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In the shadow of empire: Josef Schmidlin and Protestant–Catholic ecumenism before the Second World War*

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Abstract

This article examines the life and ideas of Josef Schmidlin, the founder of Catholic 'missionary science' and the most influential German Catholic missionary theorist of the first half of the twentieth century. An admirer of the German Protestant missionary theologian Gustav Warneck, Schmidlin often appears in the historiography as a forerunner of the Protestant–Catholic ecumenical collaboration that emerged after the Second World War. Yet a close examination of his writing reveals a vigorous critic of Protestantism and the Protestant ecumenical movement. A sceptic of transnational missionary organizations, he remained a firm supporter of the German nation and imperial project. This article gestures towards both the continuities and the discontinuities between the early attempts at fostering confessional cooperation between Protestants and Catholics and the later iterations. It also examines how nineteenth-century entanglements between missions and empire shaped the ideas of Catholic missionary theory during the interwar years.

Keywords Catholicism, Christian missions, ecumenism, German history, imperialism, nationalism

The era of high imperialism was a boom time for Christian missions. As Andrew Porter has noted, 'expansion was almost everywhere the order of the day' for the European Christian missionary enterprise during the period from 1873 to 1914.[1] Aided by European imperialism, the territorial reach of Christianity widened, and the number of European missionary societies grew. Without Western imperial protection, missionaries held onto a precarious existence;

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1 Andrew Porter, 'Missions and empire, *c.*1873–1914', in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, eds., *The Cambridge history of Christianity, volume 8: world Christianities c. 1815–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 568.

they faced antagonistic foreign societies that viewed Christian missionary work as an existential threat. Missionaries constantly confronted the political reality that they needed imperial muscle to carry out their work, and Western imperialist powers were obvious horses onto which missionaries could hitch their wagons.[2]

But for Catholic missionaries, the horses posed a multitude of problems. Domestically, in an age of rising nationalism, anti-Catholic sentiment swept through the three most powerful Western empires. William Gladstone called 'papism' a threat to the British empire; Bismarck launched a *Kulturkampf* against Catholics in the newly founded German Reich; and the French Third Republic sought to curtail the influence of the Jesuits within its borders.[3] Close collaboration with imperial powers abroad portended a betrayal of European Catholics at home, who suffered from anti-Catholic policies and sentiment.

These tensions mirrored themselves in the colonies. While missionaries and colonial administrators alike rallied behind a Western 'civilizing mission', they advanced conflicting visions about how to achieve the mission or held fundamentally diametric ideas about the meaning of 'civilization'. Missionaries clashed with colonial powers over a range of cultural, political, social, and economic issues. For instance, French Catholic missionaries demonstrated against French policies towards indigenous labour in Indochina; British and American missionaries sought to shut down the opium trade in China; German missionaries challenged German geopolitical aggression in the colonies.[4]

Complicating matters even further was the issue of confessional conflict. As Norman Etherington points out, the colonial project was 'denominationally porous'.[5] Catholic and Protestant missionary groups worked side by side in the colonies, leading to both friction and accommodation.[6] The diverse panoply of the Christian missionary project also fostered intra-confessional conflict. In China, for instance, after the unequal treaties of 1860 opened the Chinese interior to European encroachment, an array of denominationally organized Protestant missionary congregations – among them Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, and

2 The historical scholarship on the entangled relationship between Christian missionaries and Western imperialism is vast. An older strand of historiography posited missionaries as enthusiastic handmaidens of empire, while more recent revisions have stressed the complicated relationship between missionaries and the imperial project. For a good overview of these shifts in the British historiography, see Norman Etherington, 'Introduction', in Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 1–18. On the German case, see Ulrich van der Heyden, 'Christian missionary societies in the German colonies, 1884/85–1914/15', in Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, eds., *German colonialism: race, the Holocaust, and postwar Germany*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 215–53. For the French case, see Owen White and J. P. Daughton, 'Introduction: placing French missionaries in the modern world', in Owen White and J. P. Daughton, eds., *In God's empire: French missionaries in the modern world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 3–25.

3 For the best overview of these pan-European anti-Catholic 'culture wars', see Christopher M. Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture wars: secular–Catholic conflict in nineteenth-century Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

4 J. P. Daughton, *An empire divided: religion, republicanism, and the making of French colonialism, 1880–1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 69–72; Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against opium: Protestant missionaries in China, 1874–1917*, Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996; Jeremy Best, 'Godly, international, and independent: German Protestant missionary loyalties before World War I', *Central European History*, 47, 2014, pp. 588–9. For a discussion of how colonial Africa further complicates the picture of the relationship between Catholic missionaries and colonial administrators, see Elizabeth Foster, *Faith in empire: religion, politics, and colonial rule in Senegal, 1880–1940*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013, pp. 10–13.

5 Norman Etherington, 'Afterword: the missionary experience in British and French empires', in White and Daughton, *In God's empire*, p. 282.

6 J. P. Daughton, for example, in *An empire divided*, expertly dissects the conflict between Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the French empire.

Lutherans – along with interdenominational organizations such as the China Inland Mission flooded into China. The Catholic landscape was just as varied: Franciscans, Lazarists, Dominicans, and Jesuits jostled for influence and territory.[7]

Catholic missionary theologians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were thus faced with questions that straddled the complex, overlapping terrains of imperialism, nationalism, and confessional competition. To what extent could they be entangled with empire? Should they adopt a form of 'missionary nationalism' (to use Adrian Hastings' term), in spite of the Catholic church's claims to internationalism?[8] Should Catholics cooperate, or even learn from, their Protestant competitors, who might be working towards a similar 'civilizing mission'?

This article examines how Josef Schmidlin, the most influential Catholic missionary theologian before the First World War, sought to give systematic answers to some of these questions. Based at the University of Münster, Schmidlin was the founder of Catholic 'missionary science' (*Missionswissenschaft*). By invoking the term, he drew upon the work of Gustav Warneck, the influential Protestant theologian who established the study of missionary work as an academic field in Germany. In standard histories of missionary theology, Schmidlin appears in the literature as a pioneer, an advocate for Catholics to emulate Protestant missionary methods.[9] In this narrative, he was a proto-ecumenist, a forerunner of the ecumenical cooperation between Catholics and Protestants that emerged after the Second World War. Further elevating his reputation was his tragic death. In 1943, he was arrested by the Gestapo for criticizing the Nazi regime and sent to a concentration camp in Alsace. He was tortured and died there. Schmidlin's biographers have read his opposition to National Socialism as a reflection of his commitment to a more non-nationalist, anti-imperialist, and ecumenical form of global Christianity.[10]

Yet a closer examination of Schmidlin's writings reveals a different picture. For one thing, Schmidlin was a fervent nationalist and supported German imperial expansion. Before the First World War, he advanced a systematic justification for Catholic missionary collaboration with the German Reich. Even after the war, he remained convinced of the superiority of European civilization. Throughout the 1920s, he was critical of other national efforts that sought to advance the efforts of missionary work throughout the world.

It would also be a mistake to present Schmidlin's suggestion of cooperation with Protestants as an uncomplicated form of proto-ecumenism. While he welcomed political

7 For a good overview of the expansion of missionary congregations in China, see Daniel Bays, *A new history of Christianity in China*, Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012, pp. 66–91. Bays focuses more on the Protestant landscape. For more on the rivalries between Catholic missionary societies in the early nineteenth century, see Ernest Young, *Ecclesiastical colony: China's Catholic church and the French religious protectorate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 16–18.

8 Adrian Hastings, 'The clash of nationalism and universalism within twentieth-century missionary Christianity', in Brian Stanley, ed., *Missions, nationalism, and the end of empire*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003, pp. 15–33.

9 See, for example, Paulus Y. Pham, *Towards an ecumenical paradigm for Christian mission*, Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010, p. 141.

10 For examples of this line of thinking, see Karl Müller, *Josef Schmidlin (1876–1944): Papsthistoriker und Begründer der katholischen Missionswissenschaft*, Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1989; Horst Rzepkowski, 'Joseph Schmidlin's supposed endeavours for an interdenominational missionary periodical', *Mission Studies*, 11, 1994, pp. 227–42. A notable exception that points out Schmidlin's thinking as being forged by imperialist expansion is Giancarlo Collet, 'German Catholic mission science: comments on the time of its commencement', in Carine Dujardin and Claude Prudhomme, eds., *Mission and science: missiology revisited*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015, pp. 99–111.

collaboration with German Protestants, he rejected the transnational partnerships that the Protestant ecumenical movement sought to create. Before the First World War, he criticized the Edinburgh conference of 1910, which David Thompson has called 'the starting point of the modern ecumenical movement'.[11] After the war, he followed movements within the Protestant ecumenical movement closely, but he still believed that confessional and theological differences remained paramount. Until the end of his life, he sought to convince Protestants of the 'universality' of Catholicism.

