

Munich, July 12, 1962 (Non-Target Analysis Department - Dorothy Miller) --

The Number of Catholic inhabitants in the GDR being infinitely smaller than the Protestant sector, the regime's chosen tactics against the Catholic Church have given proof of less restraint than even the systematic struggle against the Evangelical Church. While Gomulka's attitude, for example, is more tactical than ideological, East German propaganda includes the contention that the Federal Republic is a clerical-fascist state, and that any faithful Catholic (in the GDR) is therefore an assistant of Bonn's militarism, receiving his "political" instructions directly from the monopolistic Vatican. Any attempts by the clergy to safeguard a minimum of freedom of conscience for their flock have been systematically defeated by the regime's assumption that they represent political aggression inspired by the West.

It was against this general background and with the tightening Berlin situation that Cardinal Döpfner, Bishop of Berlin, was recalled from his diocese by Pope John XXIII in July 1961, to replace the deceased Joseph Cardinal Wendel of Munich-Freising. Cardinal Döpfner had been in charge of the East German Catholics as Chairman of the Eastern Church Conference, despite the fact that, since May 1958, he had been forbidden to enter the territory of the GDR outside of East Berlin. He had become a symbol of forgiveness between East and West, having preached openly for more understanding between the German and the Polish peoples in a much noted sermon (among others) in October of 1960 when he directly addressed the Polish Catholics on the occasion of the name-day of the patron saint of Berlin, St. Hedwig of Silesia.

His recall from Berlin at that particular time created sufficient concern that the Cardinal pleaded with the Pope to let him remain there, and that Pope John XXIII felt it necessary to justify the move in one of his rare personal messages in which he expressed concern for the political situation.

Cardinal Döpfner remained in Berlin until the nomination of the new bishop, which occurred on August 17, the Friday following the building of the wall. The new Berlin Bishop was Dr. Alfred Bengsch, a resident of East Berlin who until then had been suffragan. Forty-year-old Dr. Bengsch is the first born Berliner ever to become Berlin Bishop.

Commenting on the nomination of his successor, Cardinal Döpfner stated that during the present hard times, especially after August 13, the Catholics of East Berlin and of the East German part of the diocese "required the closeness of their bishop for strength and support". He added: "Imperative considerations for spiritual welfare demanded that a bishop be appointed who lives in the Eastern part of the diocese." These words which

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leave nothing to be desired in clarity proved to be correct during the bishops' conference in Fulda in September 1961 which had to take place in the absence of the three East German Church leaders: Bishop Otto Spülbeck of Meissen, the new Berlin Bishop Bengsch and the Bishop Ferdinand Piontek of Görlitz. The regime had not given them permission to travel beyond the GDR borders.

At the Fulda conference, Cardinal Döpfner also gave a description of the Berlin situation: on August 15, he had been allowed to visit East Berlin for the last time. The next day, he was refused permission, and on August 17, the new bishop was nominated who in turn has not had permission to see his West Berlin flock since his consecration ceremony in West Berlin on September 21.

(For the sake of comparison, the titular head of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg, Kurt Scharf, has been refused admission to East Berlin and the Eastern part of his diocese since 31 August 1961, after having been granted official admission to travel to West Berlin.)

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