

The relationship between Catholicism and the Christian  
Democratic Union in the Federal Republic of Germany:  
The case of CDU housing policy during the 1950s

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Explaining the features and historical developments of social policy in the Federal Republic of Germany, focusing on Catholicism during the 1950s, is indispensable due to the influence of Catholicism on various aspects of politics and society at that time. That influence is also evident in the housing policy implemented at the time. Within the framework of social housing, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) gave priority in the second Housing Act of 1956 to the construction of privately owned single family dwellings, each with an adjacent garden and barn.

To explain the conceptual foundations of this policy, the author focuses on politician Paul Lücke, the CDU's chief housing policy-maker, and the Catholic intellectuals around him. First, Lücke and his colleagues designed the housing policy based on the idea of enabling the private ownership of land and houses among a broad strata of the population, based on the Catholic social teaching that private ownership is regarded as the basis of an autonomous personality. Through this policy, they aimed at resisting the collectivism of East Germany that created, in their words, the "impersonal masses". Secondly, Lücke's group conceptualized the houses they envisioned as "Familienheim", there by incorporating Catholic views of family into their housing policy; to wit, private property enables the patriarch to rule his family and protect them against the threat of intervention by the state. Finally, Lücke's group emphasized the value of self-help in the process of housing construction. That is to say, they regarded the construction of one's own home as practicing the kind of self-help promoted in Catholic social teaching. Considering these policy features, the author concludes that the CDU's housing policy was based on principles derived from Catholic social doctrine.

Relative to other housing reform concepts, the CDU opposed reformers who sought to create new social ties in urban areas through the promotion of new types of collective dwelling plans; and garnering support from reformers critical of metropolises, it promoted housing rooted in the soil. From the above urban reform perspective, the CDU's housing policy could be assessed as conservative; however, given the characteristics of those Catholic social teachings that reject socialist or collectivist avenues to social reform and attempt to find a path guided by the Catholic concept of personality, the CDU's housing policy should rather be viewed as pursuing social reform through Catholic perspectives.