Thus, a closer look at Schmidlin's career offers us insight into how Catholic missionary theologians positioned themselves in relationship to the Protestant ecumenical movement that emerged from the period of high imperialism to the interwar years. As Udi Greenberg has shown, this movement began in the period of high imperialism as a way to coordinate European and American missionary work and evangelization across national and imperial borders. Greenberg brilliantly argues that after the First World War, in response to fears of the rise of global secularism, 'it was these imperial networks, visions of global evangelization, and dreams of pan-European fusion that placed ecumenicals at the intellectual vanguard of decolonization and European integration from the 1920s onward'.[12]

In this special issue, my colleagues build on Greenberg's insight, demonstrating how Protestants ecumenicals sought to advance a new vision for a Christian 'world order' after the First World War. Schmidlin's career conforms to certain aspects of these broader narratives: like his Protestant counterparts, Schmidlin followed with intense interest the new wave of decolonization as well as the spread of global communism. But his writing also reflects how certain aspects of his theology remained impervious to change. Unlike many Protestant ecumenicals, who turned to anti-imperialist rhetoric as a way to combat global secularism, Schmidlin retained his commitment to the European imperial project, and continued to argue for the superiority of European civilization. Resentful at the geopolitical constraints placed on Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, he remained a firm believer in the potential of the German empire to spread global Catholicism.

Finally, Schmidlin's conception of Protestant and Catholic cooperation point us to the differences between ecumenical visions that emerged before and after the Second World War. As Thompson has noted, the ecumenism that emerged after the Second World War sought to sever the relationship between church and state: 'Ecumenism represented a further step in the differentiation of church from state, because of its emphasis on what churches have in common across national boundaries.'[13] Schmidlin, in contrast, did not aim to sever the relationship between church and state; he hoped to bind them closer together. In his view, Protestant and Catholic cooperation could only be forged within the confines of the nation-state, through confessional cooperation created in the colonies. During the interwar years, he joined his German Protestant counterparts in criticizing the Protestant ecumenical movement, seeing it as an attempt by Anglo-American Protestant missionaries to further solidify their dominance in

11 David Thompson, 'Ecumenism', in Hugh McLeod, ed., *The Cambridge history of Christianity, volume 9: world Christianities, c.1914–c.2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 50. For the best account of the Edinburgh Conference, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009.

12 Udi Greenberg, 'Protestants, decolonization, and European integration, 1885–1961', *Journal of Modern History*, 89, 2, 2017, p. 316.

13 Thompson, 'Ecumenism', p. 68.

the missionary sphere.[14] It was not until after the Second World War that German missionary theologians sought to decouple Christianity definitively from both national and confessional interests.

A metaphysical fusion of the 'two swords'

Josef Schmidlin's early life was forged at the intersection between religion and empire. Born in March 1876, he grew up in a small farming community in the Sundgau region of southern Alsace, which had just been annexed by the German Reich as spoils from the Franco-Prussian War.[15] Religious identity had long played an important part in the politics of the region, which was around 80% Catholic and had been politically organized to resist the anti-clerical policies of the Second French Empire. German annexation stoked further anxieties among the Catholic population, who feared persecution under a Prussian-led Protestant Germany. Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* confirmed Catholic suspicions, and split political Catholicism in Alsace into various camps, centred around the vexing question of how to relate to the new German empire.[16]

By the time that Schmidlin had come of age, in the 1890s, the *Kulturkampf* was over. But the question of cultural loyalties remained. He later reflected on the schizophrenic pull that living in the Alsatian borderland exerted on him. Both of his parents had been trained in the French system, but they felt culturally German. 'I lived at the intersection of French and German intellectual tendencies', he wrote in 1927, which 'gave rise to many internal and external contradictions'.[17]

Another aspect of Alsatian history made a deep imprint on Schmidlin: Alsace was a centre of the Catholic missionary revival of the 1830s and 1840s.[18] Andreas Räss, the Bishop of Strasbourg from 1842 to 1887, was a devoted supporter of the French Society of the Propagation of the Faith (Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi), a lay organization dedicated to raising funds for training and sending missionaries abroad.[19] By the late nineteenth century, Alsace boasted more than 10,000 subscriptions to the Society's monthly magazine.[20] Alsatian men and women had a disproportionate representation in Catholic missionary societies such as the Spiritans and the White Fathers, as well as affiliated missionary sister organizations. Writing in 1924, Schmidlin's brother Augustin called Alsace the 'classic land of missions'.[21]

14 For more on the long-standing tensions between the German Protestant and Anglo-American missionaries, see William Hutchison, 'Innocence abroad: the "American religion" in Europe', *Church History*, 51, 1, 1982, pp. 79–82.

15 The most comprehensive biography of Schmidlin is Müller, *Josef Schmidlin*.

16 For more on German nation-building processes in Alsace, see Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and divisions of Alsatian regionalism, 1870–1939*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010; Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania? Nationalizing women in Alsace, 1870–1946*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

17 Josef Schmidlin, 'Josef Schmidlin', in Erich Stange, ed., *Die Religionswissenschaft der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen, v. 3*, Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1927, p. 168.

18 For more on the Catholic revival, see Clark, 'The new Catholicism and the European culture wars', in Clark and Kaiser, *Culture wars*, pp. 11–46.

19 For more on the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, see Daughton, *An empire divided*.

20 Josef Schmidlin and Augustin Schmidlin, *Die katholischen Missionen und das Elsass*, Mülhausen, Germany: Salvator-Verlag, 1924, p. 48.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

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Schmidlin's parents were devout Catholics who instilled within their children a 'deep religious sensibility'. All three of their sons ended up as priests, and one of their daughters became a nun.[22] Schmidlin was ordained in 1899, at the age of twenty-three. He continued his studies in classical philology and history at the University of Freiburg, where he wrote a dissertation on the history of Habsburg law in Alsace. In 1905, he returned to Strasbourg, where he worked on his *Habilitation* thesis at the newly formed faculty of theology in the University of Strasbourg. There, he merged his interests in philosophy and history, writing an intellectual biography of the medieval historian Otto von Freising. The work made a major impression, and Schmidlin was slated for promotion to a full position at thirty-three.[23]

Schmidlin's reading of Otto von Freising reveals a preoccupation that would persist in his thought: the question of how to reconcile conflict between the church and secular powers. While he does not reference the *Kulturkampf* directly, the central question that the *Kulturkampf* raised – how Catholics could remain loyal to a state that saw them as enemies – looms large in his analysis of Otto's work. Schmidlin admired Otto for successfully arguing for a 'metaphysical fusion of the two swords' (*metaphysische Verschmelzung der zwei Schwerter*).[24] The medieval theologian had argued that the work of the state was not all 'sinful', but could be an example of 'God's grace'.[25] For Otto, the two powers need not be in opposition with one another; rather, 'the spiritual and the worldly communities, the Pope and the Emperor come together as father and son', so that the two 'become a single state'.[26] Schmidlin saw in Otto's writings a way to redeem worldly authorities, as well as a theological justification for collaborating with secular power.

Universalism as confessional competition

The defining moment in Schmidlin's early career came when he moved to the University of Münster, where he was given the opportunity to make his name by developing a new academic field, 'the science of mission' (*Missionswissenschaft*). In 1909, the Prussian Ministry of Culture contacted the university, offering it funding for a series of lectures related to the colonies. The theological faculty saw a good opportunity to train theological candidates for the 'increasing need of colonial tasks and efforts of the German empire'.[27] Schmidlin leapt at the opportunity to take on the new task.

