
Between ‘National Community’ and ‘Milieu’: German Catholics at War, 1939–1945

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This article examines German Catholics’ sense of community and identity during the Second World War. It analyses how far they were able to reconcile their religious faith with support for Nazism and the German war effort and questions the extent to which Catholicism in the Rhineland and Westphalia represented either a sealed confessional subculture or a homogenising Nazified ‘national community’ (Volksgemeinschaft). The article argues that, in their pure forms, neither of these analytical paradigms accounts for the complexities of German Catholics’ attitudes during this period, which were far more contested and diverse than outlined by much existing historiography. Religious socialisation, Nazi propaganda and older nationalist traditions shaped Catholics’ mentalities during the Third Reich, creating a spectrum of opinion concerning the appropriate relationship between these influences and loyalties. At the level of lived experience, Catholics’ memberships of religious and national communities revealed themselves to be highly compatible, a tendency which in turn exerted a restraining influence on church–state conflict in wartime Germany.

Introduction

On 16 January 1943 Dr Franz Wiemers, a prominent member of Münster’s Nazi Party, attended the funeral of a local member of the National Socialist Motor Corps at a Catholic cemetery on the city’s edge. The deceased was evidently well known in the area; despite the demands of wartime recruitments and evacuations, some 150 mourners had gathered for the service. Wiemers entered into conversation about the deceased with two men standing near him. These individuals noted approvingly how the individual had been ‘a convinced National Socialist’ but also remained a loyal and devout Catholic. One pointed out that the individual had continued to take the sacraments in recent years. The two men were in full agreement that

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the deceased 'was an example of the fact that one could absolutely combine the National Socialist world view with Christian faith'. They argued that anybody claiming the opposite was just trying to create trouble in order to gain some personal advantage.¹

Men from the National Socialist Motoring Corps, party members and ordinary civilians surrounded the gravesite in a wide arc, having laid three Nazi flags on the site.² In the midst of this group stood the local Catholic priest, who, prior to delivering his sermon, bade the party members to deliver 'a last greeting to their dead comrade'. His subsequent eulogy's key argument was an appeal that the Lord might be merciful to his servant.³ Eulogies delivered by members of the Motoring Corps, National Socialist War Victims' Care and a former comrade of the deceased from the First World War, followed the priest's sermon. The first of these stressed that, 'you were always a good comrade . . . and when you arrive up there you won't need an intermediary with the Almighty'.⁴ The second stated: 'you were one of the most loyal, and if you must now go to your fathers, be certain, dear comrade, we will never forget you'.⁵ Finally, the veteran recalled that, 'in the World War you were a good soldier and always loyal to your regiment. The Lord God will certainly reward you for it'.⁶ At the service's conclusion, the mourners sang the *The Song of the Good Comrade*, a tune which had established itself as a favourite of the nationalist right during the First World War, before subsequent incorporation into the Nazi musical canon.⁷

After the funeral Franz Wiemers walked home in the company of the two men with whom he had talked before the service. They were in full agreement that the four speakers at the graveside, while all declaring belief in God, had nevertheless articulated divergent religious convictions.⁸ The two men pointed out wistfully that:

We Germans are peculiar people. Only in Germany is it possible for four men to deliver a eulogy at a funeral, all of whom want to express their own world view, and nevertheless strive with every word not to offend one another. If a funeral like that had taken place in Russia, a minimum of three speakers would have been arrested afterwards by the Cheka.⁹

As a Nazi Party member and author of Münster's official wartime chronicle, a project commissioned by the local Nazi authorities, Franz Wiemers probably intended this 'wonderful picture of unity' to illuminate the strength of 'national community'

¹ Report, Saturday 16 Jan. 1943, Stadtarchiv Münster, Stadt DOK Nr 55.1, 2–3.

² Ibid., 3. See also, Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105.

³ Report, Saturday 16 Jan. 1943, Stadtarchiv Münster, Stadt DOK Nr 55.1, 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 4. For an enlightening discussion of the *Song of the Good Comrade's* popularity on the nationalist right prior to 1933, its place within the Nazi movement and its on-going presence in West Germany during the 1950s, see Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 165–6.

⁸ Report, 16 Jan. 1943, Stadtarchiv Münster, Stadt DOK Nr 55.1.

⁹ Ibid. By 1943 the Cheka had been renamed the *People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs*: NKVD.

(*Völksgemeinschaft*) at a time of war.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in explicitly portraying the potential for Christian and Nazi beliefs to co-exist within this ‘national community’ in a document intended for posterity, Wiemers’ account does offer important insights into the politics of wartime Westphalian Catholicism beyond propagandist window-dressing.

This article analyses German Catholics’ sense of national and religious community during the war years, specifically focusing on those who lived in the northern Rhineland and Westphalia within the Archbishopric of Cologne and the Bishoprics of Aachen and Münster. It asks whether, as Franz Wiemers implies, Catholics in these regions successfully reconciled their religious loyalties with membership of an essentially consensual ‘national community’, or if they instead formed an internally coherent confessional ‘milieu’ distanced from Nazi influence. As Ian Kershaw notes in a recent essay, this question is of crucial importance for our understandings of the *Völksgemeinschaft* paradigm, and the answer to it is ‘far from obvious’.¹¹

This article argues that, for most Catholics in wartime Germany, religious identity and membership of the ‘national community’ were compatible. The ways laypeople and clergymen negotiated the combination of these identities, however, expressed a considerable diversity of theological and political opinion and should not be seen as reflecting consensual or consistent support for either the Nazi regime or church hierarchy. Many younger clergymen aimed to create a more *völkisch* Catholicism which would replace the Neo-Scholastic, ultramontane variant established in the later nineteenth century which was characterised by a pronounced emphasis on clerical leadership, and the maintenance of a distinct Catholic subculture.¹² They intended to place their religious confession squarely within the ‘national community’, such as by introducing greater use of the German language into church services and liturgy.¹³ The older episcopate, trained in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, overwhelmingly resisted these ambitions and articulated a vision of *Völksgemeinschaft* at peace with inherited social hierarchies and theological teaching.¹⁴ Various groups of Catholics thereby contested the precise relationships between confessional identity and ‘national community’ during the war years, with the ‘milieu’ revealing itself to be both more open to external cultural influences than at the time of its establishment in the 1870s and also more internally divided. This reflected developments underway since the Wilhelmine era, with increasing numbers of

¹⁰ <http://www.muenster.de/stadt/kriegschronik/chronist.html> (last accessed on 1 Aug. 2016). Note that Wiemers was a member of the NSDAP, NSV and DAF, and a former *Freikorps* volunteer.

¹¹ Ian Kershaw, ‘Völksgemeinschaft: Potential and Limitations of the Concept’, in Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto, eds., *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38.

¹² For the rise of ultramontaniam in the Rhineland and Westphalia, see, Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 96.

¹³ For example, Minutes of Clerical Conference, 16 June 1942, Bistumsarchiv Aachen, GVD Herzogenrath 1, II, 18254, 115; Hubert Wolf and Claus Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis: Dokumente zu Modernismus und Reformkatholizismus*, Band 1 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 153, letter from Oskar Schroeder, 30 Dec. 1942.

¹⁴ Wolf and Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, 381.

