Karl-Joseph Hummel,
Michael Kißener (ed.)

Catholics and Third Reich

Controversies and Debates

Ferdinand Schöningh

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Translated by
Christof Morrisey

Ferdinand Schöningh

Cover illustration:
The photograph on the cover is highly suggestive. It shows Abbot Albanus Schachleiter greeting SA-Men. Karl-Joseph Hummel analyses this picture in this volume (p. 244-247). However, it does not indicate a clear relationship between the Roman Catholic church and the Nazi state in Germany.

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Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c.

Konrad Repgen

on his 85th birthday

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Preface

Kirche, Katholiken und Nationalsozialismus (The Church, Catholics, and National Socialism) – that was the title of a volume edited by Klaus Gotto and Konrad Repgen, first released in 1980, by the Mainz publisher Matthias Grünewald. There followed a second, revised edition in 1983 with the title *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich* (Catholics and the Third Reich) and, in 1990, an expanded and revised third edition. The aim of that paperback volume, and at the same time the reason for its success, was "to present essential questions about the relationship of the Church, Catholics, and National Socialism in an easy-to-read yet still academically sound form for a broad reading public".

The present, newly conceived work seeks to serve exactly this purpose. The editors have therefore decided, with kind permission of Klaus Gotto and Konrad Repgen, to take up the old title once more and continue the tradition established in 1980.

The task of presenting the historical scholarship on the topic "Catholic Church and Third Reich" in a form that is broadly accessible but still does justice to the high standard of current research has not become any easier since the previous edition was released – to the contrary! The Third Reich now belongs to the best-researched chapters of contemporary church history, not least thanks to the vigorous intellectual debates of the last decades and the opening of many important archives. The field of research has been broadened to include numerous new topics; many new sources have been uncovered, and fierce controversies about these have been carried out; new methodological approaches have been incorporated, and, for some time now, the subject has no longer been the domain solely of historians. In fact, theology, psychology, and various social sciences have also made important contributions to the field, which should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Despite the considerably greater complexity that has resulted, the contributors to this volume are committed to making the topic as readily accessible as possible to a wide range of readers, especially students. They do this by, first, giving summary overviews of the topic and the relevant scholarship and then going directly into the specific debates. The reader can thereby analyze and assess the various arguments and find his own place in the debate. The volume should therefore be seen not as a kind of overarching presentation of the topic but rather as a "snapshot" of the current state of the debate in the year 2009.

In this way, it should become possible to gain a grasp of the background and contexts of this controversial topic and make a qualified judgment of one's one own as expeditiously as possible. It is hoped that in this way, new interest in research will arise that will, in turn, contribute to evermore precise and appropriate historical verdicts on "Catholics and the Third Reich".

The editors thank all authors for their helpful contributions to the discussion on the volume's conception, for their readiness to render mutual support, and for observing their commitment – all individual obstacles notwithstanding – to submit contributions to this discussion book that are up to the newest standard of a widely ramified scholarship, on deadline, to the prescribed length, and in readable language. Our thanks also extend to the ready hospitality we enjoyed at the various locations where our editorial meetings were held. The staff at the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte in Bonn and at the Historisches Seminar at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, including Julia Brinker, Dr. Andreas Burtscheidt, Petra Cartus M.A., Daniela Hernig and Andreas Linsenmann, dedicated themselves to correcting any remaining errors, performing bibliographical tasks, and compiling the index. Without the down-to-earth determined precision, technical skill, and utter imperturbability of Dr. Erik Gieseking, producing a printable manuscript in-house would have turned into a daring venture indeed.

Catholics and the Third Reich in 2009 is dedicated to the Nestor of contemporary church history, Professor Dr. Konrad Repgen, with the highest respect for impressive scholarly achievement.

Bonn and Mainz, July 2009

Karl-Joseph Hummel/Michael Kißener

Preface to English edition

When our book on "Catholics and the Third Reich" was first published in 2009 our aim was to present the controversies and debates on this topic since the 1950s. Meanwhile it has become itself part of these controversies and debates. We are now glad to be able to present the book to English speaking readers as well. Apart from a few corrections there are no revisions of the text. The literature published in the meantime is only included where it seemed to be absolutely necessary. As the original texts are translated from German into English some quotations may slightly differ from the English versions of the books quoted therein.

We wish to thank Dr Hans J. Jacobs of Brill Deutschland GmbH for his inspiring cooperation and the Association of German Dioceses (VDD) for their financial support.

Bonn and Mainz, August 2017

Karl-Joseph Hummel/Michael Kißener

I.

Overview

Michael Kißener

Catholics in the Third Reich: A Historical Introduction

The topic "Catholic Church and Third Reich"[1] remains one of the most controversial sub-fields of the by no means controversy-poor history of National Socialism.[2] There are many reasons for that.