Schmidlin committed himself to familiarizing himself with an academic field that he considered 'an unknown country, a true *terra incognita*'.[28] As he immersed himself in the literature, he realized his potential contribution. Despite the 'hundreds of years of missionary practice', he noted that for Catholics there was still no 'missionary science in its own right'.[29]

22 Schmidlin, 'Josef Schmidlin', p. 168.
23 Schmidlin's work remained a classic in the field. The Catholic theologian Felix Fellner, writing in 1934, listed Schmidlin's *Habilitation* as one of the most important modern interpretations of Otto von Freising's work. See Felix Fellner, 'The "Two cities" of Otto of Freising and its influence on the Catholic philosophy of history', *Catholic Historical Review*, 20, 1934, pp. 154–74.
24 Joseph Schmidlin, *Die geschichtsphilosophische und kirchenpolitische Weltanschauung Ottos von Freising: ein Beitrag zur mittelalterlichen Geistesgeschichte*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany: Herder, 1906, p. 162.
25 *Ibid.*
26 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
27 Quoted in Müller, *Josef Schmidlin*, p. 69.
28 *Ibid.*
29 Schmidlin, 'Josef Schmidlin', pp. 176–7.

Even though German Protestants had a shorter history of sending missionaries abroad, they already had more than a 'generation of theologians who had studied the historical and theoretical aspects of missions'.[30]

And indeed, since the middle of the nineteenth century, German Protestants had sought to make missions an object of academic study. The main force behind this movement was Gustav Warneck, the founder of Protestant 'missionary science'. A graduate of the University of Halle, a centre of German Pietist thinking, Warneck had established in 1874 the influential missionary journal *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift*, which became the premier scholarly journal of 'missionary science'.[31] He held the first chair in the study of missiology (*Lehrstuhl für Missionswissenschaft*) at the University of Halle, and, under his leadership, missions became an independent field in theological faculties, alongside practical and systematic theology. Soon universities throughout Europe established chairs and professorships in missiology.

Schmidlin found in Warneck a model, and he set out to create a system of parallel Catholic institutions that could rival Warneck's. Just as Warneck had edited a journal, so too would Schmidlin: he began the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* in 1911. He helped to found the 'Institute for Research in Missionary Science' (Institut für missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen) at Münster, and in 1914, Schmidlin came to occupy the first chair in Catholic missiology at Münster. He pushed for the establishment of chairs in missionary studies throughout Europe, such as in Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Scandinavia. The most influential chair of missiology that he helped establish was at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.[32]

But Schmidlin saw in Warneck more than just an institutional rival; he wanted to advance a clear intellectual justification for Catholic *Missionswissenschaft* as a legitimate field of study. In the first issue of the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, he noted that, until that point, Catholic missionaries had mainly been offering ethnographic, geographic, or linguistic observations from the field. These reports generated large amounts of information, but no theoretical apparatus for understanding it. For Schmidlin, the increase in knowledge led many to see the Catholic missionary world as fractured, and Catholic missionary science could synthesize the various 'separatist tendencies' within the Catholic missionary world. Schmidlin's stated goal was to make the study of missions 'scientific'.[33]

By invoking the word 'science', Schmidlin inserted himself directly into a debate waged between liberal and conservative German Protestant missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Pietist missionary societies dominated the German missionary landscape. They devoted their resources to building institutions that could help foster the *Innerlichkeit* ('depth of soul') of the indigenous converts: they believed that Christianity could be spread through 'individual conversion' (*Einzelbekehrung*).[34] They printed Christian tracts and pamphlets in indigenous languages, taught basic literacy, supplied the converted with free elementary education, built churches, and preached on the streets.

30 *Ibid.*
31 Hans Kasdorf, *Gustav Warnecks missiologisches Erbe*, Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1990, p. 6. See also Best, 'Godly, international, and independent', pp. 591–5.
32 For a list of places and dates where chairs of Catholic missiology were established, see Collet, 'German Catholic mission science', pp. 105–6.
33 Josef Schmidlin, 'Was wir wollen', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 1, 1911, p. 8.
34 Timothy Yates, *Christian missions in the twentieth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 35.

Most importantly, they emphasized the necessity of church-building as the primary method of fostering community.[35] For the most part, Pietists eschewed institutions of higher education and elite *Bildung* ('education'), which they considered as too 'secular'.

In the 1860s, this Pietist approach came under direct attack from liberal reformers. The most polemical of these critics was the Swiss Reformed pastor Ernst Langhans, who called for an alliance of liberal Protestants throughout the world to stem the effects of Pietist methods.[36] Langhans characterized the Pietists as beset by 'dualism and fanaticism', ignorant of the different cultures and civilizations that they were trying to convert.[37] Pietists adhered to a 'dead dogmatism' rather than a 'living Christianity'.[38] Such ignorance had deadly consequences. Unable to distinguish between 'true faith' and 'superstition', Pietists were responsible, Langhans charged, for inflaming global insurgencies throughout the world, such as the Sepoys in India and the Taipings in China.[39]

Liberals like Langhans proposed a series of reforms. First, missionaries ought to engage with the actual culture and history of the peoples they encountered. He also argued that missionary societies should provide missionaries with more solid and rigorous theological training, so that they could conduct 'theological and philosophical debates and arguments'.[40] Rather than focus on creating a narrowly pious, solely Christian training, missionaries ought to focus on advancing the 'free development of men'.[41] Liberals rejected the idea of individual conversion, and instead they exhorted missionaries to work for the 'elevation of the spirit of the people' (*Hebung des Volksgeistes*), which liberals also referred to as 'the Christianization of the people' (*Volkschristianisierung*).[42] In short, missionary work had to become more secular: instead of focusing solely on evangelism, missionaries ought to be philanthropists and intellectuals, and experts on the cultures that they sought to convert.

The liberal Protestant approach to missions also found resonance in the academy through the formal study of comparative religions.[43] The scholar often credited with founding this new 'science of religion' (*Religionswissenschaft*) was F. Max Müller, a German-born academic, who had taught at Oxford since 1850.[44] Hoping to find common ground between different religious systems, Müller advanced the claim that Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam were all religions based on revelation. Yet comparison did not nudge these liberals towards cultural relativism. As Tomoko Masuzawa notes, Müller himself was an advocate of the goals of Christian mission: his study of other religions did not convince him that Christian missionaries should abandon the goal of Christianizing the world.[45] Liberal Protestants like Müller and

35 *Ibid.*
36 Ernst Friedrich Langhans, *Pietismus und äussere Mission vor dem Richterstuhle ihrer Vertheidiger*, Leipzig: Wigand, 1866, p. 395.
37 Ernst Friedrich Langhans, *Pietismus und Christenthum im Spiegel der äußeren Mission. Erster Theil: der Pietismus*, Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1864, p. 246.
38 *Ibid.*, p. 327.
39 *Ibid.*, pp. 241–2.
40 Julius Richter, *Das Buch der deutschen Weltmission*, Gotha, Germany: Klotz, 1934, p. 221.
41 Langhans, *Pietismus und Christenthum*, p. 454.
42 Ludwig Knöpp, 'Die Volkskirche auf dem Missionsfelde: die Antwort deutscher evangelischer Mission auf die Frage nach Aufgabe und Ziel', PhD thesis, Giessen, 1938, pp. 84–5.
43 For a history of the academic study of comparative religion, see Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative religion: a history*, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986. For a critical examination of how religion was 'invented' in the crucible of Western imperialism, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
44 For a good overview and assessment of Müller's career, see Tomoko Masuzawa, 'Our master's voice: F. Max Müller after a hundred years of solitude', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 15, 2003, pp. 305–28.
45 *Ibid.*, pp. 315–16.

Ernst Buss remained convinced of the superiority of Christian civilization. For them, Christian missionaries had primarily failed in understanding the essence of other cultures. With better knowledge, they could more easily assert Christianity's superiority.

Liberals thus saw the process of 'civilizing' and 'Christianizing' as marching hand in hand.[46] To be effective, missionary work had to cooperate with secular, colonial authorities to build institutions such as hospitals and universities, and thus fulfil the double role of bringing Western civilization and Christianity to the rest of the world.[47] Liberals accused Pietists of being stuck in the past: the Pietist approach to missions was unscientific and backward, of no benefit to the converts in the colonies. Liberals hoped to replace what they considered as a confessionally narrow, outdated form of Christianity with a more 'rationalist', and therefore more 'universalist', form of Christianity.