Catholics, such as those in the People's Association for Catholic Germany (*Völkerverein für das katholische Deutschland*) movement, keen to integrate fully into the German nation.¹⁵

Catholics' combination of religious and patriotic identities in turn placed real limits on church–state conflict in wartime Germany, with critics of Nazi anti-clerical policies capable of attacking them via the language of 'national community' and senior clergymen forced to take many laypeople's support of the regime into account.¹⁶ It was no coincidence that bishops during the war years stressed their congregations' 'patriotic' qualities, and Nazi propaganda appealed to Catholics' religious sentiments by highlighting the destruction of churches in Rhenish and Westphalian cities by Allied bombing.¹⁷ This article contends that neither the paradigm of an internally coherent confessional milieu nor that of an ideologically homogenising *Völksgemeinschaft* corrosive of non-Nazi identities adequately characterises German Catholic society during the war years. Catholics' mentalities and identities reflected the co-existence of religious influences with those derived from state propaganda and older nationalist traditions.¹⁸ Rather than viewing 'milieu' and 'national community' as irreconcilable opposites, we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the various ways Catholics navigated and perceived membership of both. This is essential to adequately comprehend the dynamics of popular opinion within predominantly Catholic regions of the Reich such as the Rhineland and Westphalia, as well as the development of church–state relations during the war years.

In critiquing the notion of a *resistent* confessional milieu, this article builds upon historiographical developments underway since the 1990s, highlighting instances of Catholic accommodation with the Nazi regime. Until the 1980s literature discussing both major churches and their social milieus focused heavily on the Nazi regime's anti-clerical policies and instances of resistance by Catholics and Protestants.¹⁹ Underpinning this approach was the conviction that devout Germans could not reconcile their religious faith with support of Nazism.²⁰ Historians such as Werner Blessing portrayed German Catholic society as an internally coherent social 'milieu',

¹⁵ See Oded Heilbronner, 'From Ghetto to Ghetto: The Place of German Catholic Society in Recent Historiography', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72, 2 (2000), 468, 494; Oded Heilbronner, *Catholicism, Political Culture and the Countryside: A Social History of the Nazi Party in South Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

¹⁶ See Peter Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen: Akten, Briefe und Predigten 1933–1946, Vol. II, 1939–1946* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1988), 858.

¹⁷ See Dietmar Süß, *Töd aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2011), 74, 285.

¹⁸ An appeal for this approach is made by Alon Confino, 'Death, Spiritual Solace and Afterlife: Between Nazism and Religion', in Paul Betts and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth Century Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 219–31.

¹⁹ See John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London: Basic Books, 1968), Ulrich Hehl, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus im Erzbistum Köln* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1977).

²⁰ These arguments remain influential within German church history. See Karl Joseph Hummel and Michael Kissener, eds., *Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich* (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2010).

hermetically sealed off from the temptations of Nazism during the war years via a process of ‘inner emigration’ or ‘*Resistenz*’.²¹ Until the 1990s historiographies of German Protestantism in the Third Reich overwhelmingly based themselves around a romanticised account of the Confessing Church’s opposition to the regime in the 1930s.²² By contrast, recent research has suggested that many ‘ordinary Germans’, whether Catholic or Protestant, could combine their private religious faith to varying degrees with support of the Nazi regime.²³ Armin Nolzen demonstrates that most members of the Nazi Party and its auxiliary organisations also belonged to a Christian Church during the Third Reich.²⁴ Monica Black’s research on Berlin indicates that Nazi and Christian imageries frequently merged in church funerals, while a growing historiography highlights the influence of ‘ethnic’ (*völkisch*) nationalism and anti-Semitism among many Protestant and certain Catholic clergymen in the Weimar and Nazi periods.²⁵ Kevin Spicer and Derek Hastings have outlined the appeal of Nazism among sections of the Catholic clergy and laity during the 1920s and 1930s, and Oded Heilbronner’s research underlines the Nazi Party’s electoral successes among Catholics in the Black Forest region during the Weimar era.²⁶ Winfried Süß has developed the concept of ‘antagonistic co-operation’ to analyse the relationship between Catholic medical institutions and the Nazi authorities in the field of ‘euthanasia’ as of August

²¹ Werner K. Blessing, ‘“Deutschland in Not, wir in Glauben . . .” Kirche und Kirchenvolk in einer katholischen Region 1933–1949’, in Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Woller, eds., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (München: Oldenbourg, 1988), 109. See also Norbert Fasse, *Katholiken und NS-Herrschaft im Münsterland: Das Amt Velen-Ramsdorf 1918–1945* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1996), 609.

²² Manfred Gailus, ‘Overwhelmed by their own Fascination with the “Ideas of 1933”’: Berlin’s Protestant Social Milieu in the Third Reich’, *German History*, 20, 4 (2002), 462.

²³ For an overview see Manfred Gailus and Armin Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene ‘Völksgemeinschaft’: Glaube und Konfession im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 10–5, 23, 113, 170–2; Black, *Death in Berlin*, 102–5; Alon Confino, *Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 133–5; Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For individual examples, see Mary Fulbrook, *A Small Town near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78–9, 131, 195; Beth A. Griech-Polelle, *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 135.

²⁴ Armin Nolzen, ‘Nationalsozialismus und Christentum: Konfessionelgeschichtliche Befunde zur NSDAP’, in Gailus and Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene ‘Völksgemeinschaft’*, 170–1.

²⁵ Manfred Gailus and Wolfgang Krogel, eds., *Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche im Nationalen: Regionalstudien zu Protestantismus und Nachkriegsgeschichte 1930 bis 2000* (Berlin: Wichern Verlag, 2006), 520; Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 24–6; Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 138; Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120–5; Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939: Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York: Phoenix, 1997), 42–9, 298; idem, *The Years of Extermination, 1939–1945: Nazi Germany and the Jews* (London: Phoenix, 2008 edn), 302–3.

²⁶ Kevin P. Spicer, *Hitler’s Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism*; Heilbronner, *Catholicism, Political Culture and the Countryside*, 2–3, 231.

1939, undermining the idea of uniform Catholic resistance in this murderous area of state policy.²⁷

Nevertheless, in explicitly tackling the relationship between ‘national community’ and Catholic ‘milieu’ during the years 1939 to 1945, this essay breaks new analytical ground. The recent publications inspired by the *Volksgemeinschaft* paradigm have offered little analysis of Germans’ confessional identities and religious beliefs, leaving the interactions of these cultural influences with ‘national community’ on the ground largely unexplored.²⁸ While the recent works cited above have done much to deepen our understanding of the German Churches’ engagement with Nazism during the 1920s and 1930s, the historiographical neglect of the roles played by religious belief and community during the war years remains striking. Christoph Kösters and Wilhelm Damberg note that the Second World War has long been neglected within specific studies of Catholicism in the Nazi era, an observation Manfred Gailus replicates with regards to the literature on German Protestantism.²⁹ As Nicholas Stargardt highlights in a recent article, the ‘cultural history of belief’ remains a lacuna in the historiography of German society during the Second World War, and this essay forms part of new literatures attempting to correct this deficit.³⁰ By focusing on the northern Rhineland and Westphalia between 1939 and 1945, this article is able to analyse Catholics’ senses of national and religious community at the scale on which they were lived and to examine their complex responses to the mounting strains imposed by ‘total war’. With Bishop Galen of Münster’s (1933–1946) public protests of July and August 1941 representing a dramatic critique of the Nazi regime’s ‘euthanasia’ policies and its seizures of ecclesiastical property, this region provides an ideal means of investigating the complex relationships between Catholics’ senses of national, religious and political identification during this period.