Not a few would like to view the Church of yesterday as a "moral authority" with an all-embracing global responsibility, which could have at least minimized the catastrophe of the Third Reich, if not prevented it, through the weight of its preaching. Consequently, those reactions by *the* Church that were inadequate or completely failed have become the focus of increasingly critical attention. Strong public interest in the topic has not only inspired research by various academic disciplines, it has also motivated countless authors and journalists to conduct their own investigations and express their views. Yet the rapidly growing breadth of research findings and scholarly insights has often gone unperceived across the barriers of academic disciplines and ignored in the public presentation of the topic. These facts, too, have given rise to new debates and conflicts. On occasion, the debate has been stimulated by timely new questions. An example has been the problem of restitution for former forced laborers, which opened a completely new field of inquiry and gave impetus to further critical queries.

In all of these debates, two very distinct basic approaches can be determined. First, the conduct of Catholics in the Third Reich is considered and analyzed in its moral aspects; the high moral standards of a church proclaiming the Gospels are applied to its own actions, so to speak. That is, of course, legitimate. Anyone proceeding in this fashion will soon discover, on closer examination, many shortcomings, instances of failure,

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1 For definitive and summarizing accounts, see: K. Gotto and K. Repgen, eds., *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich*; H. Hürten, *Deusche Katholiken*; A. Leugers, "Die Deutschen Bischöfe"; K. Repgen, "Die deutschen Bischöfe und der Zweite Weltkrieg"; W. Ziegler, "Die deutschen katholischen Bischöfe unter der NS-Herrschaft", C. Kösters and Mark Edward Ruff, eds., *Die katholische Kirche im Dritten Reich*, M. Gailns and A. Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene 'Volksgemeinschaft'*, O. Blaschke, *Die Kirche und der Nationalssozialismus*.

2 Cf. M. Kißener, *Das Dritte Reich*.

even "guilt". That much was already known by those who held responsibility within the Church before and after 1945: Archbishop Gröber of Freiburg, for example, a man who initially demonstrated receptiveness toward National Socialism, spoke in his May 1945 pastoral letter of "our disgrace" and that "we, too, are guilty in some respects, at least before God".[3] For some, however, this is only the starting point of the debate: whether or not such statements adequately sum up the Church's conduct in the Third Reich, whether such "confessions of guilt" can be pronounced on behalf of the Church as a whole or not, has become the subject of a wide range of published works. After 1945, the German bishops stated their position on this in a whole series of relevant declarations made on various occasions and, in increasingly clear formulations, emphasized the largely inadequate actions of the Church as a whole.[4] Pope John Paul II's "prayers for forgiveness" in 2000 represented a momentary high point of that development. These admissions of guilt, prepared by an international commission of theologians, are seen by some as a hitherto unique confession not only of individual sins but also of institutional failures of the entire Church; others consider them a step backward in the debate.[5]

Alongside this moralistic view of the history of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich there exists another historical approach, for which the concept of "guilt" does not represent an appropriate category of analysis. The historian using this second approach wants to "understand" how and why people acted as they did; he analyzes causal factors and sets up theories about developmental processes. Above all, however, he must make an effort to understand the time he is researching on its own terms, rather than "condemn", in the manner of a judge, based on conceptions that were developed only later or on a present-day level of awareness. The present volume has chosen the latter approach.

Presuppositions

In order to work to a scholarly standard, the historian must first achieve clarity about the terms to be utilized. It is necessary, then, to clarify

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3 L. Volk, ed., *Akten VI*, Nr. 976: 480, 483.

4 The bishops' declarations can be found at http://www.dbk.de (searching the item "Schuldbekenntnis").

5 Cf. M. Sievernich, "Kultur der Vergebung", 444–459, and G. Denzler, *Widerstand*, 227.

what is meant in the following texts by the terms "Catholic Church" and "Third Reich".

In 1933, the "Catholic Church" in Germany consisted of somewhat more than a third of all Germans, approximately 21 million; a minority in the Reich, two-thirds of whose population were Protestant Christians. At the same time, the German Catholic Church was a national church that exercised considerable influence on the way of life of its faithful. This influence, however, ended at the grey zone – almost impossible to define exactly – between church and religious interests in society and politics in a narrower sense, in which the Church, in accordance with its own self-image of the time, did not want to intervene. By no means did the Catholic conception of church and of individual freedom at the time (and today as well) permit it to require its believers to choose martyrdom in extreme situations, under threat of exclusion from eternal salvation, as certain sects and small religious communities have done on occasion. In that respect, the Catholic Church's situation cannot be readily compared, for example, with the conduct of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Third Reich.

Such a requirement would in practice have been inconceivable anyway, since this national church was anything but a monolithic bloc, weak-willed and acquiescent toward its spiritual head, the Roman pope.

The Catholic milieu was eroding, in the cities arguably more than in the countryside. The Church's people were in motion: traditionalists, for example, confronted believers who sought new ways of preaching the faith and renewing time-honored liturgical forms, yet at the same time saw their place not outside but within the Church. Many notions and ideas that later, in the 1960s, would occupy the reform debates of the Second Vatican Council were already being discussed at this time within German Catholicism. Politically, too, many different currents converged in this national church: the existence of the Center Party should not lead one to assume, mistakenly, that the German Catholicism it represented was politically uniform. There were expressly nationalist Catholics, who wanted to bury once and for all the reputation for national unreliability, which dated to the Wilhelmine Empire, as well as Catholics who aimed to overcome nationalism through international understanding and pacifism. There were adherents of monarchism, as well as Catholics who found their place within Weimar democracy; Catholic organized labor is one such example.