The vehemence with which the liberals attacked Pietist missions helps to explain Warneck's strategy of entrenching *Missionswissenschaft* in the academy. He understood that establishing centres that promoted Pietist missions within academic institutions could legitimize the Pietist approach in the face of attacks by liberal academic theologians like Müller. In turn, he accused liberal missionaries of promoting secularism in disguise. Focusing on secular institutions diverted attention from the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, which itself was universal. Jesus exhorted the apostles to 'make disciples', not scholars, of all non-Christians. The liberal emphasis on elite education in the colonies perverted the egalitarian, universal command of Jesus to convert all people, regardless of class and educational status.[48]

Furthermore, Warneck criticized the type of Christianity that liberals such as Müller and Langhans hoped to export. In 1879, he called Max Müller's attacks on Pietism a reflection of the *Kulturkampf* over the place of scriptural, 'biblical Christianity' in the modern world.[49] Warneck rejected the idea that mission meant civilizational 'development' or 'Europeanization'. He argued that missionary schools should teach in native languages, rather than European languages.[50] He believed that the 'biblical', traditional, and historical Christianity that Müller rejected underpinned the foundations of modern society. Pietism, for Warneck, was hardly at odds with a modern cultural worldview.

Liberal Protestants and Pietists found common ground in their hatred of Catholicism. Warneck wrote multiple rabidly anti-Catholic tracts throughout the 1880s, warning of a coming clash between the 'ultramontanes and us'. Just as it seemed that the *Kulturkampf* was going to subside in the 1880s, Warneck warned Protestants not to be complacent. 'The peace between the ultramontanes and us Protestants', he wrote in 1884, 'is an illusion.' He called 'the battle with Rome … one of the central wars of the future', and exhorted the Germans to continue their campaign against Catholicism.[51] Liberal Protestants were equally, if even more vehemently, anti-Catholic. They waged a sustained campaign against the Catholics after the

46 Johannes C. Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft*, Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967, p. 82.
47 Knöpp, 'Die Volkskirche auf dem Missionsfelde', pp. 84–5.
48 See Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk*, p. 79.
49 Ulrich Berner, 'Religionsgeschichte und Mission: zur Kontroverse zwischen Ernst Troeltsch und Gustav Warneck', in Volker Drehsen and Walter Sparn, eds., *Vom Weltbildwandel zur Weltanschauungsanalyse*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996, p. 106.
50 Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk*, p. 94.
51 Gustav Warneck, *Protestantische Beleuchtung der römischen Angriffe auf die evangelische Heidenmission: ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik ultramontaner Geschichtsschreibung*, Gütersloh, Germany: C. Bertelsmann, 1884, p. 504.

middle of the nineteenth century, seeing Catholics as enemies of modernity. As Michael Gross has shown, liberals like the influential Swiss jurist Johann Bluntschli compared the Catholic church to an 'aging lady', as opposed to liberalism, which appeared as a 'young man, assertive and in the prime of life'.[52]

Schmidlin thus understood that he needed more than institutional imprimaturs to defend Catholic missions against Protestant attacks. What use was a university affiliation if Protestant critics saw Catholic theologians as subject to papal control? He had to justify Catholic missions by using the same language that liberal and conservative Protestants deployed: the language of 'science'. Thus, in the very first issue of the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, he referred to the enterprise of Catholic *Missionswissenschaft* as one of uncovering and deploying a systematic, scientific knowledge to defend Catholic missions against Protestant attacks.

Even in Schmidlin's earliest writings in the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, he acknowledged the importance of Warneck's work, but he also sought to distinguish Catholic missionary approaches from Warneck's. Many 'inconsistencies and contradictions' muddied Warneck's thinking.[53] Schmidlin argued that the abstruseness of Warneck's ideas stemmed 'thoroughly from the principles of the Reformation'. Protestants prized 'subjectivity and individuality' over 'objectivity'. For Schmidlin, the debates between *Einzelbekhrung* and *Volkschristianisierung* reflected the fragmented denominational landscape of Protestantism. Naturally, Schmidlin pointed out, missionaries had to do *both*: they needed to convert both the individual and society.

Without a central, hierarchical church body to oversee and conduct the Protestant missions, Protestant missionaries could be driven individually by missionary organizations that had different agendas or perspectives. For Schmidlin, this decentralization would lead to unnecessary competition, and the missionary societies would undercut each other in the colonies. This competition would only confuse the individual converts and the societies that missionaries faced. When meeting a Protestant missionary, an individual convert would not know if the missionary represented 'private interests' or 'state interests', or whether they represented the British or German empire. In the Catholic world, Schmidlin argued, these divisions made no difference to the indigenous convert. Catholic mission 'is a matter for the entire Church'.[54] Catholics were not bound to the 'government consensus or colonial interest', but rather to the call to evangelization of the world.[55] Only the Catholic church, with its 'hierarchical organization', could bring about 'order and righteousness'.[56]

The universal Catholic church required an equally universal missionary methodology. Schmidlin argued that the work of Catholic missionary theorists could develop 'scientific methods' that could serve as a 'compass to guide all denominations', both Protestant and Catholic.[57] The claim to science was a way to transcend confessional conflict; it reflected his hope to rise above the inter-confessional and intra-confessional conflict that he saw wracking

52 Michael B. Gross, *The war against Catholicism: liberalism and the anti-Catholic imagination in nineteenth-century Germany*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 202.
53 Josef Schmidlin, 'System und Zweige der Missionswissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 1, 1911, p. 106.
54 Josef Schmidlin, *Die katholischen Missionen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, Münster: Aschendorff, 1913, p. 9.
55 *Ibid.*
56 Josef Schmidlin, 'Die katholische Missionswissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 1, 1911, p. 12.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the German religious landscape. In a Germany where Catholicism was still suspect, considered unmodern and backwards, science was a mantle that Schmidlin invoked for Catholic missions.

Thus, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catholics, liberals Protestants, and Pietists all jostled to claim the mantle of 'science'. Pietists labelled their approach 'scientific' to deflect liberal Protestant claims of Pietist backwardness; liberal Protestants developed their own 'science of religion' to justify their approaches to cross-religious comparisons; Catholic missionary theologians sought to establish their 'missionary science' to bolster the universal claims of the Catholic church. 'Universalism' and 'science' were both ways to legitimize their own confessional approaches while undercutting the claims of their rivals. Behind the rhetoric of scientific universalism and rationality lay the brutal reality of a competitive religious landscape and conflicting visions for the souls that they hoped to convert.

Defending empire

These academic debates over 'science' and 'universalism' had political implications that ranged beyond the echo chambers of academia. After the Berlin Conference of 1885, and with the onset of the 'scramble for Africa', German colonial officials realized that missionary organizations could serve as effective partners in extending European influence abroad. Udi Greenberg has shown that the Berlin Act of 1885 gave Christian missionaries 'access to all territories and the special protection of colonial rulers, regardless of their nationality'.[58]

Missionaries, in turn, saw the benefits of empire. Missionary work was expensive – it was difficult to train, send, equip, and protect missionaries in the colonies – and missionary societies knew that state support could aid their work. For the most part, all missionaries, regardless of confession, knew that the levers of empire could help them. But missionaries often supported empire out of more than just a sense of convenience: they also found common ideological cause with imperial power. As Greenberg has pointed out, Protestant missionaries were crucial to the process of reformulating 'the civilizing mission in transnational terms'.[59] For the most part, Christian missionaries agreed that the colonial state was a vehicle that they could use, if harnessed correctly, to help bring universal truth claims into reality.

In Germany, liberals, Pietists, and Catholics all jockeyed for patronage from the German empire. At first, Pietist missionaries were the most effective at mobilizing the institutions that they had established for the effort. In 1885, Pietist missionary organizations joined together to form the Protestant Missionary Council, and Warneck was elected as its first chairman. Through the Council, Warneck regularly sought to influence colonial policy. He and the Protestant Missionary Council were not just uncomplicated boosters of empire, however. As Jeremy Best has shown, Protestant missionaries aimed to clearly delineate their work of evangelization from that of direct colonization.[60]

In the 1880s and 1890s, before Schmidlin had appeared on the scene, individual Catholic missionary societies also sought to enter German colonies. Catholic missionary leaders examined the international missionary landscape in the 1880s and 1890s, and they saw the overwhelming dominance of the French. In China, for example, Catholic missionaries needed

58 Greenberg, 'Protestants', p. 319.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 322.
60 Best, 'Godly, international, and independent', pp. 595–6.