²⁷ Winfried Süß, ‘Antagonistische Kooperationen. Katholische Kirche und nationalsozialistisches Gesundheitswesen in den Kriegsjahren 1939–45’, in Karl-Joseph Hummel and Christoph Kösters, eds., *Kirchen im Krieg: Europa 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand, 2007), 317–41.

²⁸ Kershaw, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, 38. Note that the excellent volume, Steber and Gotto, eds., *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany*, does not contain a chapter specifically addressing Germans’ religious beliefs or confessional affiliations. Neither does Michael Wildt and Frank Bajohr, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2009). Gailus and Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene ‘Volksgemeinschaft’*, is a rare exception to this trend.

²⁹ Hummel and Kösters, eds., *Kirchen im Krieg*, 9; Wilhelm Damberg, ‘Kriegserfahrung und Kriegstheologie 1939–1945’, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 182 (2002), 321; Manfred Gailus, ‘Keine gute Performance: Die Deutschen Protestanten im “Dritten Reich”’, in Gailus and Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene ‘Volksgemeinschaft’*, 113. The Catholic military chaplaincy has, by contrast, been the subject of considerable attention in recent years. See Lauren Faulkner Rossi’s excellent study, *Wehrmacht Priests: Catholicism and the Nazi War of Annihilation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Nicholas Stargardt, ‘The Troubled Patriot: German Innerlichkeit in World War II’, *German History*, 28, 3 (2010), 341. It is encouraging to note the increasing attention paid to religion within recent wider studies of wartime German society, such as Süß, *Tod aus der Luft*, ch. 5, ‘Die Kirchen und der Luftkrieg’; Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939–1945* (London: Bodley Head, 2015). *The German War* draws upon the doctoral thesis I recently completed under Nicholas Stargardt’s supervision, see Thomas Brodie, *For Christ and Germany: German Catholicism and the Second World War* (Oxford DPhil, 2014), cited in Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War*, 14–5, 32–3, 52, 145, 150–1, 249–50, 332, 352–346, 360, 386, 401, 559 and endnotes from pages 574–7, 589–91, 600, 610, 612, 616, 617, 619, 636.

Antagonistic Co-Existence, 1939–1945

Much evidence exists to suggest Franz Wiemers' account of a peaceful co-existence of Catholicism and Nazism in wartime German society is distinctly one-sided, a romantic portrayal of 'national community' removed from inconvenient social realities. To cite but one example, the Catholic episcopate's responses to the outbreak of the Second World War in sermons and pastoral letters often lacked the nationalist languages desired by the regime.³¹ The Cologne Archbishopric's official newspaper did not respond to the outbreak of war in September 1939 with the publication of patriotic sermons but rather with prayers for the rapid return of peace.³² Although Bishop Galen of Münster's public responses to the outbreak of war were more overtly nationalist in content, they were the exception within this region, differing noticeably from the restrained statements made by Cardinal Schulte of Cologne (1920–1941).³³ As the secret service (*Sicherheitsdienst*; SD) observed concerning the Rhineland metropolis and several other cities in November 1939, overtly nationalist themes were absent from many Catholic priests' sermons, which instead aimed to impress upon congregations that 'only faith in God and unshakable loyalty to the Church are an indispensable support'.³⁴ Such complaints also abounded in the reports of local Nazi agencies in northern Westphalia, which lamented that Catholic clergymen, instead of praying for outright German victory, appealed for a 'just peace'.³⁵ At the war's very outset, significant differences existed between the regime's statements on its significance and those articulated by both the higher and lower Catholic clergy.

The restrained nature of the Catholic Church's response to the outbreak of war also contrasted sharply with the reaction of Germany's Protestant Churches, whose contemporary commentaries were saturated in nationalist language hailing the war as a historic opportunity to redeem the national shame of November 1918.³⁶ In early September 1939 the Protestant Church's central newspaper glorified the 'struggle of our German People for the land of its fathers, in order that German blood may be reunited with German blood'.³⁷ The regional (*Gau*) leadership of Westphalia North did not miss these differences of theological interpretation, arguing on 6 September 1939 that, 'it must be concluded that the Protestant Church makes a much greater effort to display a positive attitude to the outbreak of war than the Catholic'.³⁸ A comparison

³¹ Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Westfalen, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 21, report of 14 Sept. 1939 by Düsseldorf SD Inspector.

³² Historisches Archiv des Erzbistums Köln, *K.A., 1939 (Z 80 79)*, articles of Sept. 1939, 127–44.

³³ Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen*, II, 1939–1946, 747; AEK, *K.A., 1939, (Z 80 79)*, 143, article of 22 Sept. 1939.

³⁴ Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die Geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945* (Berlin: Pawlak, 1984), III, 13, report of 13 Mar. 1940, 467.

³⁵ Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Westfalen, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 21, Reports, 21 Nov., 24 Nov., 17 Nov. 1939.

³⁶ Evangelisches Zentralarchiv, 1, 2877, *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche*, 6 Sept. 1939, Der Landesbischof Hannover, 1 Sept. 1939, *Amtsblatt der evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg*, 21 Sept. 1939, *Landeskirche Hessen-Nasau*, 2 Sept. 1939.

³⁷ EZA, 1, 2877, *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche*, 6 Sept. 1939.

³⁸ LNRW. AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 22, report of 6 Sept. 1939.

of the two major German Churches' responses to the outbreak of war in autumn 1939, must conclude that, on the whole, Catholic Bishops' commentaries demonstrated a greater ideological distance from Nazism than those of their Protestant counterparts.

The differences of emphasis in public statements concerning the war between those made by the Nazi regime and Catholic episcopate lasted, with several notable exceptions, until 1945.³⁹ Many of the Cologne Archbishopric's pastoral letters, as well as those of the combined German Episcopate, focused on abstract discussions of Neo-Scholastic theology and themes such as the immorality of extra-marital sex, while providing relatively restrained statements of support for the German war effort.⁴⁰ Crucially, during intensifying Allied bombing of German cities in the summer and autumn of 1943, leading members of the Catholic episcopate, including Archbishop Frings of Cologne (1942–69) and Bishop Galen of Münster, publicly spoke out against Nazi propaganda promising devastating 'revenge' attacks on Britain with 'wonder weapons'.⁴¹ Galen argued in a sermon of 4 July 1943 that, 'I cannot endorse the hatred and calls for revenge filling the German Press and neither can you!'⁴² In May 1943 Archbishop Frings entrusted the protection of his Archbishopric to the Virgin Mary, indicating a desire to seek safety via heavenly, rather than secular, defences.⁴³ Whereas Nazi propaganda portrayed Allied bombing as 'Jewish revenge' on Germany, senior clergymen such as Frings and Galen repeatedly argued that, like the war as a whole, it represented a divine punishment for modern secularism.⁴⁴ It would, of course, be inaccurate to argue that the pastoral letters and sermons of senior clergymen such as Frings and Galen *were* objectively unsupportive of the German war effort; those of Galen in particular often explicitly wished for the national armed forces' triumph.⁴⁵ It is nevertheless crucial to note that these arguments' intellectual basis in Neo-Scholastic theology and its notions of 'just war' often rendered them visibly distinct from Nazi pronouncements on the conflict and insufficiently nationalist in the eyes of the regime.⁴⁶

Beyond these tensions arising from the episcopate and Nazi regime's differing understandings of the war, the years 1939–45 also witnessed a range of minor conflicts between Catholics and regime officials at the local level.⁴⁷ In October 1939, the regime passed legislation forbidding the holding of public church services prior to

³⁹ For an important exception, see Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen*, II, 969–70; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 551.

