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Eduard Winter (1896–1982) : a report on the originality and adaptability of the Sudeten-German historian : summary

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SUMMARY

Eduard Winter (1896–1982). A Report on the Originality and Adaptability of the Sudeten-German Historian

This study is a biographical portrait of Eduard Winter (1896-1982), an important ecclesiastical historian and Sudeten-German Catholic intellectual from Bohemia, whose life and work reflect some of the greatest political upheavals in 20th-century Central European history. This study is not a "complete biography", attempting to describe Winter's life in all its varied aspects. Instead it focuses on Winter as a historian of intellectual history and the history of religious thought in the Czech lands, who tried to find a way to be a professional historian during three political regimes covering Catholicism, nationalism, and National Socialism and communism. For this reason the author was only interested in Winter's personal life and work as a priest when it related to Winter's ideas and the development of his career as a professional historian. The focus of the study is on his work in pre-war Prague and during the period of the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. Particular attention is paid to the six-year-period between 1938 and 1945 as the author considers this to be a dark though crucial episode in Winter's intellectual biography. In 1939/1940, Winter took several steps (he left the priesthood, started a family, quarrelled with the Catholic Church and actively collaborated with the National Socialist regime) which significantly influenced his standing in terms of the occupation and post-occupation academic and intellectual environment. Winter's conduct during the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands can also be viewed as an example of the general problem of how scholars adapted to conditions under undemocratic regimes.

In addition to the introduction, this study is arranged into five chronologically linked chapters. The first and second chapters examine Winter's academic activities during the interwar period. The author charts Winter's journey to historical science through the study and teaching of Christian sociology and philosophy at the Faculty of Theology at the German University, and he examines the form that ecclesiastical history had taken under Winter's predecessor, Professor August Naegle (1869-1932), at the Department of Ecclesiastical History. There is also a description of the trends in German historiographical development

in First Republic Czechoslovakia after 1918, how professional historians gradually came together in their efforts to create a united image of "Sudeten-German history", and there is also an investigation into the process of how Sudeten-German historiography was hijacked by historians who were closely linked to the dominant player in the political arena, Henlein's Sudeten-German Party.

These were the main trends in academia when Eduard Winter became a historian. Winter's interest in history was closely linked to his work as a priest and his activities in the German Catholic youth group Staffelstein, which contributed towards the formation of a Sudeten-German collective identity. The author follows the journeys made by Winter and some of the members of the Staffelstein to the German-speaking areas of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. These were made from the second half of the 1920s with the financial support of institutions which were closely connected to the German foreign office and the politics of revisionism following the First World War. One outcome of these journeys was Winter's first ever publication - a historical-sociological, collectively written analysis of the "Carpathian Germans". These journeys also influenced Winter's historiographical thought which became characterized by an initial interest in German inhabitants that quickly became an interest in their non-German neighbours as well. Influenced by the mathematics and philosophy scholar, Bernard Bolzano, Winter gradually began to apply an idea to his historiographical texts which was unusual during this time of obviously revisionist-oriented "eastern research" (*Ostforschung*). While the central importance of German culture in Central Europe continued to be emphasized, Winter pointed out that in societies with a distinctive cultural plurality, there was a two-way cultural transfer. His main work, where this idea became the central point of the historical narrative, was a unique synthesis of Czech ecclesiastical history *Tausend Jahre Geisteskampf im Sudetenraum. Das religiöse Ringen zweier Völker* from 1938.

By this point, Winter was already a recognised representative of German academic historiography in Czechoslovakia. This was largely due to the success of his studies on the Catholic philosophers of the early 19th century, Anton Günther and Bernard Bolzano. In particular the book on Bolzano met with wide acclaim in the press and many Czech intellectuals (Arne Novák, Josef Šusta) welcomed it enthusiastically. In addition, he produced an original hypothesis about the beginnings of the Dutch movement *devotio moderna* in early humanist thought in pre-Hussite Prague. Influenced by the studies of Wilhelm Dilthey and the Viennese cultural historian, Max Dvořák, Winter turned to the methodology of "intellectual history" (*Geistesgeschichte*). The theoretical basis of Winter's unique approach to the history of religious thought in the Czech lands is analyzed on the basis of a forgotten short essay on the function and methodology of ecclesiastical history (an edition of the essay in appendix no. 1).