The views and positions of the clergy and the German bishops were similarly multifarious as those of church laypeople. The German bishops'

coalescing in the Fulda Bishops' Conference was an expression of the imperative for mutual action. Yet this was a pretty new institution, functioning as a whole only since 1933, organizationally still insufficient, its resolutions not yet binding for the individual bishops. For this reason alone, the reactions to National Socialism within the Church hierarchy were not uniform. Older priests and bishops – such as Cardinal Bertram of Breslau, already 74 years old in 1933 – had themselves experienced the Church's lack of rights during the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s. They were convinced that the Church could only fulfill its essential pastoral mission if a harmonious cooperation between divinely ordained state authority and church institutions was secured. Their interpretation of ministry was, in contrast to today, often still patriarchal and authoritarian; they demanded obedience from the faithful and viewed with skepticism any change in the role of laypeople. Other, mostly younger men, such as Bishop Preysing of Berlin or the clergy who convened in a "committee for monastic affairs", already believed the Church had a more extensive universal responsibility as a steward of human rights. They interpreted the words "We must obey God rather than men" in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5:29) as a binding mission, and consequently tended toward a more active political stance. Of course the boundaries between these different currents could not always be exactly defined; the experience of the Nazi challenge resulted in processes of learning and of transformation that have to be taken into consideration.

Church members, clergy, and bishops were connected to the Roman papacy in a relationship of direct dependence but one that nonetheless permitted a certain room for maneuver. Both of the reigning popes during the time frame covered here, Pius XI and Pius XII, knew Germany well; as envoys in different functions during the Weimar years, they had both dealt with questions that concerned Germany. It was during this period that tensions in the relationship with Cardinal Bertram, the chairman of the Fulda Bishops' Conference, had their roots. These tensions did little to encourage a united stand on the part of the Church. And of course the popes' view could not be limited exclusively to Germany, however important the political events occurring there appeared to be. Bearing responsibility for the universal Church, their evaluation of the situation in Germany was shaped by various experiences. In the case of Italian Fascism, for example, the Lateran Treaties of 1929 enabled tolerable relations between state and Church. In the Stalinist Soviet Union, by contrast, Catholics had been violently persecuted for years, their church organizations smashed. Whether and how the

popes could act in a (church) political sense was dependent on variegated considerations and calculations: the cynical question, attributed to the Soviet dictator Stalin, about how many divisions the pope had, makes clear enough the limitations incumbent on the pope's – in any case only moral – "power".

Upon closer examination, the notion of the "Third Reich" proves to be similarly complex and multifaceted as the term "Catholics". The essence at the core of this state, into which Catholics suddenly found themselves "transplanted", has still not been fully explained. This much, at least, seems certain: it was a modern totalitarian state with a defining orientation on the person of Adolf Hitler, in which, at the same time, a plethora of polycratic elements claiming authority were inherent. Its essential functions were the physical destruction of the Jews and the ideological war of annihilation over "living space" with the main political enemy, Soviet Bolshevism. Inwardly, this state aimed at a complete *Gleichschaltung* (alignment) of society, while eliminating all competing institutions. Although the Catholic Adolf Hitler constantly invoked the name of God and felt himself appointed by a higher power, his regime was at bottom atheistic. It aimed to destroy Christianity, whose institutions and forms of community Hitler's paladins in fact frequently attempted to copy. In the SS, for example, Heinrich Himmler sought to establish a monastic-style community, while some saw in National Socialism nothing less than a new religious creed. Hitler's criminal policies did not shrink from lies and betrayal and unscrupulously ignored national as well as international law. These characteristics of the Nazi state, which have been established during 70 years of scholarship, were not even remotely recognizable to most Catholics, the clergy, the bishops, or the pope in 1933. That a German Reich Chancellor would lie, break contractual agreements, and be able to decree crimes against humanity of unimagined dimensions was not even conceivable to the great majority of Catholics. Furthermore, in the *Parteigaue* (Nazi Party districts), Hitler's "viceroys" created a heterogeneous reality of everyday life that made it even more difficult to assess the overall situation. The "Third Reich" did not conform to the normal model of a Central European state with which the Church had, for centuries, been able to enter into a somehow bearable coexistence. It was not a state in the conventional sense at all but rather a party dictatorship that overran the traditional state, a "prerogative state" that appropriated government agencies for its own "ideological" goals. The war, with its immense dynamism and its awakening of an unreflective, virtually self-evident patriotism, complicated matters still more.

When all of these factors are taken into consideration together, the complexity of the topic becomes clear, making swift judgments impossible and ruling out simple answers.