⁴⁰ For example, Wilhelm Corsten, ed., *Kölner Aktenstücke zur Lage der katholischen Kirche in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Cologne: Bachem, 1949), 264–8, 281; AEK, *K.A. 1941–1943*, Easter 1943, 70.

⁴¹ For the centrality of 'revenge' to Nazi propaganda in 1943, see Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, XV, report of 11 Nov. 1943, 5987–8.

⁴² AEK, *CR II 25.18*, 1, 227.

⁴³ AEK, *K.A. 1941–1943 (Z 80 82–3)*, 15 May 1943, 79.

⁴⁴ AEK, *DA Lenné 164, Hirtenwort zum Herz-Jesu-Zeit*; Löffler, *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen*, II, 1086.

⁴⁵ Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen*, II, 907.

⁴⁶ LNRW. ARH, *RW 35/09*, 80–82, report of 16 September 1942, LNRW.AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, letter to Berlin, 14 Sept. 1939 (Morale report No. 11).

⁴⁷ See the classic, Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 edn), 31–57.

10AM on mornings following the sounding of air raid sirens the previous night. This measure inconvenienced the lives of clergymen and laypeople throughout the war years, and unsurprisingly provoked regular protests.⁴⁸ One Westphalian farmer dryly noted this legislation's anti-clerical purpose in February 1943, commenting that the authorities did not object at all to him feeding his cattle at six each morning, regardless of any sleep potentially lost due to air raid alarms the previous night.⁴⁹ As a result of such provocations, many Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics complained during the war years of a sense of victimisation at the hands of anti-clerical elements within the Nazi regime. In mid-February 1943, one Catholic man in Münster told Franz Wiemers that the state should not make individuals feel like 'second class citizens' on account of their faith.⁵⁰ Following heavy Allied bombing raids in early summer 1943, clergymen in the Cologne area went further, labelling the Nazi regime 'hostile to Catholics' when confronted with Goebbels' propaganda condemning Allied damage of the city's Cathedral.⁵¹

The summer and autumn of 1941 provide the most dramatic evidence of the potential for conflict between Catholicism and Nazism in Rhenish and Westphalian society. From late 1940 onwards the SS had been seizing considerable amounts of monastic property throughout the region, with the justification that it was needed for the national war effort.⁵² Widespread knowledge of the Nazi regime's murder of the disabled, underway since August 1939, also served to fuel many devout Catholics' anger with the state authorities.⁵³ The extent of many Catholics' frustration with these Nazi policies was dramatically revealed by their supportive responses to Bishop Galen's sermons of July and August 1941, which attacked 'euthanasia' and the seizures of ecclesiastical property.⁵⁴ On 31 July the region's SD Inspector lamented that many Catholics were criticising the party for exploiting the conditions of war to pursue its anti-clerical aims, and as late as November, Nazi officials reported from Tecklenburg, a rural area to the north of Münster, 'that the mood in the Catholic population has never previously been as hostile towards party and state as is currently the case'.⁵⁵ According to a range of local Nazi Party reports, Catholic women and rural dwellers in the Münsterland were especially prominent in supporting their bishop's arguments.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Hehl, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, 203, BAA, GVD Krefeld 11, I (Dekanat Krefeld-Uerdingen Mitte), 18264, 64, Dekanatsbericht for 1942, AEK, CR II 25.16.1, 298, 303–4, 312. For the law's suspension in 1945, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, R 43/3535, Martin Bormann's letter of 6 Feb.

⁴⁹ Stadtarchiv Münster, *Stadt Dok Nr 52 02/1943*, entry for 17 Feb. 1943. (Potential loss of sleep being the official justification for this restrictive legislation.)

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, entry for 16 Feb. 1943.

⁵¹ LNRW. ARH, RW35/09, 187, report of 10 July 1943.

⁵² Annette Mertens, *Himmlers Klosersturm: Der Angriff auf katholische Einrichtungen im zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedergutmachung nach 1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 21, 388.

⁵³ See, LNRW. AW, NSDAP Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen, 125, report of 23 July 1941, Kershaw, *Nemesis*, 426–9.

⁵⁴ Winfried Süß, 'Ein Skandal im Sommer 1941: Reaktionen auf den "Euthanasie" – Protest des Bischofs von Münster', in Hubert Wolf, Thomas Flammer, Barbara Schüler, eds., *Clemens August von Galen: Ein Kirchenfürst im Nationalsozialismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 190–1.

⁵⁵ LNRW. AW, NSDAP Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen, 125, report of 14 Nov. 1941, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, reports of the 11 and 21 Aug. 1941 and 4 Sept. 1941.

This was evidently a moment when the co-existence of Catholic and Nazi loyalties in Rhenish and Westphalian society came under considerable strain. A Catholic nobleman terminated his membership of the Nazi Party on 22 August 1941 with the justification that it was ‘determined to pursue a course that is irreconcilable with Catholic Christianity’.⁵⁷ For many Catholics, especially women and those closely involved in parish life, the church–state conflicts of summer and autumn 1941 problematised their ability to easily reconcile their religious faith with conscious support of the regime and its ideology.⁵⁸

As the war visibly turned against Germany from early 1943 onwards the Nazi authorities’ popularity declined yet further in the eyes of many Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics, with some perceiving engagement with their faith as a means of marking ideological distance from Nazism.⁵⁹ The reports of Gestapo informers among the clergy in the Cologne–Aachen region indicate that many entertained defeatist sentiments following the destruction of the sixth army at Stalingrad, with Hitler increasingly incorporated into their criticisms of the state leadership.⁶⁰ Judging by these documents, such sentiments intensified among groups of laypeople and clergymen during the heavy Allied bombing of the Rhineland in early summer 1943.⁶¹ In August, following the collapse of Fascist Italy, certain sections of clerical opinion in the region were of the opinion that ‘Hitler should leave and then Germany would receive an honourable peace’.⁶² Others were convinced that ‘the Third Reich’s grave was already ready for the Führer and Party, and the coffin lying in the hole’.⁶³ Revealingly, a rumour spread among the Rhenish clergy in summer 1943 that the American armed forces had installed Catholic priests as mayors in newly occupied Sicily, indicating favourable contemplation of a post-National Socialist future.⁶⁴ Although many of these Catholic complaints against the regime between 1943 and 1945 evinced hopes of German victory, they do illustrate an erosion of many Catholics’ earlier support for the Nazi regime and Hitler personally.⁶⁵

As Allied offensives approached Germany’s western borders in autumn 1944 many lay Catholics and clergymen in the Rhineland and Westphalia articulated yet stronger criticisms of the Nazi leadership, united by opposition to what they mutually held to be its aim of creating the ‘largest cemetery in Germany’.⁶⁶ In Aachen, locals took down pictures of Hitler in September 1944 as the NSDAP’s attempts to evacuate them

⁵⁷ LNRW. AW, *Politische Polizei im III Reich*, 409, report of 16 Sept. 1941, 6.

