance.

The contributions differed in theoretical depth, scale of analysis and, of course, geographical focus. Some authors addressed epistemological or moral issues more directly and used historical examples to back their claims. Other contributors privileged the inverse approach: Their agreement (or disagreement) with the two dominant theoretical themes of the conferences exuded from the details of the bits of history they presented, rather than from explicit claims. However, the mutual compatibility of the contributions clearly emerged in the discussions. The conference sought to question the role of the Church in responses to Nazism in Germany and Europe. As it happens, this led to a very fragmented answer, or to a variety of answers. A general agreement emerged that the positions taken by national Churches and of religious men (whether clergy or laymen) varied greatly across national, political and personal contexts.

Conference overview:

Introduction

Anders Jarlert (University of Lund)

Gerhard Besier / Katarzyna Stokłosa (University of Southern Denmark): Confession – Emotion – Situation. On Resistance in Churches and Religious associations in 20th century Europe

Robert Ericksen (Pacific Lutheran University):

Resistance or Complicity? Balancing Assessments of German Churches under Nazism

Klas Åmark (University of Stockholm): Swedish anti-Nazism and resistance against Nazi Germany during the Second World War

Anders Jarlert (University of Lund): Bureaucratic resistance, acceptance, or enthusiasm in Sweden and elsewhere

Andrea Varriale (Bauhaus University of Weimar): A folk battleground. Representations of the Italian resistance movement in popular culture

Palle Roslyng-Jensen (University of Copenhagen): The Danish state church and Danish theologians during the German occupation 1940-45: Resistance and state collaborationism

Torleiv Austad (University of Oslo): Church Resistance against the Totalitarian State in Norway 1940-1945

Svante Lundgren (University of Lund): Resistance in Finland During WWII: Between Patriotism and Humanitarianism

Summary

Anders Jarlert (University of Lund)

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