The Catholic Church and the Nazi "Seizure of Power"

Even the beginning of the tense relationship between National Socialism and the Catholic Church in Germany is difficult to assess. Long before 30 January 1933, many German bishops had warned about Nazism, if not in concert, then at least in pastoral statements and clergy letters of their own. They considered it as hostile to Christianity as Bolshevism or Socialism, which Catholics were also not permitted to support. The most unequivocal definition of the Catholic Church's position on National Socialism was given on 30 September 1930 by the General Vicar of the Diocese of Mainz, Philipp Jakob Mayer, when queried by the Nazi Party of Hesse: "Can a Catholic be a registered member of the Hitler Party? Can a Catholic priest permit members of this party to actively participate in church funerals or other events? Can a Catholic who professes the principles of this party be admitted to the Holy Sacraments? We have to answer in the negative".[6] Until the end of the Weimar Republic, members of the Catholic Church voted overwhelmingly for democratic parties, especially the Catholic Center Party, and denied the Nazis their support, as newer research on voting behavior has shown.[7] Catholic publicists emphatically attacked the Hitler movement. Examples include the Eichstätt Capuchin priest Ingbert Naab, who in 1932 asked Hitler in an open letter: "Who elected you anyway?" and then answered: "The sub-humans of murder and those who threaten their fellow men". The Munich publicist Fritz Michael Gerlich described Nazism simply as a "plague" in his newspaper *Der Gerade Weg*.[8]

By the election of 5 March 1933, at the latest, the situation had changed fundamentally in the view of the Church's leaders. The vote delivered a parliamentary majority to Hitler, together with his national-conservative coalition partners, whose exaggerated nationalism had been rejected just as forcefully by the Church. The leader of a previously rejected political movement had – in an apparently legal fashion – become Reich Chan-

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6 H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 2: 4.
7 Cf. the enclosed map of voting results.
8 Cf. H. Witetschek, *Pater Ingbert Naab*; R. Morsey, ed., "Fritz Gerlich".

cellor, to whom, in the Christian view, obedience was in principle owed. At first, the Chairman of the Fulda Bishops' Conference demonstrated a reserved attitude and stressed that it was not the Church that needed to reconsider its position but Hitler who now had to approach the Church. This view was shared by many priests, such as Stephan Rugel in Lutzingen, who at the same time, however, discovered that Church members were by no means prepared to follow the beckoning of Church leaders as uniformly as before and that Nazism had already made first inroads into the ranks of Catholicism. In his Sunday homily of 12 March 1933 titled "Hail Christ, not Heil Hitler!" Rugel reproached his congregation because approximately 250 parish members had voted for the Nazi Party, even though the bishops had unambiguously "prohibited" it. "When a much more terrible world war breaks out in the foreseeable future", Rugel continued, "then I implore you even today: Forget about whining, you voted for it yourself!"[9]

What Bertram had anticipated occurred on 23 March 1933, in the context of the Reichstag consultations on the Enabling Act. In a government decree, Hitler offered the Catholic Church a number of guarantees concerning the unimpeded exercise of its operations and thereby appeared to be moving toward the Church: "The national government considers the two Christian churches very important factors in the preservation of our nationhood. It will respect agreements between them and the states; their rights will not be infringed",[10] Hitler said in his speech. Bertram now believed the moment had arrived when some previous reservations about National Socialism could be shed and to see to it that the Church, as in the Wilhelmine Empire and Weimar democracy, entered into a thriving relationship with the new state. His proclamation of 28 March 1933, which had been coordinated in advance with only some of the German bishops, described a series of "general prohibitions and warnings" concerning Nazism as "no longer necessary", yet continued to uphold a series of other "admonitions".[11] To forestall the monopolization of the Church by Nazi organizations, instructions for the clergy issued the following day regulated the participation and appearance of Nazi associations in church services.

Even contemporaries heavily criticized this seemingly all too swift "accommodation" with the new rulers. All those whom the cardinal's

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9 F. X. Winter, "Predigt", 243–251.

10 H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 19: 34.

11 H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 22: 40.

proclamation had not praised even in passing, such as the Catholic Workers' Associations (Katholische Arbeitervereine; KAB) or the countless other organizations that had been involved in the political struggle, felt snubbed.[12] Others, however, such as state officials subjected to increasing political pressure by the regime, gratefully accepted the easing of strains that the proclamation offered. It is therefore not surprising that even among historians this transitional phase, in particular, has engendered fierce controversies.