In the second chapter the author attempted to understand the social environment which Winter came from and was socialized in. There is also an examination of the most important social networks which the historian was linked to and the plurality of social environments he was involved in to a greater or lesser extent. This provides the basis for a description of the intellectual world which Winter inhabited. Winter came from a German Catholic family of a lower civil servant in Česká Lípa. His father had been a loyal supporter of the defunct Austro-Hungarian empire. The family environment was German-Austrian, though it was tolerant and liberal towards other nationalities (the grandfather on the mother's side was Czech). On the other hand, the students and their societies at the German gymnasium in Česká Lípa were pan-Germanic in their sympathies with anti-Christian and anti-Semitic ele-

ments. During his studies he distanced himself from them and was attracted more towards the Catholic Church. With the outbreak of the First World War he avoided being called to the front due to health reasons. After finishing his school studies he therefore decided to pursue a priestly career in the service of the Austrian emperor. He studied theology at the Canisianum Jesuit boarding school in Innsbruck. In the meantime, Austria-Hungary collapsed and Winter became a citizen of the Czechoslovak Republic, where German citizens were considered to be a national minority. This circumstance was to fundamentally influence Winter's further activities in Czechoslovakia, in particular in the organisation of the Staffelstein youth movement. The movement's aim was to spread the Catholic faith amongst the youth and support their Germanness, or rather their Sudeten-Germanness. Winter gradually developed his own ideas about the relationship between Christianity and nationality, which he later described in the journal Volk und Glaub as "Christian nationalism". Among the strands of modern theological thought he sympathised more with liberal-reform Catholicism, which the Roman Catholic Curia had condemned at the start of the 20th century. He also proposed reforms to the Catholic Church which focused more on the national differences of Catholic believers. In practice this would have meant dividing the dioceses in Czechoslovakia along ethnic lines. However, the local church hierarchy rejected these ideas as being the expression of unacceptable national radicalism and chauvinism. The Staffelstein movement also came under criticism from the Catholic hierarchy in the mid-1930s for its collaboration with Henlein's Sudeten-German Party and its youth organisations in building a Sudeten-German "national community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*), which was considered to be a Trojan horse of exalted nationalism and pagan Nazism within the ranks of the Sudeten-German Catholics. However, amongst Czech intellectuals and representatives of the Czechoslovak state, he had the reputation as a nationally conscious Sudeten-German intellectual with whom it was possible to have an open dialogue on Czech-German coexistence.

The third chapter examines the accelerated course of events in the critical years of 1938-1939. Winter's enthusiastic participation in the building of a National Socialist Germany was in contrast to his participation in the First Republic Czech-German dialogue, which has often been perceived as opportunism. The author of this study rejects this one-sided viewpoint and interprets Winter's conduct at the end of the 1930s largely as an expression of Sudeten-German political illusions. Such illusions, culminating in the process of the unification of German nations, was projected by Winter and many other Sudeten-German intellectuals onto Hitler's pan-German policies.

In the fourth chapter there is an analysis of how Winter adapted to the academic environment of the National Socialist regime. The author describes Winter's decision to leave the Faculty of Theology and attempts to understand the reasons for undertaking this major step.

Winter found himself in no-man's land between the Catholic Church, which viewed his nationalist activism with great suspicion, and the representatives of the National Socialist regime in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, who rejected Winter's position as a Catholic priest. Winter was particularly worried about the intervention of the Catholic Church hierarchy in Bohemia against his public activities, and following the example of several reformist Catholics in the past (e.g. the Viennese philosopher Franz Beranto) attempted to transfer over to the Faculty of Arts at the German Charles University. However, the Prague National Socialist student organisations, as well as the dean, were opposed to this because of his Catholicism and so he decided on a more radical solution. With the intercession of some of the highest representatives of the Reich Protector's Office (Kurt von Burgsdorff),

and after agreement with representatives of the Nazi security services in Prague, he gave up teaching at the Faculty of Theology and began lecturing at the Faculty of Arts. In addition to his desire to become involved in the building of a Greater Germany, and alongside his worries about intervention from the Catholic Church, he was also influenced by private matters (a relationship and starting a family). The author does not single out one of these set of circumstances as being the most important because they were all closely connected and it is impossible to separate them from one another. However, the socio-cultural environment in Hitler's Germany created the essential conditions to make Winter's decision realizable. The following passages then examine Winter's transfer strategy to the Faculty of Arts. A major element in this strategy was Winter's active participation in the occupation's policy concerning history and Reich propaganda in the magazine of the Reich Protector, Böhmen und Mähren.