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to apply for passports from the French Protectorate, which naturally favoured French missionaries over other nationalities. Germans missionaries knew that if they wanted a foothold in colonial holdings abroad, they had to curb French influence. The only vehicle that they could rely upon to stymie the influence of the French lay with the German Reich.[61]

Domestically, German Catholics saw within the colonies an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the newly founded Reich, and a way to undercut Bismarck's antagonism towards Catholics. Catholic missionary societies, such as the Pallotine Fathers, petitioned to be granted permission to engage in the civilizing mission in Cameroon. Bismarck, even though he had long recognized that his *Kulturkampf* had been fruitless and was engaging in a series of *rapprochements* with the Vatican, argued that German Catholic missionaries should be denied access to German colonies in Africa. He claimed that 'international organizations' like the Jesuits were actually French agents, working to undercut the influence of Germans abroad. In the Reichstag, the Catholic Centre Party politicians Peter Reichensperger and Ludwig Windthorst defended the presence of Catholic missions in the colonies. They argued that Catholic missionaries could be essential partners in helping the German colonialists with 'civilizing' the Africans.[62]

The possible presence of Catholic missionaries in Cameroon alarmed Warneck, who feared that they would undermine the work of Protestant missionaries in the colonies. He argued that the mobilization of German Catholics to enter the colonies signalled a re-ignition of the *Kulturkampf*. He warned the 'colonial administrators who think that competition between Catholics and Protestants will benefit the colonies' that 'our Jesuit enemies' were 'mobilizing on behalf of the papacy, in preparation for an apocalyptic battle'.[63]

But Pietists like Warneck were not only competing with the Catholics for support from the German empire. In 1900, Warneck and the Pietists themselves also came under attack from liberals for their attempts to influence the colonial state. In the wake of the Boxer Uprising, German missionaries and colonial officials were grappling with the fallout from the surge of colonial violence in China. A debate emerged in the Reichstag and in the public press over whether missionaries were culpable for instigating the violence. Liberal German Protestants, such as Ernst Troeltsch, an influential member of the 'history of religions' school (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), blamed the Pietists and their aggressive approach to evangelization for exacerbating tensions with local Chinese officials and the Qing government. Troeltsch claimed that Pietists threatened to undermine the entire Western enterprise in China. Warneck defended the missionaries, maintaining that they had operated independently of Western imperial ambitions.[64] Mud-slinging from both sides ensued, each claiming that the other side was more culpable for the violence that they had witnessed.

61 For more on the French Protectorate and tensions with German Catholics, see Young, *Ecclesiastical colony*, pp. 62–8; Horst Gründer, *Christliche Mission und deutscher Imperialismus: eine politische Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen während der deutschen Kolonialzeit (1884–1914) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Afrikas und Chinas*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1982; Karl Josef Rivinius, *Weltlicher Schutz und Mission: das Deutsche Protektorat über die Katholische Mission von Süd-Shantung*, Cologne: Böhlau, 1987.

62 Michael Schubert, *Der schwarze Fremd: das Bild des Schwarzafrikaners in der parlamentarischen und publizistischen Kolonialdiskussion in Deutschland von den 1870er bis in die 1930er Jahre*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003, pp. 158–60.

63 Warneck, *Protestantische Beleuchtung*, p. 1. See also Armin Owzar, 'Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam in German East Africa', in Dujardin and Prudhomme, *Mission and science*, p. 356.

64 For a good overview of the entire debate between Warneck and Troeltsch, see Berner, 'Religionsgeschichte und Mission'.

Schmidlin followed these debates closely, and when he founded the chair of missionary theology at Münster, he immediately sought to solidify his relationship with the German empire. He owed his job to the German state: the Prussian cultural minister had approached the university to set up courses in German Catholic missionary work. But, more importantly, Schmidlin immediately understood that a connection with the German Reich could serve to legitimize his work in the eyes of the Protestants. Garnering further influence with the German empire, and overcoming the prejudice that German Protestants held towards Catholics, would place the entire German Catholic missionary enterprise on more solid footing domestically. He also saw the German state as a convenient vehicle to help the expansion of German Catholic missionary influence abroad.

Schmidlin's dedication to the German Reich is on display in his 1913 book, *Die katholischen Missionen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten* (*Catholic missions in the German protectorates*). He published the book to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kaiser Wilhelm II's ascension to the throne, and he used the opportunity to acknowledge the official state support that the German empire had offered the theological faculty. The stated goal in the book was to advertise the 'cultural contributions' of German Catholic missions within the 'learned public', who knew so little of the 'religious, cultural, colonial, and national significance' of German Catholic missions.[65]

In the book, Schmidlin argued that Catholic missionaries and the secular colonial state were mutually beneficial. The colonies offered a space where 'national and religious interests are bound together'. The goals of the colonies could only be achieved through a 'religious orientation', and through a 'harmonious synthesis' between religious ideals and patriotic ones.[66] For Schmidlin, national interests and German Catholic missionary interests were inseparable from one another. Being involved in the 'international work' of missions did not contradict patriotism.[67]

Schmidlin turned to history to make the case for a close linkage between German evangelization and imperialism, arguing that 'mission and colonization have throughout time been tied to each other'.[68] During the Middle Ages, the Benedictines, Cistercians, and Norbertines had elevated the German tribes from barbarism to a civilized state. By combining the 'benefits of religion with true culture', each missionary organization had brought a 'solid, sustaining, real colonization'. In return, the colonizing powers had elevated these 'lower cultures to a higher form' of civilization. Similarly, modern Catholic missionaries in the German colonies could, 'through the light of the Gospels', inculcate within the 'native population' the 'virtues of hard work'. A whole host of 'cultural advantages' would follow: 'farming, industry, modern transportation, social welfare, education, morality'.[69]

Moreover, for Schmidlin, the advance of German Catholic missionary work abroad could help to revive religious sentiment at home. Because of the *Kulturkampf*, many Catholics had become afraid of demonstrating their commitment both to the papacy and to the Reich. Catholics felt that they had to choose between two competing powers. 'The colonial movement' could help to spark a new 'missionary spirit' in Germany. Schmidlin proposed that,

65 Schmidlin, *Die katholischen Missionen*, p. XIV.
66 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
67 *Ibid.*
68 *Ibid.*
69 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

through the work of missionaries in the colonies, Catholics in Germany would begin to see development of missionary work in the colonies and religious sentiment in Germany as 'inseparable'.[70]

Schmidlin also used the publication to refute what he considered were misconceptions about Catholic missionary involvement in the colonial enterprise. Protestants and colonial politicians criticized the 'international character of German Catholic missions', claiming that they were under the control of the Vatican. German politicians portrayed Jesuits as fifth columnists, intending to undermine the workings of the German nation. Schmidlin refuted these claims, arguing that the papacy does not wield an 'unrestricted missionary power' but rather allows missionary organs to operate with 'relative independence'.[71] He pointed out that the membership of their societies was often more purely 'German' than their Protestant counterparts.[72]

Yet Schmidlin did not see Protestants solely as objects of competition. He also recognized them as potential collaborators with regard to the missions. He praised Warneck for raising the profile of missions within German popular culture. Through missionary festivals, publications, and, most importantly, the establishment of missions in an academic milieu, Warneck had helped German missionaries gain a broad acceptance among the educated classes. Warneck's work of convincing the broader German public that missionary work was a worthwhile investment of the empire's resources gave Catholics a space to operate.[73]

One finds in Schmidlin's writing a constant appeal to his Protestant counterparts. He sought to prove the 'German-ness' of Catholic missionary societies and raised the possibility of a 'positive cooperation' with German Protestants in the empire.[74] But the shadow of the *Kulturkampf* looms over his work. Schmidlin saw the main goal of Catholic missionaries as being to overturn Protestant suspicions of German Catholics conspiring against the interests of the nation-state. German Catholics and Protestants could find common cause in the civilizing mission in the colonies, and work towards the 'universal' goal of bringing Christianity and European culture to the colonies. To forge this unity required an explicit political commitment. Schmidlin pointed to the examples of Bismarck and Windthorst, who ended their squabbles inside Germany and turned their attentions towards the international and colonial sphere, as an example of such political cooperation.[75]

Thus, for Schmidlin, 'ecumenical' cooperation emerged in the context of the German colonial empire. He was dismissive of the 'international missionary solidarity' on display at the Edinburgh conference. National rivalries were too difficult to overcome; national bonds trumped confessional or denominational agreements. He claimed that cross-confessional cooperation could only succeed within the framework and boundaries of the nation-state. International cooperation, disconnected from actual organs of political and imperial power, was impractical for Schmidlin. The only way for German Catholic missionary work to succeed was to appeal to the German nation and to mobilize German national support.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
71 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
72 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
73 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
74 Schmidlin, 'Die katholische Missionswissenschaft', p. 16.
75 Schmidlin, *Die katholischen Missionen*, p. 2.