Was this the decisive "cardinal sin"? Or does it prove to be impossible, upon objectively considering the circumstances, to identify any realistic alternative courses the bishops could have taken? Matthias Stickler's contribution to this volume considers that question, while also addressing the concordat with the Holy See, which followed a few months later, a further attempt to settle the relationship between church and state in Germany through a legally binding agreement and secure the profession of the faith. For centuries, of course, the popes had chosen this course, seeking guarantees that the Catholic Church could operate as freely as possible in the states of the world, the Church having no other means than the law to safeguard its existence. Now Hitler offered negotiations for a concordat at the Reich level, something that had not been achieved in the Weimar Republic. But there would be a price to pay for this legal guarantee that, to some, seemed too high even at the time: the de-politicization of Church activities in Germany. To be sure, it has been demonstrated that the Reich Concordat did not bring about the end of the Center Party. But the strict constraints on Church activities soon manifested themselves as problematic, while the German dictator was able, at the very beginning of his rule, to project an image internally of being reconciled with the highest Church authority. Conversely, there is no question that the concordat signed on 20 July 1933 secured the freedom of the Catholic confession of faith, as well as the continuing existence of religious orders and Church facilities, for years. It also enabled the Church to present Nazi Germany's conduct to the international community as a permanent violation of the law. Compared with Austria, where there was no concordat, this would be prove to an advantage not be underestimated. Yet was it worth the price that was paid?[13]

While all these negotiations were in progress, with some accommodation on the part of Hitler, and the new relationship between Catholic

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12 J. Aretz, *Katholische Arbeiterbewegung*.

13 T. Brechenmacher, ed., *Das Reichskonkordat*.

Church and state in Nazi Germany was being weighed and assessed, actions undertaken against the Church – some overt, others covert – demonstrated the new rulers' readiness for violent solutions. Some Catholic civil servants, for example, were forced from office on the basis of far-fetched charges; the example of Cologne's governing mayor Konrad Adenauer is a case in point. Soon, the first priests were committed to the concentration camps and mistreated there. Were these actions "excesses" and "exaggerations" of a transition period, as some bishops still wanted to believe, or was there a method to them, as others feared? For the participants of the guild members' convention held in Munich by the Catholic Kolpingwerk in June 1933, there could be no doubt: the festival, which had been planned with the support of Vice Chancellor von Papen, turned out to be an absolute fiasco. Six days before the opening, the Bavarian Political Police prohibited the assembly on spurious grounds. When, following wide-ranging efforts, the convention was finally permitted to take place after all, SA goon squads attacked the peaceful attendees in such numbers that the police could not even guarantee that church services could be held undisturbed. As a result, the guild members' convention had to be brought to a premature end.

At the same time, it was symptomatic that German Catholics were prevented from taking part in the General German Catholics Congress organized in Vienna by a law of 29 May 1933 that restricted travel to the Republic of Austria. A compensatory event scheduled in Gleiwitz would only be permitted by Prussian prime minister Hermann Göring on the condition that Catholics professed a clear commitment to National Socialism. As a consequence, the Central Committee of German Catholics cancelled this largest public manifestation of German Catholicism. In the following years as well – until 1945, in fact – no more Catholic congresses could be staged in Germany.[14]

The Church under Totalitarian Rule

What had been prefigured by pinpricks of increasing depth during the regime's early months would become the norm in the established Nazi dictatorship of the mid-1930s, against which the legal guarantees of the Reich Concordat no longer offered any security. The Catholic daily press, for example, came under more and more pressure, until it was largely

14 H. Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken*, 272 f.

prohibited in 1935. A similar fate befell the Catholic journals and even the diocesan papers, which were "dried out" after 1937 by way of restrictive paper rationing. Although guaranteed by the Reich Concordat, the confessional primary school system and in-school religious instruction – an essential pillar for propagating the faith – increasingly became ideological battlefields. Leading Nazi culture politicians unlawfully organized parent surveys in the *Länder* (states) about the introduction of non-denominational schools, which was accompanied by massive propaganda manipulation. If the desired majorities came to pass, the confessional schools were abolished, in violation of the Concordat. In Berlin, the Nazis dispensed with even this effort and simply suspended the confessional schools in 1938. Parallel to this development, Catholic religious instruction in schools was combated: at the end of the 1930s, it had been reduced mostly to one hour per week, which could be conducted only by temporal teachers. Counteracting this development by extending the system of Catholic private schools was made impossible when state subsidies were cut and, in 1939, the Church was denied admission to the "Reich Community of German Private Schools", which meant the effective end of the Catholic private schools. Only in their attempts to remove crosses from the walls of schools, in order to accelerate the de-Christianization of society, did Nazi authorities fail. When they attempted this in Oldenburg in 1936 and a second time in Bavaria in 1941, they provoked such vigorous protests, including among some party members, that the *Gauleiter* were forced to rescind the relevant decrees. In these cases, the rural Catholic milieu, which saw its traditional way of life threatened by all-too-rapid changes, was still functioning. That an evidently effective opposition could materialize over such issues but was apparently not transferable to a broader political context has provoked critical enquiries by scholars of this milieu, about which Christoph Kösters reports in this volume.

