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Along with about 415,000 Catholic expellees – most of them from Silesia and the Sudeten German regions, though some came from the Catholic enclave in East Prussia and from Hungary – about 200 Catholic priests, some of them released prisoners of war, settled in Saxony and Brandenburg after 1945.

As former parish priests or vicars, they were looking not only for new homes but also for new pastoral missions in an environment – the confessional Diaspora – and conditions – under a communist occupation government – that were mostly unfamiliar to them. This study examines in what ways these clerics were able to integrate into socialist post-war society and find a new »home« in the Catholic diaspora church of the Soviet Occupation Zone and GDR.

Under the chaotic conditions of the immediate post-war period and faced with an uninterrupted stream of destitute expellees, the newly created resettlement agencies in Saxony and Brandenburg at first gratefully accepted assistance from the charitable organizations of both large Christian churches in Germany, still functioning even after the war. As its power increased, however, the East German »Socialist Unity Party« (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or SED, e. g. the Communists) from 1947–1948 sought to attain supremacy in the area of »resettler policy.« This political change of course became visible when the state's resettler policy veered from mainly providing social welfare services to permanent integration of the expellees. As in other areas, the Christian churches were increasingly pushed from this policy field as well. The state massively suppressed any separate and publicly visible group consciousness on the part of the expellees. The churches in particular, as spaces where cultural and religious needs and identities were preserved and cultivated, came under general suspicion of permitting separate organizations for the expellees. The churches in the Soviet Occupation Zone and GDR therefore faced a two-part challenge. In an environment shaped by an increasingly anti-religious state, they had to receive a huge number of uprooted people, provide them with both social and charitable as well as religious care, and integrate them into the existing pastoral structures. For the Catholic Church, its distinct status as a confessional minority, which had obtained since the Reformation, added to the difficulties. Despite the enormous influx of Catholic expellees, the traditional diaspora conditions did not change fundamentally and thereby aggravated the problem of church integration. The authorities in

the Saxon Diocese of Meissen and the diocesan territory Görlitz-Cottbus in Brandenburg – the »rump« of the Archdiocese of Breslau that remained in Soviet-occupied East Germany – reacted by expanding the existing parish structures, without permitting the formation of independent organizational structures that would exclusively serve the expellees. The unity of the Catholic Church, which had been forced upon it by political conditions, was to be preserved. At the same time, Church leaders wanted to prevent the domination of local folkways and forms of piety by Silesian or Sudeten German Catholics.

The social and financial conditions of the expelled Catholic clergymen that are examined empirically in this study reveal that their integration was initially characterized by professional and economic retrogression, even if this did not necessarily equate to »social downgrading.« From the beginning, the expellee priests possessed considerable pastoral independence that accorded them a certain prestige, all the more so since they were able to retain the titles they had acquired before 1945.

Just as important as the economic incorporation of expellee clerics was their religious-cultural integration. The expellee priests personified those native traditions, customs, and memories that the state had forced back under the roof of the churches. Liturgy, pilgrimage, religious custom and personal piety, which had been brought along from Silesian, East Prussian, or Sudeten German dioceses, found lively new homes in the parishes. In rural parishes, differing religious traditions of expellees from diverse regional backgrounds had to adapt above all to one another, while they collided with those of the native Catholic Diaspora especially in the cities.

The leaders of the Diocese of Meissen dealt with these inner-church tensions by strengthening their own diocesan traditions and by partly curbing those forms of piety among the expellees that they perceived as strange. The church leadership in Görlitz, on the other hand, strove to preserve traditions above all from the Archdiocese of Breslau while limiting influences from the other dioceses from where their expellees came.

In the long term, the religious and cultural integration of expelled Catholics promoted certain developments, in the course of which a diaspora Catholicism marked by strong »alien influences« could emerge, which would play a not inconsiderable role in shaping Catholicism in the GDR.