The fifth chapter deals with Winter's success in establishing himself amongst the German regime's historians in the protectorate. The author asks how Winter became part of academia during the occupation and how he strengthened his position. There is special focus on the establishment of an institution which Winter originally intended to be independent, but which eventually became incorporated into the Reinhard Heydrich Reich Foundation for Academic Research in Prague (*Reinhard Heydrich Reichsstiftung für wissenschaftliche Forschung in Prag*), the central institution for Nazi politically motivated research in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The author asks what the academic goals of this institution were in relation to the political aims of the regime. It was called the Institute for East European Spiritual History (*Institut für osteuropäische Geistesgeschichte*) and was set up with the intercession of Sturmbannführer SS Albert Hartl, the head officer in the fight against political churches at the headquarters of Berlin's security services (Reichssicherheitshauptamt - RSHA). The author shows that the Archive of East European Spiritual History (*Archiv für osteuropäische Geistesgeschichte*) was later added to this institution. There is an examination of the historical work which Winter carried out here, such as his study of the church union and principally his large study of Josephinism as an Enlightened reformist Catholic movement in the Czech lands, which was well-received even in later years. The author placed these texts within the context of their time, and there was also a look at the collective projects which were carried out as part of the Reinhard Heydrich Foundation, which Winter also contributed to. These projects were used to justify the existence of the foundation and its high running costs. Winter was mainly involved in work on a publication on pan-Slavism, which though never completed was to have used academic arguments to reject the idea of the unity of all Slavonic nations, which was being used by Soviet and communist propaganda during the war against Nazi pan-Germanism. One subchapter of this study also focuses on Winter's position and influence in the formal and informal structures of the university in Prague. Despite the fact that he never had any central standing at the university in terms of academic power, and that Winter never had any academic function, his loyalty to the main figure associated with the Heydrich Foundation, H. J. Beyer, was sufficiently strong that he could influence the choice of professorial candidates. Therefore, he was not an "academic professor" as Winter tried to claim after the war. Despite being connected to the structures of National Socialist academia, even during the Protectorate Winter never abandoned his radical, though basically pre-war reformist Catholic ideas. In certain situations he also chose to oppose the official National Socialist interpretation of Czech history, where he highlighted periods of Czech-German cooperation instead of celebrating periods of German rule. Under the cover

of supporting National Socialism it is also possible to see the efforts he made to maintain friendly relationships with his Czech colleagues. During the tense period of the German occupation these contacts tended to be more sporadic and can only be dated to the first half of the occupation.

Following a brief look at the last months of the war and his expulsion from the reunited Czechoslovakia to Austria (where Winter was granted citizenship), in the sixth chapter there is an analysis of Winter's shift towards socialism and the background to his successful career in a divided postwar Germany. After 1945, it appears as though this Sudeten-German theologian and historian began to live a completely different second life. Although he did not cut off all his ties with the past and still met many of his Sudeten-German colleagues in the academic world of East Germany, his search for a new place in postwar academia led him to a completely new environment. In Vienna he established contact with left-leaning scholars and representatives of Marxist parties. Winter's attempts to become a professor at the university in Vienna and become involved in academic life in Halle, and from the early 1950s at Humboldt University in Berlin, all occurred under the supervision of the occupying Soviet authorities in Austria and the Soviet occupation zone in Germany. For example, Winter used his position as a chancellor in Halle to act as a mediator in promoting communist academic policy and contributed towards the Sovietization of academia in East Germany. However, his standing within the East German academic system at Humboldt University and at the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin was negatively affected by his recent collaboration with the National Socialist regime. Notwithstanding, from the start of the 1950s he managed to produce an exceptionally large amount of academic work, culminating in a series of publications and thousand-page studies on the history of science, the history of the relations between the Catholic Church and Russia, and on the history of thought in the Habsburg states. In collaboration with historians from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Winter developed the concept of so-called German-Slavonic reciprocity, which used the history of mutual scientific and cultural contacts between German and Russian scholars and scientists from the 18th century to support the idea of a civilized German culture in the East (*West-Ost Gefälle*), which had been spread widely in Germany before 1945. At the time, the concept was interpreted within a political context as an expression of German-Soviet friendship. This was one of the reasons why the East German regime repeatedly awarded Winter's extensive research and publishing activities with the highest state commendations of the GDR. The study follows Winter's work until the mid-1960s when he retired from academic life.

The final chapter looks at the distinguished academic's later life in the GDR. In the last two decades of his life, Winter repeatedly attempted to interpret and explain the discontinuities in his life in several autobiographical texts. This chapter, which originally developed from a critique of these egodocuments, shows that these autobiographical writings were very closely linked to Winter's perception of himself and are an expression of the final phase of his adjustment to his habitat. The author used a great number of the autobiographical texts to analyse how the process of "remembering" operated throughout Winter's life. Specifically, this referred to his memories from 1938-1945 and how the interpretation of this particular period in the past changed over the years.

(translated by G. Dibble)