During the same time frame, spectacular actions took place that targeted the social defamation of the Catholic clergy, on whom the Nazis attempted to pin foreign currency offenses and, above all, violations of morality. The foreign currency trials concerned individual cases of formal offenses against the laws then in effect, most involving the internationally active religious orders. They frequently had their origins in gullibility vis-à-vis the commissioned bankers or in the complexity of business dealings with headquarters that had been relocated abroad as a result of the *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s. The extent of moral misconduct in the Catholic Church, on the other hand, was grossly exaggerated by the Nazi propaganda machinery in specially devised campaigns. Reich Propaganda

Minister Goebbels spoke publicly in 1937 about "herd-like fornication" (herdenmäßiger Unzucht) and hypocritically assumed the mantle of morality against the supposedly thousand-fold "disgraces" (Schweinereien) among the clergy. In fact, in only a little more than a hundred cases were charges pressed and convictions achieved. Nevertheless, the Nazis attempted to blackmail the Church through intimations about thousands of additional compromising cases, which a specially created Gestapo commission had reportedly amassed. In the end, these defamation attempts did not achieve their intended goal because a large majority of the faithful refused to get caught up in the Nazi propaganda.[15] Instead, Church members frequently responded with demonstrative piety; Corpus Christi processions or pilgrimages during this period often turned into veritable political demonstrations. In the wake of anti-Church actions, the already high incidence of state coercive measures against Catholic priests and members of religious orders, including confinement in concentration camps, rose yet again.

In view of such an existentially threatening situation, the question as to what political activities remained possible for the Catholic Church evokes a notably heterogeneous set of answers some 85 years after the events. The German bishops, whose assessment by scholars is reviewed by Karl-Joseph Hummel in this volume, were often at a loss, with quite different opinions about which defensive strategy to adopt. The chairman of the Fulda Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Bertram, met the regime's unreasonable demands with the same means whose efficacy he had tested in the Wilhelmine empire and Weimar democracy: he wrote petitions, protests and position papers that remained unknown to the public and to which the regime responded either evasively or not at all. Although this "policy of petition" may well have been legitimate as long as functioning remnants of traditional stateliness remained, it became increasingly anachronistic and futile with the rapid expansion of the Nazi "prerogative state".

Of course, where the core of the Catholic faith and its world view were concerned, the bishops were quite capable of collectively achieving a publicly perceptible, energetic stance. One such case was their response to the "Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Defective Offspring" of 14 July 1933, which prescribed the forced sterilization of hereditarily ill people that would take place following an expert medical opinion and a decision by specially established "hereditary health courts", whereby hereditary

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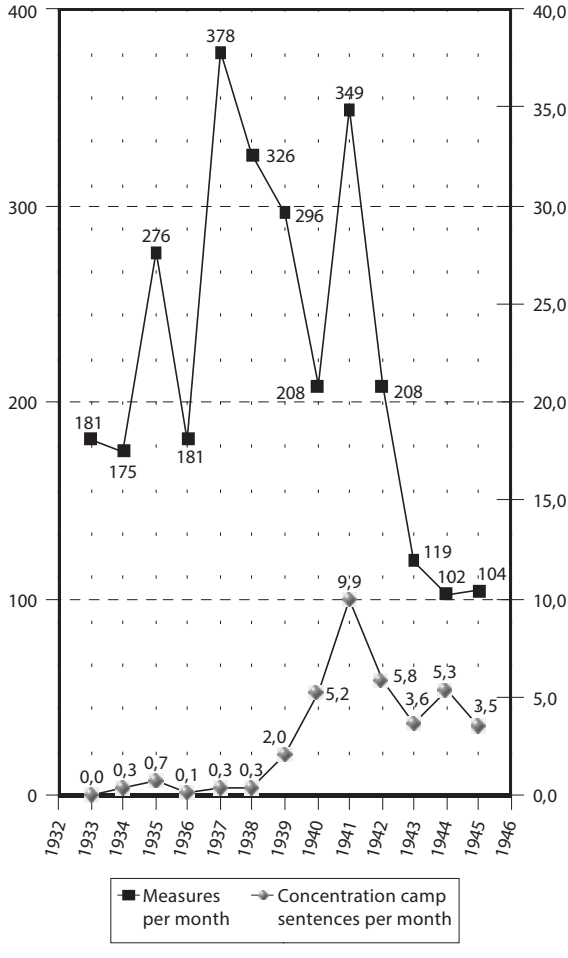
15 H. G. Hockerts, *Sittlichkeitsprozesse*.



Comparison of coercive measures and concentration camp sentences against Catholic priests, 1933–1945[16]

illness was given a notably broad definition. For the Catholic Church – as Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich immediately understood – this posed the critical question: "Is there an objective morality and is the Church its professor? Or, put another way: Is Germanic racial feeling the absolute ruler over morality?" After the *Osservatore Romano* had also expressed

16 U. v. Hehl and C. Kösters, *Priester unter Hitlers Terror*, 81.

strong criticism, the German bishops declared unequivocally in January 1934: "In the question of sterilization, the faithful must obey the fundamentals of the Christian moral law, which have been propagated by the highest Church authority. In compliance with the instruction of the Holy Father, we remember this: It is not permitted to volunteer to have oneself sterilized or to petition to have another human being sterilized. That is the teaching of the Catholic Church".[17] The Church thereby placed itself in open opposition to state law, while calling for civil disobedience – as Reich Interior Minister Frick accusingly pointed out. That the conflict did not escalate was due primarily to restraint on the part of the state in employing Catholic nurses, doctors, and judges for carrying out the "euthanasia" program.[18] But this by no means meant a revocation of National Socialism's eugenics goals. At the start of the war, these activities were expanded to include the systematic killing of mentally and physically handicapped people as part of the operation known by the code name "T4". In this situation, it was the Münster bishop Clemens Count von Galen who publicly opposed these murderous actions in his well-known sermons. Whether or not it was Galen's protest that caused the (only temporary) suspension of a program that was already more or less winding down anyway remains controversial – in any case, it documents the sense of responsibility the Church felt on this terrain in particular.[19]