⁵⁸ Süß, ‘Ein Skandal im Sommer 1941’, 190–5.

⁵⁹ For example, LNRW. ARH, *RW35/09*, 29, report of 3 April 1942.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 134–5, 143. For Allied bombing of the area, Ralf Blank, ‘Wartime Daily Life and the Air War on the Home Front’, in *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*, ed., *Germany and the Second World War*, IX, I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 ed.), 382.

⁶¹ LNRW. ARH, *RW35/09*, 181, 187, reports of 6 and 10 July 1943.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 195–6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶⁴ LNRW. ARH, *RW34/03*, 23, report of 30 July 1943.

⁶⁵ For Nazism’s lack of a monopoly on German patriotism, Nicholas Stargardt, ‘Beyond “Consent” or “Terror”: Wartime Crises in Nazi Germany’, in *History Workshop Journal* (2011), Vol. 72. (1), 201.

⁶⁶ LNRW. ARH, *RW 35/09*, 254, report of 29 November 1944.

collapsed in the face of Allied advances towards the city.⁶⁷ Evidently, not all Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics were able to harmonise their religious beliefs with support of the regime as the war entered its later phases or would have seen themselves as forming part of a consensual ‘national community’. As Winfried Süß notes, the relationship between Catholics and the regime, even when co-operative, cannot be fully understood without consideration of these areas of underlying tension, and we must not forget that the Nazi authorities sent a small minority of Catholic priests from the Rhineland and Westphalia – 38 from the Diocese of Münster – to concentration camps between 1933 and 1945.⁶⁸ In July 1942 clerical informers of the Aachen Gestapo noted that one local curate, Friedrich Sparbrodt, was of the opinion that, ‘being a follower of National Socialism is incompatible with the Catholic faith’.⁶⁹ A purist understanding of the ‘national community’ concept as entailing consensual societal support for the regime, struggles to account for such sentiments.

Ideological Overlaps

We should not, however, conclude that all Catholics in the Rhineland and Westphalia were as uniformly or consistently opposed to the Nazi regime as Friedrich Sparbrodt. The vision of an internally coherent and *resistant* confessional sub-culture is as misleading as that of a consensual ‘national community’. Co-existing with church–state tensions were areas of ideological and cultural overlap between German Catholics and the regime. Bishop Galen’s sermons and pastoral letters during the war years, including even his famous protests of July and August 1941, displayed passionate support of the German war effort and neglected to comment on the radicalising Nazi persecution and murder of the Jews.⁷⁰ A closer analysis of Westphalian Catholics’ responses to Galen’s protests of summer 1941, moreover, reveals that many voiced criticisms of the regime with language reflecting the influence of Nazism itself. In October 1941 a Catholic man in northern Westphalia claimed that the regime’s current anti-clerical policies represented the work of the infamously anti-clerical minister Alfred Rosenberg, whom he termed, ‘this Jewish rogue and freemason’.⁷¹ Ian Kershaw’s research similarly highlights Bavarian Catholics’ uses of anti-Semitic metaphors when criticising local Nazi officials during the ‘Crucifix Struggle’ of summer 1941.⁷² In the Münsterland a *Kreisleitung* observed in August 1941 that locals were angered that at a time Germany’s troops were combating Bolshevism, the party’s treatment of the churches at home supposedly resembled that inflicted on those in

⁶⁷ For the Nazi Party’s near collapse in the Aachen region during autumn 1944, Ian Kershaw, *The End: Hitler’s Germany 1944–45* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 62–5.

⁶⁸ Süß, ‘Antagonistische Kooperationen’, 317–41; Christian Frieling, *Priester aus dem Bistum Münster im KZ* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1992), 2.

⁶⁹ LNRW. ARH, RW 35/09, 48–49, report of 8 July 1942.

⁷⁰ See Polelle, *Bishop von Galen*, 135; Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen II*, 901–8, 970.

⁷¹ LNRW. AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 17, report for Oct. 1941, 37.

⁷² Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 ed.), 179.

Russia since 1917.⁷³ Whereas certain Catholics in the Rhineland and Westphalia saw their reconciliations of religious identity and support of the regime come under strain in later 1941, many drew upon the regime's own languages of a crusade against Judaeo-Bolshevism when criticising its anti-clerical policies, paradoxically highlighting areas of underlying consensus.

Crucially, a majority of Catholics were keen to harmonise their religious and national loyalties in the service of a war effort, they, like most Germans, understood to be defensive in nature and waged for national survival.⁷⁴ Local Nazi officials in northern Westphalia noted as early as 19 September 1939 that 'the religious struggle appears to have faded into the background; all rage today is directed against England, against whom everybody, even the best Catholic, wants to fight'.⁷⁵ Catholics throughout the Rhineland and Westphalia participated in the national rejoicing at the defeat of France in June 1940.⁷⁶ Literature published by clergymen at this juncture sought to portray a seamless fusion of German nationalism and Catholic devotion. That summer, Ludwig Wolker, the former head of the Catholic Young Men's Association, published, after editorial changes, the diary of a devout young soldier, Hans Niermann, who had been killed in the French campaign.⁷⁷ This pamphlet, *The Way of the Soldier Johannes*, proclaimed that God had instilled in Niermann 'a deep love of the Church and of Germany'.⁷⁸ Older nationalist language and tradition here served as a means of bridging the divides between specifically Catholic and Nazi understandings of the war. The residual strength of the 'Hitler Myth' among many German Catholics, particularly prior to 1943, also underlines their attempts to reconcile religious loyalties with support of the regime and national war effort.⁷⁹ In April 1942 certain clergymen in Cologne were spending much time discussing 'the ostensibly Christian behaviour of the Führer' and alleged expressions of Hitler's Catholic piety from 1920s Bavaria.⁸⁰

These nationalist sentiments did not disappear among Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics as the war first intensified, and then turned against Germany, from late 1941 onwards. Echoing Goebbels' propaganda, Bishop Galen's pastoral letter for Heroes' Memorial Day in March 1942 argued that German troops who died in the struggle against Bolshevism had fallen as Christian martyrs in a 'Crusade' against 'a satanic ideological system'.⁸¹ From autumn 1941 onwards he largely abstained from public criticism of the regime, despite strong suspicions that its murder of the disabled was

⁷³ LNRW. AW, *NSDAP Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen*, 125, report of 15 Aug. 1941.

⁷⁴ LNRW. AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 30, report of 18 Oct. 1939; see also, Stargardt, 'Troubled Patriot', 342.

⁷⁵ LNRW. AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 29, report of 19 Sept. 1939.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13, report for June 1940, 38.