A strengthened nationalism

The First World War further strengthened Schmidlin's nationalism. During the war, he published regular reports on the state of missions in the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, to give his readership an overview of how German missionaries were faring. In these overviews, he portrayed the work of German Protestants and Catholics as indelibly linked. German Catholic and Protestant missionaries consistently appear as victims, dominated by the other leading international powers.[76] The British, with their overwhelming power on the sea, prevented German missionaries from freely travelling to and from their stations. Similarly, he complained that the French pursued anti-clerical policies, forcing Catholic priests into military service. In contrast, the war had 'hardly affected' the work of Anglo-American missionaries, just as it had barely made a dent on the progress of French Catholic missionaries abroad.[77]

Feeling beleaguered by these international foes, Schmidlin sought to build bridges and alliances with his German Protestant compatriots during the war. He invited German Protestants to attend missionary conferences. He also reviewed and publicized the writings of his Protestant competitors. In return, Protestants began to reach out to Catholics as well. A leading Protestant missionary theorist, Julius Richter, wrote that, because of Schmidlin's writing, the Protestant world had become aware of the 'awful suffering in Catholic missionary efforts. One comes to the strong impression that Schmidlin is right: The world war could destroy Catholic missionary work.'[78]

Schmidlin also actively opposed the organization of Catholic missions along international rather than national lines. During the war, the Jesuits hoped to revive the Francis Xavier Association, an organization that sought to establish closer relationships between German and French Jesuits. The Jesuits saw the fragmented missionary landscape as a symptom of the 'particularistic claims' of the various missionary organizations in the field. Schmidlin was sceptical of the Xavier movement, and did not believe that their plans to 'centralize' the mission would be effective. He used the entire resources of the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* to engage in what his later biographer, Karl Müller, has called a 'public polemic against the Jesuits'.[79] Schmidlin justified his opposition to the Xavier Association by claiming that it threatened the entire German missionary establishment. Organizing missionary work along transnational bonds represented a form of 'secularization', a complete separation of church and state. He saw the Xavier Association's attempts to draw closer to France as an 'unnecessary fracturing and weakening' of the status of missionary work within the German empire, because he believed that it would turn the German empire against supporting the Catholic missions.[80] As the leading German missionary theorist, Schmidlin's opposition to the movement left it as good as dead.[81]

Schmidlin's nationalistic outlook remained unshaken with the end of the war, and Germany's defeat gave him the opportunity to solidify his bonds with German Protestants. He joined forces with prominent German Protestant missionaries like Karl Axenfeld to criticize

76 Josef Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission im Weltkrieg*, München-Gladbach: Volksvereins-Verlag, 1915, p. 70.
77 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
78 Cited in Müller, *Josef Schmidlin*, p. 142.
79 *Ibid.*, p. 159. As part of this campaign, Schmidlin refused to publish Jesuit opinions in the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*.
80 Rivinius, *Weltlicher Schutz und Mission*, pp. 79–80.
81 Müller, *Josef Schmidlin*, p. 165.

the treatment of German missionaries in the Versailles Treaty. Their immediate target was Article 438, which transferred German holdings to Anglo-American trusteeship, and had indeed served to interrupt the normal operations of German missionaries abroad. Schmidlin called the Versailles Treaty a 'death blow against the German missions'. He was unrelenting in his criticism of the victorious powers. He accused the French, driven by their 'hatred of the church', of thoroughly destroying German missionary work. He claimed that more than 3,000 French missionaries had been sent from the colonies back to France, that the secular French Republic had shut down missionary houses, and that the French jailed German Catholics, thoroughly disrupting the work of German Catholicism abroad.[82] He reported that German Protestants did not fare any better: 'The German Protestants were put in prisoner-of-war camps, their missionary holdings confiscated.'[83]

Schmidlin's resentment towards the post-war settlement did not abate. In a 1926 article, he argued that, since the war had ended, the position of German missionaries throughout the world had 'worsened'.[84] He pointed to the Treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye, which had revised the Berlin Act of 1885 and the Brussels Declaration of 1890. But after the war, Anglo-American and French missionaries retained complete freedom of access to the Congo basin, so that the Germans were now competing on an unequal playing field. As a way to fulfil their 'humanitarian duty', he exhorted German Protestant and Catholic missionaries to bind together and lobby the League of Nations to restore the Germans to the 'full freedom' that German missionaries had enjoyed before the First World War.[85] In short, Schmidlin evinced nostalgia for the period of high imperialism, when German missionaries were allowed unrestricted access to the African continent.

But the war did alter some of Schmidlin's ideas about the relationship between nationalism and internationalism in global missions. Several months after war broke out, he began to warn about the 'ideological, moral, and principal wounds' that the war had inflicted on Western Christendom.[86] The divisions within Christendom had the potential to ruin the moral legitimacy that Christianity could claim over the colonies. Schmidlin wrote that non-Christians in the colonies could 'with good reason call Christianity bankrupt'.[87] Quoting an anti-Christian editorial, he noted that Chinese intellectuals had issued a statement that defiantly criticized European civilization: 'The Europeans calls us barbarians. But it seems to us that if the end of European civilization is only destruction, then it is better to remain barbarians.'[88]

Seeing the possible demise of Christianity in the colonies, Schmidlin began to modify his thinking about cooperation among different missionary nations. He called for the creation of more 'international missionary solidarity'.[89] He argued that the war had shown the destructive nature of 'extreme nationalism', and that peace could only be achieved by stressing the 'international character' that 'transcends nation, race, and language'. A 'cosmopolitan Christianity' could help to ensure a lasting world peace. International Christian missions

82 Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission*, p. 87. See also Josef Schmidlin, 'Rückblick auf die Kriegsgeschichte der Weltmission', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 9, 1919, p. 40.
83 Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission*, p. 87.
84 Josef Schmidlin, 'Die Missionsfrage vor dem Völkerbund', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 16, 1926, p. 317.
85 *Ibid.*, p. 318.
86 Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission*, p. 14.
87 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
88 *Ibid.*
89 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

could, along with new international organizations such as the League of Nations, help eliminate the 'nationalist chauvinism' that had helped to foment the world war.

But Schmidlin still cleaved to his pre-war views of the superiority of European civilization, insisting that only 'the Christianization of all people' could ensure world peace. Christian missionaries, as bringers of European ideals, had the duty to implant 'true freedom, equality, and brotherhood' in non-Christian countries.[90] For him, the fate of the world hinged on Christian evangelization, as he believed that a bigger threat to world peace loomed on the horizon: the rise of competing religions. He warned of the growth of anti-colonial movements threatening the supremacy of the West: 'We see the brown Indians and the yellow Japanese widely support the calls that they are equal to white Europeans and how they are striving to become great powers.'[91] With global Christendom in decline, Schmidlin feared that instead the world would be split among 'new groupings, organized along religious ideology'.[92] He saw in Japan Europe's biggest threat. He believed that Japan was going to turn its modern, militarized weapons back on the West, and employ its power to spread Buddhism and Shintoism.[93] He also warned of the threat of Soviet Russia, which sought to undermine religion more broadly.[94] Collectively, the rise of these 'heathenish cults' represented the greatest danger to the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

Western Christian missionaries thus needed to band together and try to act as a bulwark against the rise of other rival religions. For Schmidlin, 'cosmopolitan Christianity' was simultaneously a defensive and an offensive move. It would help to consolidate Christianity in Europe, while also spreading it abroad. Schmidlin thus became intensely interested to foster such international solidarity within the Protestant world, and it is evident from his publications that he was a voracious reader of Protestant writings. The *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, which he continued to edit, published regular reviews of the activities, journals, and conferences of the Protestant ecumenical movement. Schmidlin commissioned or published annual reports of Protestant publications, offering detailed round-ups of all of the major developments within the Protestant world.[95] The journal also issued special reports on major ecumenical gatherings. One German Catholic missionary pored over the eight-volume report that the International Missionary Council produced after the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, presenting to the readers of the *Zeitschrift* a schematic overview of the conference proceedings.[96]

While Schmidlin viewed the Protestant ecumenical movement with interest, he found little to admire in it. He argued that Protestants 'cannot teach us what they want to learn from us'.[97] For him, the Protestant ecumenical movement was but a pale imitation of what the Roman Catholic Church offered – a transnational, international coordinating organization. Yet Protestant ecumenical organizations like the International Missionary Council did not have