The Church had shown a similarly determined reaction when Hitler appointed Alfred Rosenberg as "representative of the Führer for supervision of the entire intellectual and ideological schooling and education of the NSDAP" on 24 January 1934. Rosenberg was the author of *The Myth of the 20th Century*, a book that set the mission of the Aryan race against the sources of the faith of the Christian churches, that rejected humanity and human rights in the same way it considered the holy scriptures contaminated by Jews, and that damned the Church in obscenely distorted images. Unanimously, the pope, bishops, priests, and ordinary church members voiced protest, the book was placed on the index of forbidden books, theological repudiations were published and the faithful informed of the spiritual dangers that emanated from this screed. The

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17 H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nrs. 69 and 70: 148 f.

18 Exemplary here, cf. the minimal employment of Catholic judges in the hereditary health courts in Baden. It was overwhelmingly Protestant or non-affiliated judges who were entrusted with these assignments. Cf. M. Kißener, *Zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie*, 245, n. 468.

19 Cf. J. Korupka, *Galen – Wege und Irrwege*.

"Führer" then quickly distanced himself from Rosenberg's book, which he described as a "private effort" that he himself rejected.[20]

Alongside this list of assets in the Church's conflict with the regime during years of an existential threat to itself, there were also some failures and liabilities, which continue to be hotly debated even today. There was, for example, no reaction on the part of German Catholicism to the murders that occurred during the so-called Röhm Putsch of 30 June 1934. Not only high-ranking SA men who were becoming a danger to Hitler were murdered but also outstanding representatives of German Catholicism, such as Fritz Michael Gerlich in Munich and Erich Klausener, the head of Catholic Action in Berlin, neither of whom had any connection to the SA. Besides Bishop Bares in 1934[21] and Bishop Galen, who in a 1936 sermon demanded that the injustice perpetrated against Klausener be investigated and cleared up – as a "moral demand" and "not for any political considerations, which as such do not concern me as a bishop"[22] – no other voices among the bishops called for clarification of the state-led murder operation. The ordinary church members, too, mostly remained silent; presumably, many were happy that the putsch had finally put a stop to the SA's terror.

One also searches in vain for an intervention by the Church's leaders against the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. Their discriminating marriage regulations against Jews diametrically opposed the Catholic conception of the sacrament of marriage, as Walter Ziegler has recently emphasized.[23] And when, in the pogrom night of 1938, Jews were once again victimized and disenfranchised, the German bishops did not intervene, nor did protest arise among ordinary church members, the majority of whom undoubtedly abhorred the organized acts of violence. Did they fear that standing up for the Jews in the existing situation would provoke more violence against them? Or did they believe they were unable to help because it was assumed that, after the Jews, the Catholics would be the next target of Nazi attacks?[24] When Cathedral Vicar Bernhard Lichtenberg publicly prayed "for the priests in concentration camps, for the Jews, for the non-Aryans" in Berlin's St. Hedwig's Church on 10 November, adding, "We know

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20 K. Keywan, "Dein Volk – oder Christus"*?*

21 H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 85: 184 f.

22 P. Löffler, ed., *von Galen I*, Nr. 168: 383.

23 W. Ziegler, "Die deutschen Bischöfe unter der NS-Herrschaft", 419.

24 K. Repgen, *Judenpogrom*, 12, 14, 16.

what happened yesterday… Out there, the synagogue is burning. It, too, is a house of God", it remained one of the few exceptions. [25]

This addresses a problem area that time and again has occupied center stage in the debate over "Catholic Church in National Socialism": the Church and the Jews.[26] The striking inner distance, rooted in the old Christian anti-Judaism, with which the Catholic Church confronted the fate of the Jews, as well as other discriminated groups of victims, is difficult to explain. That this was not the product of any racially based anti-Semitism adapted by the Church is demonstrated by the discussion about the relations with the Jews that was underway in the Vatican in the mid 1920s. One central subject of debate there had been an association of religious and priests who called themselves "Amici Israel" and, in a brochure titled *Pax super Israel,* advocated a far-reaching accommodation with the Jews. Although the Vatican could not endorse this, the debate had led to a decree, inspired by Pope Pius XI, that was published on 25 March 1938 and which took an unequivocal stance against modern racial anti-Semitism.[27] But how, then, can this distance toward the fate of the Jews be explained? Was it their own hard-pressed situation or a lacking vision of the extent to which Jews were endangered that caused Cardinals Bertram and Faulhaber to consider a public stand on behalf of the Jews following the anti-Jewish boycott of 1 April 1933 unnecessary?