⁷⁷ Karl-Theodor Schleicher and Heinrich Walle, eds., *Aus Feldpostbriefen junger Christen 1939–1945: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der katholischen Jugend im Felde* (Munich: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 105.

⁷⁸ Bistumsarchiv Münster, *Sammlung Zeitgeschichte D 106, A 204, Der Weg des Soldaten Johannes: Aus seinen Briefen und Tagebuchblättern*, eulogy at end of pamphlet.

⁷⁹ See, Kershaw, *Hitler Myth*, 105–21, 151–68.

⁸⁰ LNRW. ARH, *RW 58, 3741*, 25–6.

⁸¹ BAM, *Kirchliches Amtsblatt für die Diözese Münster*, H 200 18, 74–76 1940–42, 12 March 1942, 49.

secretly continuing.⁸² In late summer 1942 a clerical informer of the Gestapo in the Aachen region observed that during religious lessons Catholic youngsters' attentions were preoccupied by 'the victorious advance in the East' as well as 'Rommel's success and current events in the war'.⁸³ Parish priests serving up nationalist fare in their sermons frequently struck a chord with their congregations during the early and mid-war years. Chaplain Hilmer of the Fronleichnam parish in Aachen considered himself a 'nationally aware and upstanding German Priest' and was known locally for preaching accordingly. In June 1942 the local Gestapo noted that 'it is known in the city that Hilmer's sermons provide those attending with much strength, courage and will to sacrifice. The numbers attending are accordingly very high'.⁸⁴ When Hilmer preached in favour of 'revenge' attacks on Britain in June 1942 and 1943 his arguments went down well with the congregation.⁸⁵ Revealingly, parishioners' post-war testimony confirms Hilmer's popularity within the Fronleichnam parish during his service there between late 1941 and May 1944.⁸⁶ Similarly, a Düren priest who delivered a sermon in the aftermath of German defeat at Stalingrad, stressing 'the need to work together for final victory' was immediately thanked by a grateful congregation member, who claimed: 'you have given us all new courage'.⁸⁷ These examples indicate that for many Catholics during the mid-war years it was axiomatic that church services and pastoral care should function to support the national cause and bolster morale.⁸⁸

The conduct of religious rituals during the war years provides further evidence of this tendency. Chaplain Hilmer regularly played *The Song of the Good Comrade* on his parish's organ when the radio announced news of German victories.⁸⁹ As Monica Black and Nicole Kramer highlight, wartime funerals were key sites where Christian and Nazi imageries merged, with the regime effectively delegating responsibility for supervising mourning rituals to the Christian churches.⁹⁰ Reports produced by a range of Nazi agencies from across the Reich repeatedly highlight both the presence of military insignia in Catholic funerals and also priests' uses of nationalist languages in legitimising the struggle in which the fallen soldiers had lost their lives.⁹¹

⁸² BAM, *Abteilung 101 Sekretariat des Generalvikars, A 101–326*, letter of 8 Oct. 1943, signed by Archbishop Jäger and Bishop Galen, Caritas Archiv, 732.27, 030, III. Reich und "Euthanasie", letter by Galen to the regional administration of the Westphalian Province dated 10 Aug. 1943.

⁸³ LNRW. ARH, *RW 35/09*, 69, report of 2 September 1942.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 49, report of 8 July 1942.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 185, report of 6 July 1943.

⁸⁶ August Brecher, *Eine junge Pfarre im Aachener Ostviertel: Die Pfarre St Fronleichnam 1930–1996* (Aachen: Einhard Verlag, 1997), 83–6.

⁸⁷ LNRW. ARH, *RW 34/02*, 67, report of 28 February 1943.

⁸⁸ For example, Karl Redemann, ed., *Zwischen Front und Heimat: Der Briefwechsel des münsterischen Ehepaars Agnes und Albert Neuhaus 1940–1944* (Münster: Regensberg Verlag, 1996), 295, letter of 28 Aug. 1941.

⁸⁹ Brecher, *Eine junge Pfarre im Aachener Ostviertel*, 86.

⁹⁰ Black, *Death in Berlin*, 105; Nicole Kramer, *Völksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 203.

⁹¹ Bundesarchiv–Lichterfelde, *NS 18/253*, reports on Catholic funerals, *NS 18/276*, note to Party Member Fasse; Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, XIII, report of 1 Mar. 1943, 4869–86.

The Düsseldorf Gestapo reported in December 1942 that many Catholic Requiem services ended with the singing of *The Song of the Good Comrade* at the parish's war memorial, a tune frequently used during the war years within the Nazi Party's *völkisch* mourning rituals.⁹² Official Nazi Party reports and statistics indicate a significant and increasing number of its members participating in church funerals across the Reich as the war progressed, furnishing additional evidence of the decline in church–state tensions at the local level as of late 1941. This suggests that the intermingling of Catholic and National Socialist funeral rites observed by Franz Wiemers in January 1943 was far from unusual.⁹³ Analysis of Catholic funeral services during the war years indicates that, far from representing forms of outright ideological retreat from Nazism, it is more accurate to view them as sites where common adherence to older nationalist traditions and their symbols could reconcile Catholic identity with support of, or at least accommodation with, the regime.⁹⁴

The war years, moreover, witnessed the emergence of a Catholic reform movement centred in the Rhineland and aimed at the creation of a more nationalist, German Catholicism, to replace the ultramontane model inherited from the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ These reformers deemed the latter's Neo-Scholastic theological underpinnings to be outdated, as well as its strict emphasis on clerical hierarchy and aversion to ecumenical dialogue with Germany's Protestant communities. Founded in August 1941, this group of lower clergymen and theologians deemed easing Catholics' combination of national, religious and political loyalties to be its central priority, reflecting its intellectual debt to the *Völkerverein* movement of the Wilhelmine period.⁹⁶ Crucially, these theologians advocated the incorporation of *völkisch* themes into German Catholic teachings and services. In December 1942 one of its leading members, Oskar Schroeder, argued: 'we have to arrive at a *German* theology'.⁹⁷ Another member stated in January 1942 that the circle's aim was the replacement of a 'clerical church' with a 'People's Church' (*Volkskirche*), arguing that the concept of 'race' must become more salient within German Catholic theology.⁹⁸

Although this group of reformers represented a minority of Rhenish and Westphalian clergymen, their viewpoints enjoyed some traction within these regions during the war years. Clergymen present at a deanery conference of 16 June 1942, held in Berensberg to the north of Aachen, argued that the rejuvenation of Catholic religious life at the local level depended on 'Germanising' religious services in language and ethos by orientating them around what was termed the 'national-*völkisch* awakening'.⁹⁹ When Karl Adam, a later contact of the 'reform circle',

⁹² LNRW. ARH, RW 18/33, 186, report of 17 December 1942, Süß, *Tod aus der Luft*, 470.

⁹³ Nolzen, 'Nationalsozialismus und Christentum', 170.

⁹⁴ See also, Kramer, *Völksgenossinnen*, 205.

⁹⁵ Wolf and Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, I, 16–29.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19, 29; Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34.