90 Josef Schmidlin, 'Weltfrieden und Weltmission', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 9, 1919, p. 2.
91 Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission*, p. 16.
92 Schmidlin, 'Weltfrieden und Weltmission', p. 3.
93 See Josef Schmidlin, 'Missionslage und Missionsaufgaben angesichts des Friedens', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 9, 1919, p. 78.
94 On fears of the Russian Revolution, see Josef Schmidlin, 'Deutsche Missionsperspektiven', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 9, 1919, p. 62. On fears of the Japanese, see Schmidlin, 'Rückblick', pp. 56–7.
95 For one detailed example, see 'Missionsrundschau: die protestantischen Missionen (1932–1934)', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 25, 1935, pp. 37–51.
96 Johannes Thauren, 'Der protestantische Konferenzbericht des internationalen Missionsrates in Jerusalem', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 19, 1929, pp. 381–4.
97 Josef Schmidlin, 'Zum Wettbewerb der katholischen mit der deutschen evangelischen Mission', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 24, 1934, p. 73.

the binding theological authority or power that the Vatican had. Drawing on his pre-war criticism of Protestant ecclesiology, Schmidlin also saw the Protestant ecumenical world as plagued by factionalism. Other Catholic missionaries agreed with his assessment. One German Jesuit, commenting on the Jerusalem Conference for the *Zeitschrift*, wrote that, without a centralizing power like the Vatican that offered pronouncements on orthodox belief, the Protestant missionary field was prone to the influences of 'syncretism' and 'secularism'.[98]

The Protestant ecumenical movement lacked another crucial element: geopolitical power. For Schmidlin, traditional imperial structures remained the best way to foster a 'cosmopolitan Christianity'. But which European empire could missionaries trust? Certainly not the French Third Republic, which Schmidlin felt had demonstrated its commitment to secularism and anti-clericalism through its wartime behaviour. The 'Anglo-Saxon-liberal Protestant' missionaries were also not to be trusted. Their liberal theology represented a 'subjectively syncretic dilution' of Christianity, and Catholics needed to devote their entire efforts to rooting out these false doctrines.[99]

Schmidlin further argued not only that the French and the Anglo-Americans had betrayed Western Christendom through their watered-down theology, but also that the British and the French had politically made an alliance that could eventually portend the ruin of Western Christianity. By drawing on Senegalese, Indian, and Japanese troops, they were unleashing a 'foreign and racial hatred against Europeans'. He asserted that the British had been the prime hypocrites. Schmidlin criticized the British, 'who always claimed to carry the banner of Christianity and the burden of the white man' but joined in an 'unnatural pairing' with the Japanese. Through their alliance, German missionaries, who had served as a 'bulwark' against 'heathenish Japan' throughout Asia, had been removed from Qingdao and put in prison. Now with a free hand in northern China, the 'religious politics of the Japanese will push for the advance of Buddhism through the region'.[100]

Ever the German nationalist, Schmidlin proposed that Germany should take the lead in international missions. Wilfully ignoring the colonial violence that had exploded in the German colonies, he argued that before the First World War there was a 'solidarity between the white races and the coloured and non-Christian'.[101] As losers in the First World War, Germany had the moral legitimacy to lead Western Christendom in its civilizing mission, as it had not forged any alliances with indigenous troops. Germany, with its 'deeper' theological approach to Christianity and its 'deep understanding of Christian missions', could provide a 'convincing bulwark and a model of objective, positive Christianity' for the world.[102]

Catholic challenges to Schmidlin

In Catholic circles outside Germany, Schmidlin's nationalistic approach came under increasing criticism after the First World War, as a new approach to missionary work appeared in the Catholic world. As Giuliana Chamedes has shown, the Vatican emerged as a major

98 A. Väth, 'Die protestantische Missionskonferenz auf dem Ölberg', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 18, 1928, p. 353.
99 Schmidlin, 'Missionslage', p. 74.
100 Schmidlin, *Die christliche Weltmission*, p. 16.
101 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
102 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

international diplomatic force in the 1920s. Pope Benedict XV saw missionary work as a way for the Vatican to extend its influence, and the Pope's 1919 apostolic letter, *Maximum illud*, reinvigorated Catholic missionary circles. In it, Benedict, who had been influenced by Belgian Lazarist missionaries in China seeking to curtail the influence of the French Protectorate, directly repudiated the alliance of nationalist and imperialist goals with missionary ones: 'We have been deeply saddened by some recent accounts of missionary life, accounts that displayed more zeal for the profit of some particular nation than for the growth of the kingdom of God.'[103] Benedict's line was further reiterated in his successor Pius XI's papal encyclical *Rerum ecclesiae*, arguing that missionaries needed to dissociate themselves from the imperial ambitions of the nation-state. In the 1920s, missionaries in Belgium, particularly Jesuits at the Catholic University of Leuven, led by Pierre Charles and Théodore Monnens, similarly began to challenge Schmidlin's approach.[104]

On the surface, the 'Louvain school' and the 'Münster school' shared many common causes. For instance, both Schmidlin and Charles advanced a broadly anti-secular critique of Western societies, and were deeply critical of the 'materialism' and secularism that 'divided' European society.[105] Their disagreements seemed largely minor, a squabble over technicalities. The Catholics replayed the arguments that liberal and conservative Protestants waged over *Einzelbekehrung* and *Volkschristianisierung* in the nineteenth century. Pierre Charles criticized Schmidlin's endorsement of *Einzelbekehrung*, claiming that it sounded too similar to Protestant approaches to conversion. He proposed that Catholics should instead focus on 'church plantation', building ecclesiastical structures that encouraged indigenous participation.[106]

Central to the Louvain school's attacks on the Münster school was the question of how missionaries should relate to their imperialistic past. Charles argued that the nineteenth-century approach to mission saw non-Christians as objects of conquest. By obsessing over statistics on the numbers of non-Christians converted, or the territories won, missionary groups employed the logic of imperialistic conquest. In this new age, when missionaries had to disentangle themselves from imperialist goals, the missionary establishment required new approaches.

Echoing the arguments of liberal Protestants like Max Müller and Troeltsch several decades earlier, Charles argued that missionaries ought to engage in inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue with Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Furthermore, missionaries needed to turn towards an indigenous clergy, and foster a non-European form of Christianity. 'The indigenous clergy should be our first priority in missions … he is the point of departure', Charles exhorted.[107] No longer should Europeans see the indigenous clergy as backwards: 'the indigenous clergy, particularly Asians, are just as intelligent in the realm of high theology as the middling European'.[108] Charles railed against the 'dogma of the European

103 Benedict XV, 'Maximum illud', Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World, 30 November 1919, §20, text available at http://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm (consulted 20 March 2018).
104 For more on the founding of Belgian missiology, see An Vandenberghe, 'Beyond Pierre Charles: the emergence of Belgian missiology refined', in Dujardin and Prudhomme, *Mission and science*, pp. 151–70.
105 See, for example, August Schmidlin, *Katholische Weltmission und deutsche Kultur*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany: Herder, 1925, pp. 6–7; and Pierre Charles, *Les dossiers de l'action missionaire: manuel de missiologie*, Louvain: Editions de l'AUCAM, 1938, pp. 211–12.
106 See Pham, *Towards an ecumenical paradigm*, pp. 141–4.
107 Pierre Charles, *Missiologie*, Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1939, p. 101.
108 *Ibid*., p. 102.

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superiority' and the absolute excellence of a 'Greco-Roman culture', and appealed to European missionaries to engage with Indian and Chinese philosophy.[109]

Schmidlin, in contrast, cleaved to the idea of European superiority. While he agreed with Charles that an indigenous church, 'deeply rooted in its native soil, independent of foreign tutelage and as indigenous as possible, is the goal which the Catholic missions should ever keep in view', he argued that Catholic missionaries erred when they sought to bring about independence too quickly.[110] Often the indigenous clergy were not ready to assume the mantle of independent leadership. Echoing the ideas of Gustav Warneck, who also believed in a more gradual approach to fostering indigenous Christian independence, and who clung to the superiority of European culture, Schmidlin argued that, to bring non-European churches to 'full Christian maturity', the situation necessitated a 'clearly conceived and long prepared plan'.[111]

And it was here that Schmidlin conceived of the contribution that German Catholic missions could make in the international sphere: they could serve as spiritual guides. German missionaries needed to bring 'German thoroughness, depth, inwardness, sobriety, adaptability, modernity, and orderliness' to the rest of the world, and offer themselves as 'meaningful examples for all of human civilization'.[112] While German missionaries were of course obliged to be aware of the international interests of the global Catholic church, the German missionary should remain 'an apologist for German culture'. Schmidlin exhorted the German missionary to stay 'a servant both of global Catholicism and of the noblest and most potent facets of German culture'.[113] He asserted that 'the Catholic missions are a civilizing factor of the first rank: they are thus necessarily, and sometimes even unconsciously, a valuable confederate of political and national interests – of colonial powers in their colonial possessions and of the native authorities in autonomous lands'.[114] Schmidlin continued to preach European, and more specifically German, chauvinism.

