RELATIONS BETWEEN CZECH AND GERMAN CATHOLIC STRATA DURING THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918-1938)

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The relations between Czech and German catholic parts of society in interwar Czechoslovakia belong to those topics in the history of Czech-German relations scholars have tended to neglect so far. Within the overall period, three distinct stages may be discerned. In the years immediately following the setting up of the Czechoslovak state, the Catholic church had to struggle in order to deflect a succession of anti-Catholic attacks. However, powerful national animosities existed between Czech and German Catholics, preventing constructive cooperation. Neither the stabilization of the ecclesiastic and political situation in the second half of the 1920s nor the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the death of the nation’s patron, St. Wenceslas, in 1929 did succeed in reconciling them. The 1930s constituted the most dynamic stage in the evolution of both Catholic communities, marked on one hand by positive intellectual and spiritual developments, and by growing anti-democratic and nationalist tendencies on the other. An experiment with a large-scale reunion of Catholics of every conceivable national descent during the first national Catholic Congress in 1935 did not meet with much success. The 1938 Munich Pact and the occupation of the border regions by the Nazi army brought a definitive end to Czech-German coexistence, not only in the ecclesiastic sphere. Today, believers belonging to both national groups are exemplary in their quest for goodwill and mutual understanding.

CATHOLIC RHETORIC AMONG EXPELLED SUDETEN GERMANS AFTER THE WAR

Tobias Weger

Setting off with the extremist positions adopted by Emmanuel Reichenberger, this contribution examines patterns of argumentation and stereotypes of catholic rhetoric among Sudeten Germans (perceived as an ethnic group defined by common national interests) after 1945. Arguments centered around demands for an equal status in society and for a political reversion as well as the right to return, which was derived from natural law. While some evolved concrete strategies to achieve this, there were also cautious, differentiated statements by individual expelled clergymen. The “Cold War” lent new force to earlier stereotypes (such as Edvard Beneš, Hussitism, the “Peril from the East”) and occidentalism (Emil Franzel). Apart from religious argumentation being exploited for political and publicistic goals, the fate of expulsion generated many popular ways of coming to terms with it. All of this had nothing to do with metaphysical needs, it served to furnish a familiar cultural matrix for Sudeten German political endeavours (the so-called “Heimatpolitik”) after 1945.