⁹⁷ Wolf and Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, I, 153.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹⁹ Minutes of meeting, 16 June 1942, BAA, *GVD Herzogenath 1, II, 18254*, 115.

and a distinguished theology professor at Tübingen, gave a lecture at Aachen in December 1939, urging German Catholics to embrace the ‘national community’ as their ideological *Heimat*, his arguments were warmly received by certain sections of the lower clergy and laity in the Rhineland, despite predictably receiving criticism from the episcopate and Jesuit Order; the chief defenders of the theological status quo.¹⁰⁰ While Franz Wiemers’ portrayal of a harmonious co-existence between Catholicism and Nazism within an essentially consensual ‘national community’ is undeniably selective, much evidence also highlights the openness of many Catholics to support of or accommodation with aspects of Nazi rule and ideology and, above all, commitment to the national war effort.

A Divided Milieu

Diversity therefore characterised German Catholics’ engagements with Nazism during the war years in the northern Rhineland and Westphalia. If, on the one hand, the tensions generated by Nazi anti-clerical policies problematise the vision of societal consensus evoked by the ‘national community’ paradigm, the strength of many Catholics’ patriotic sentiments, as well as their support of the war and Führer cult, undermine the model of an internally coherent and *resistent* ‘milieu’. Differences in generational formation, class and gender cut across these regions’ Catholic communities between 1939 and 1945, underpinning a spectrum of attitudes towards the meanings and interrelationships of religious and national communities, as well as the war and Nazi regime. This created a complex politics within individual parish communities, mirroring the better known divisions among Germany’s episcopal hierarchy, whose members adopted a plurality of stances towards the Nazi regime and knowledge of its wartime atrocities.¹⁰¹ Recent research on Catholic soldiers’ attitudes within the Wehrmacht also substantiates this argument. Among a sample of approximately 200 captured German Catholic soldiers interrogated at Fort Hunt in Virginia between 1942 and 1945, 39 percent ‘openly approved of National Socialism’ with 38 percent articulating a more oppositional stance.¹⁰²

As illustrated by the reformers discussed above, certain members of the lower clergy advocated a more overt harmonisation of Catholic teachings and *völkisch* nationalism than the episcopate deemed appropriate. Shaped primarily by the First World War rather than the 1870s ‘culture wars’ (*Kulturkampf*), nationalist younger clergymen frequently criticised their bishops for the abstract Neo-Scholastic themes so often discussed in their wartime pastoral letters.¹⁰³ As a member of the Rhenish

¹⁰⁰ See the observations on Catholic opinion made by the regional Gestapo, LNRW. ARH, RW 58, 3922, 31–4, 61, 75, 84, 86; Lucia Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform mit Hilfe des Nationalsozialismus: Karl Adam als kontextueller Theologe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 255–60.

¹⁰¹ Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination*, 302–3; LNRW. ARH, RW 35/09, 48–9, report of 8 July 1942.

¹⁰² Felix Römer, ‘Milieus in the Military: Soldierly Ethos, Nationalism and Conformism Among Workers in the Wehrmacht’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 1 (2013), 126–33.

¹⁰³ LNRW. ARH, RW 34/02, 9, report of 17 April 1942; Wolf and Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, I, 292; Scherzberg, *Karl Adam*, 315.

Reform Circle argued in December 1943: 'Strange, what kinds of concerns our bishops have! They absolutely don't want to understand our age.'¹⁰⁴ In April 1942 the Aachen Gestapo noted that whereas older clergymen gladly read out in their church services a recent pastoral letter containing criticisms of state anti-clerical policies, younger clergymen more sympathetic to the Nazi regime were less willing to do so.¹⁰⁵ These sentiments among the lower clergy were sufficiently widespread to be brought to Joseph Goebbels' attention via intelligence reports in early 1944. The propaganda minister noted in his diary on 22 March that 'strong appearances of divisions are emerging among the Catholic clergy. The younger clergy is positioning itself against the older clergy'.¹⁰⁶ On 25 May he made similar claims, observing that younger clergymen differed primarily from their older colleagues in their desire 'to reconcile Catholic principles with the teachings of National Socialism'. Goebbels noted that the older clergymen were resisting these attempts at church reform 'with hands and feet'.¹⁰⁷ The episcopate was also aware of this tendency. Cardinal Schulte of Cologne noted in a letter to the papal Nuncio of 27 September 1940 that the desire to create a more nationalist form of German Catholicism embraced 'wide circles of the educated laity and the clergy' and constituted 'spiritual currents of considerable force'.¹⁰⁸ In 1943 Archbishop Gröber of Freiburg cited the threat of a 'split within the Greater German clergy'.¹⁰⁹ Differences in generational experience underpinned the divergent attitudes to 'national community' displayed by many lower and higher clergymen in the Rhineland and Westphalia during the Second World War, serving to fuel tensions between them.

This tendency was yet more pronounced with regards to the relationship between the senior Catholic clergy and laity. Laypeople were overwhelmingly keen that church-state conflict be avoided during the war years, ensuring bishops perceived to be overtly confrontational with the Nazi authorities received criticism as well as support from below. Although Bishop Galen's protests of July and August 1941 against 'euthanasia' and the seizures of Church property were supported by many Westphalian Catholics, others criticised his actions as an irresponsible destabilisation of the home front at a crucial juncture of the war. The Münster-based journalist Paulheinz Wantzen observed on 7 August 1941 that 'very many Catholics in Münster declare themselves against their bishop's agitation and emphasise that they won't

¹⁰⁴ Wolf and Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, I, 437.

¹⁰⁵ LNRW. ARH, *RW 34/02*, 9, report of 17 April 1942.

¹⁰⁶ Dieter Marc Schneider, ed., *Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels Online*, diary entry of 22 March 1944, https://www.degruyter.com/view/TJGO/TJG-6074?rskey=lrko8t&result=1&dbq_o=%2222.03.1944%22&dbf_o=tjgo-date&dbt_o=date&o_o=AND (last accessed on 18 Feb. 2017).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, entry of 25 May 1944, https://www.degruyter.com/view/TJGO/TJG-6167?rskey=ojDn3c&result=1&dbq_o=%2225.06.1944%22&dbf_o=tjgo-date&dbt_o=date&o_o=AND (Last accessed on 18 Feb. 2017).

¹⁰⁸ Ludwig Volk, ed., *Akten deutscher Bischöfe, V, 1940–1942* (Mainz: Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, 1983), 201.

¹⁰⁹ Wolf and Claus Arnold, eds., *Der Rheinische Reformkreis*, I, 381–2.

go to church anymore, until this agitation has ceased'.¹¹⁰ In September the local SD similarly observed that some Catholics living in urban areas deemed their bishop's protests to constitute a 'stab in the back'.¹¹¹ Whereas a range of sources indicate that Catholic women were prominent in their support of Galen's protests, Franz Wiemers observed in September 1941 that their husbands were often not as sympathetic.¹¹² Party officials noted that many Catholics in the Tecklenburg area attributed the state's seizures of monastic property to their own Church's insufficiently 'German outlook'.¹¹³ Rather than rallying Westphalian Catholics behind a consensual understanding of the relationship between their religious and national loyalties, Galen's protests of summer 1941 demonstrated the divisions within their ranks in this regard. It is hardly coincidental that he abstained from similarly frank public protests against regime policies from autumn 1941 onwards.