By the 1930s, Schmidlin's approaches to global Catholic missions seemed increasingly anachronistic. He himself remarked on how his approach to mission was becoming marginalized. In a trip to China in 1930, he wrote that a 'new, more spiritual approach that focused on indigenous clergy', as favoured by the Belgian Lazarists, had challenged 'older, more political and material' missionary methods.[115] He lamented that the 'Catholic cultural and civilizing mission' had been underfunded, and that resources for the work were lacking. The central players in the Vatican favoured the newer methods. When Celso Costantini, a proponent of a more rapid indigenization of the church in China, became the Secretary of the Propaganda Fide (the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) in 1935, it was clear that Schmidlin's camp had lost favour with the Vatican.

The movements within the Catholic missionary world after the Second World War only seem to further reflect Schmidlin's marginalization. As Dana Robert has noted, at the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church decentralized its approach to missions, clearly embracing an agenda of indigenization and multiculturalism.[116] Pierre Charles' missiology echoed throughout the transformations of Catholic missionary work.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.
110 Joseph Schmidlin, *Catholic mission theory*, trans. Matthias Braun, Techny, IL: Mission Press, 1931, p. 294.
111 *Ibid.* On Warneck's ideas of European superiority, see Greenberg, 'Protestants', pp. 322–3.
112 Schmidlin, *Katholische Weltmission*, pp. 11–12.
113 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
114 Schmidlin, *Catholic mission theory*, p. 337.
115 Josef Schmidlin, *Von meiner ostasiatischen Weltmissionsreise*, Münster: Aschendorff, 1930, p. 30.
116 See Dana L. Robert, *Christian mission: how Christianity became a world religion*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p. 71.

But in certain ways, Schmidlin's missionary theories lived on, particularly in his willingness to consider Protestant missionary methods. His approach presaged the increasingly cross-confessional cooperation of the ecumenical movement after the Second World War. The Second Vatican Council, besides representing a turn towards the indigenous church, also signalled a watershed moment in Catholic–Protestant relations.[117] Schmidlin's openness to cooperation and collaboration with Protestants in the 1920s was prescient, putting him at odds with other missionary theorists of his age. Pierre Charles, for example, rejected any possible cooperation with Protestants. Immediately after the First World War, Charles spurned attempts to forge cross-confessional solidarity between orthodox Lutherans and Catholics. He wrote that the Catholics should not be fooled by Protestant calls for cross-confessional collaboration, because 'Alas! Luther fails, he fails so often.'[118] As a Belgian Catholic, resentful of the German wartime occupation, Charles saw no possibility for compromise with Protestantism.

Twenty years later, Charles' hatred towards Protestantism had not softened. In 1938, he wrote that, 'despite the immensity of efforts by Protestants, they can boast few proper religious results'.[119] He argued that 'rational modernism' had ravaged the Anglo-American missions, 'reducing proper Protestant missions to a vast philanthropic enterprise'. Moreover, 'racism had killed the essence of German Protestantism'. The 'sterility' of Protestant missionaries stemmed from Protestant 'doctrine' itself, from its 'essence'.[120] Charles remained committed to his anti-Protestantism well into the 1930s, because he saw no possible collaboration within the transnational context, as Protestants did not have a central organizing church body to coordinate between Protestants and Catholics in an international and transnational context.

Confessional loyalty suffused the Protestant world as well. The 1910 Edinburgh conference, along with the subsequent international missionary conferences in the 1920s and 1930s, was convened to foster interdenominational unity within the Protestant world. The goal was to unite Swedish, Dutch, German, British, and American Protestants, and to seek solutions to end cross-national rivalries between Protestant missionary societies. For the most part, it was not until after the Second World War that Protestant missionaries sought to bridge their divides with Catholicism.[121] In the 1920s, Schmidlin's commitment to learn from Protestants remained an outlier.

Conclusion

Schmidlin's career shows how imperialism cast a long shadow over the Catholic missionary world well into the 1930s. Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* had left an indelible mark on German Catholics, who believed that, to carry out their work and vision, they should collaborate with newly founded nation-states. The nineteenth century also demonstrated the seductive power of European imperialism. Schmidlin saw that Catholic missionaries needed empire if they wanted to spread their faith rapidly. European empires erected the infrastructure that gave missionaries the ability to travel across the globe and they enforced international legal treaties that

117 Thompson, 'Ecumenism', p. 50.
118 Pierre Charles, *La robe sans couture: un essai de luthéranisme catholique*, Bruges: Ch. Beyaert, 1923, pp. 23, 183.
119 Charles, *Les dossiers*, p. 212.
120 *Ibid.*, p. 410.
121 I am grateful to Udi Greenberg for pointing me to the reluctance on the part of Protestant missionaries to seek cross-confessional collaboration.

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helped missionaries buy property in the colonies. Catholic missionaries also found common cause with the civilizing mission that European imperialism professed. Missionary theologians like Schmidlin thus erected entire institutional academic structures to justify their collaboration with the empire.

In the wake of the First World War, as European imperial hegemony experienced its first major challenges, a new generation of Catholic missionary theorists sought to disentangle Catholic missionary work from the imperialism that missionaries had relied upon. Missionaries saw the writing on the wall: eventually European missionaries would have to turn over their authority to local, indigenous Christians. But there were still contentious debates about how quickly this should proceed, and how and whether Europeans should supervise this process. For missionaries like Schmidlin, Christian global governance depended on the ability of European imperialism to maintain its power; European missionaries still had an important part to play in overseeing the process of indigenization.[122] It was not until after the Second World War, with the European imperial project completely discredited, that missionary theorists definitively unmoored the missionary enterprise from the imperial project and promoted ecumenical cooperation outside the context of the empire and the nation-state. Thus, it took the cataclysms of the Second World War to forge a new ecumenical movement that crossed confessional divides. It was only in the 1960s that both confessional and imperial loyalties ceased to be paramount.

Why did Schmidlin hold on so doggedly to a defence of German nationalism? Here his early biography offers us clues. Born in the borderlands of the newly formed German nation, he was pushed early on to consider his cultural and national loyalties. And the Reich did give him a career. All the institutions in which he was trained and with which he was affiliated throughout his life – from the seminaries in Alsace to the universities in Freiburg and Münster – were located within the context of the new nation-state. The history of the *Kulturkampf* also showed him the precariousness of transnational organizations in a national age. Schmidlin never joined a transnational order like the Society of Jesus, which, defined as the enemy of the nation, was banned in Germany during the *Kulturkampf*.

In a way, Schmidlin's position remained consistent from his youth, when he was preoccupied with the work of Otto von Freising. His solution to the conflict between church and state was Otto's: he advanced a justification for collaborating with the state, arguing that the church could sanctify the state and, at the same time, that the state was not separate from church interests. Through missionary work, the 'metaphysical fusion of the two swords' that Schmidlin admired in Otto's theology was now possible. Germany's defeat in the First World War and the Versailles Treaty only further convinced him that the German nation was beleaguered, disadvantaged by the new international order. His lifelong project was to bind German Catholic missionaries more closely to the power of the German Reich, rather than to disentangle them from it.

The danger of this 'metaphysical fusion' was that the German Reich was taken over by characters outside Schmidlin's late nineteenth-century moral purview. In a series of articles after the Nazi seizure of power, Schmidlin lambasted Nazism as a 'new heathenism'.[123] Refusing to perform the 'Heil Hitler' greeting, he was forced to give up his position at

122 Similar arguments played out in the international diplomatic sphere, as European powers continued to argue that they should supervise the process of decolonization. See Susan Pedersen, *The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

123 Josef Schmidlin, 'Heidenmission und Neuheidentum', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 25, 1935, pp. 1–9.

Münster.[124] His continued opposition to the Nazis led to his imprisonment, torture, and death in a concentration camp. In the end, the German nation-state that Schmidlin had once sought to strengthen turned against him, revealing itself as a fickle ally.

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124 Collet, 'German Catholic mission science', p. 108.

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