On the other hand, this reaction need not have prevented other Catholics from standing up for the rights of Jews, as did Father Alois Eckert in the *Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung* on 4 April 1933:

> "The solution of the Jewish question that is being attempted today we consider, in our Christian conscience, to be not right and not just, neither in its methods nor in its morality. The solution to the German Jewish question cannot be sought and found from the standpoint of race. No human being should have fewer rights because of his race or be defamed because of his membership in a race."[28]

This kind of intervention on behalf of the rights of Jews also occurred in the following years, even after the regime had ultimately moved on to the destruction of Jewish life in Europe during the war. When, and how

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[25] H. G. Mann, *Bernhard Lichtenberg*, 29.

[26] Definitive and summarizing: J. M. Sánchez, *Pius XII. und der Holocaust*; T. Brechenmacher, *Der Vatikan und die Juden*. See also the discussions about D. I. Kertzer, *Der erste Stellvertreter*.

[27] Cited in T. Brechenmacher, *Der Vatikan und die Juden*, 161.

[28] H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 27: 49.

reliably, the bishops were informed about the extermination operations in the occupied eastern territories is fiercely debated, as is whether or not a more determined intervention on behalf of the Jews had become their duty by this point, at the latest. In these debates, the reaction of Pope Pius XII also plays an important part; as newer research demonstrates, his actions cannot simply be reduced to the often cited catchword about the "pope's silence". At the same time, it must be pointed out that there were Church aid centers for so-called Catholic "non-Aryans". Headed by Margarete Sommer in Berlin, Gertrud Luckner in Freiburg, Gabriele Countess Magnis in Beuthen, and Father Ludger Born S. J. in Vienna, these offices helped many who were in desperate circumstances, eventually even so-called "full Jews", on the bishops' instructions, even if they could only save a few lives. It was an extraordinarily complicated situation, which is elucidated in articles by Thomas Brechenmacher and Wolfgang Altgeld in this volume.

It is noteworthy, in any case, that after four years of experience with National Socialism, the Holy See considered the time to have arrived for a fully public stock-taking – not in the form of a political reckoning, which it did not consider its prerogative, but rather in the form of a spiritual statement that could not help but address the political situation of the Church in Germany. The famous encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (usually translated as *With Deep Anxiety*) reached Catholic churches under the greatest secrecy and was read aloud there on 21 March 1937. The Gestapo was given no opportunity to intervene. In the encyclical, Pius XI lamented the Nazi regime's violations of the law before the whole world and emphatically expressed the ideological discord between the Church and National Socialism. In it, he wrote unequivocally:

> "Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community… whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God."[29]

The Nazi regime understood such statements as "fighting words" and first pursued those who had printed and disseminated the papal letter. These people suffered reprisals by the Gestapo. The revocation of the Reich Concordat was considered but, in the end, not implemented. Instead, the foreign currency and immorality campaigns against the Catholic clergy

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[29] H. Gruber, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, Nr. 146: 311.

were taken up once more. In the meantime, Pius XI contemplated a further confrontation with the Nazi world view and directed that the papal Education Congregation issue an edict to Catholic universities, encouraging scholarship that would refute the rampant fallacies in racial teachings. He also considered an encyclical in which he would establish a magisterial rejection of racism, not only in Germany but also in other parts of the world. The German Jesuit Gustav Gundlach, among others, was working on the drafts for this letter. Then, in February 1939, the pope died and the project remained unfinished.[30]

The Church in War

The outbreak of war in 1939 added a further layer of problems to an already complicated, multi-layered relationship between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state.[31]

Today we know that this war was anything but a "normal" European conflict. In fact, Nazi Germany prosecuted it as an ideological war of annihilation and as a race war, which ultimately aimed at world domination. But for contemporaries, including the leaders of the Catholic Church, this was by no means clear in 1939. Instead, traditional Christian patterns of interpreting the war were taken up. Church leaders proclaimed that Catholics were naturally obligated to perform wartime service and owed obedience to state authorities that continued to be seen as legitimate. That one had to stand by one's fatherland in time of war would have been taken as a matter of course by the vast majority of contemporaries in all the warring countries. Not a few Catholics may have seen the war as an opportunity to prove what even then some Germans still questioned: national reliability. Beyond this, what the bishops said about the outbreak of the war was moderate. There were no direct blessings of arms. The response of Catholic military chaplains and most theologians was the same. One part of the Christian interpretation of the war, however, was to see it as God's punishment for mankind's sins. This view, which contradicted the Nazis' glorification of war and appears to have been expressed frequently, soon attracted the disapproving attention of

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30 M. F. Feldkamp, *Pius XII. und Deutschland*, 114 ff.

31 On the still only rudimentarily researched sub-field of "the Catholic Church and war", see K.-J. Hummel and C. Kösters, eds., *Kirchen im Krieg*; H. Missalla, *Für Gott, Führer und Vaterland*, S. Hensel and H. Wolf, eds., *Die katholische Kirche und Gewalt*.