Intensifying Allied bombing of the Rhineland and Westphalia in summer 1943 heightened tensions between the Catholic episcopate and laity, straining consensus within the 'milieu'. Many lay Catholics expressed frustration with their bishops' portrayal of the bombardment as divine punishment for a secular modernity and supported the Nazi regime's promises of 'revenge' attacks on Britain.¹¹⁴ Bombed out civilians from Essen reacted angrily to clerical opposition to 'revenge' attacks in early July 1943, and in October the SD observed that even the 'strongly Catholic sections of the population in the Rhineland and Westphalia' rejected their bishops' opposition to 'revenge' attacks.¹¹⁵ In September the SD quoted a devout young Catholic man as criticising Galen's sermon against revenge attacks with the argument: 'that's going too far! Are we to believe that we can't even rejoice if a British plane is shot down?'¹¹⁶ The accuracy of the SD's view is strengthened by the fact the Swiss Consul in Cologne – an individual on excellent terms with the local Catholic hierarchy – regularly reported in 1943 and 1944 that the local population's belief in imminent revenge attacks on Britain was strong.¹¹⁷ Lay Catholics' frustrations with their bishops' theological leadership at this juncture reveal the divisions within the Catholic milieu's attitudes not only towards the war, but also the Nazi state itself. A Bielefeld priest lamented in late summer 1943 that, due to the bishops' opposition to

¹¹⁰ *Ein Tagebuch. Aufgezeichnet in der damaligen Gegenwart, von Paulheinz Wantzen: Das Leben im Krieg 1939–1946* (Bad Homburg: Verlag Das Dokument, 2000), 464.

¹¹¹ Joachim Kuropka ed., *Meldungen aus Münster 1924–1944: Geheime und vertrauliche Berichte von Polizei, Gestapo, NSDAP und ihren Gliederungen, staatlicher Verwaltung, Gerichtsbarkeit und Wehrmacht über die politische und gesellschaftliche Situation in Münster* (Münster: Regensberg Verlag, 1992), 545.

¹¹² Stadtarchiv Münster, *Stadt- Dok Nr 53.9 09/1941*, Sunday, 7 Sept. 1941.

¹¹³ LNRW. AW, *NSDAP Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen*, 125, report of 15 Aug. 1941, 2.

¹¹⁴ Süß, *Töd aus der Luft*, 313–4; Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, Vol. 15, report of 11 Nov. 1943, 5988.

¹¹⁵ Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, Vol. 15, report of 18 Oct. 1943, 5886.

¹¹⁶ BA. LCH, *NS 15/396*, SD Report of 6 September 1943, 201–2.

¹¹⁷ Markus Schmitz and Bernd Haunfelder, eds., *Humanität und Diplomatie: Die Schweiz in Köln 1940–1949* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2001), 116, 211–2; Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, Vol. 15, 5886.

'revenge' attacks, 'wide sections of the Catholic populace believe that their bishops and clergy are opponents of the current state'.¹¹⁸

Crucially, these patterns of differentiation also characterised Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics' responses to the unfolding Nazi persecution and murder of the Jews. While the German episcopate's silence on this issue during the war years is well documented, we currently know little about Catholics' attitudes to the Jews' fate on the ground.¹¹⁹ There is certainly evidence to suggest that Catholic and Nazi anti-Semitism could overlap at the local level. As early as September 1939 Party officials in northern Westphalia observed that 'even the Catholic population' were demanding reprisals against the Jews for allegedly instigating the current war.¹²⁰ Reflecting widespread knowledge in German society of the Jews' fate, in early summer 1943 clergymen in the Cologne area deemed it 'absurd' that in their church's wedding rite, the bride was blessed with the prayer: 'may the woman be as loving to her husband as Rebecca, as intelligent as Rachel and as long living and loyal as Sara!'¹²¹ A priest from the Münsterland told American investigators in summer 1945 that, although he had personally opposed the Nazi portrayal of Allied bombing as 'the revenge of world Jewry', many Catholics in the region had believed this claim.¹²² The complexity of Rhenish and Westphalian Catholics' responses to knowledge of the Jews' fate was revealed as the war turned against Germany over the course of 1943. In February, shortly after German defeat at Stalingrad, Franz Wiemers visited friends who owned a farm in Elsen near Paderborn. During conversation, the father argued 'that prayer to our Lord God is the best protection in such cares, and religion our greatest strength and support'.¹²³ By contrast, his wife observed that, via 'the downfall of the Jews in the East', the German people may well have taken upon itself 'a great guilt', indicating difficulty in reconciling personal religious faith with knowledge of the Holocaust. The daughter-in-law, by contrast, asserted in line with Nazi propaganda that 'we are only defending ourselves against the Jews'.¹²⁴

The SD painted a similarly differentiated picture of German Catholic opinion in July 1943. It observed that Catholics were comparing the recent bombing of Cologne Cathedral 'with the previous destruction of the Synagogues in Germany'.¹²⁵ The SD described others as believing that God's blessing had abandoned the German nation and doubting the just nature of the Reich's cause.¹²⁶ Local SD agents observed in June that 'clerical groups' in northern Westphalia saw 'the rage of the Jewish Press and its exterminatory tendencies' as a 'natural reaction' to the murder of the Jews by the SS,

¹¹⁸ BA. LCH, NS 15/396, SD Report of 6 September 1943, 203–04.

¹¹⁹ Gailus and Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene 'Volksgemeinschaft'*, 13.

¹²⁰ LNRW. AW, *Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Hauptleitung*, 29, report of 6 Sept. 1939.

¹²¹ LNRW. ARH, RW34/03, 17, report of 7 July 1943, for popular knowledge of the Holocaust, Stargardt, 'Rumours of Revenge', 377–9.

¹²² Süß, *Töd aus der Luft*, 312.

¹²³ Stadtarchiv Münster, *Städt. Dok. Nr. 52*, report of 7 Feb. 1943.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, Vol. 14, report of 8 July 1943, 5449.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5449.

a crime demanding that divine vengeance be visited upon Germany.¹²⁷ These cases suggest that popular Catholic opinion had internalised both the episcopal hierarchy's portrayal of Allied bombing as a divine punishment and the Nazi regime's claim that it was linked to the Jews' fate. In this context, as in others, the complexity of Catholic opinion reflected the co-existence and intermingling of influences derived from both clerical and state leaderships.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, it was these very overlaps between Catholics' religious and national self-identification which underpinned the plurality of lay and clerical opinion outlined in this article. Catholics of different ages, genders and classes found varying ways to navigate the respective claims of 'national community' and confessional identity during the Second World War, ranging from overt support for National Socialism to syntheses of religious belief with older forms of nationalism. Even when explicitly criticising certain Nazi policies, many Catholics, such as Galen himself, frequently couched their arguments as defences of 'national community' and what they considered Catholicism's organic place within it in the Rhineland and Westphalia.¹²⁸ This plurality of opinion among laypeople and the lower clergy concerning the appropriate relationships between religious and national communities ensured that the strains imposed by total war challenged episcopal leadership within the Catholic 'milieu'. Senior clergymen such as Frings and Galen struggled to articulate consensual understandings of the conflict or manage church–state relations in an uncontroversial manner and became the subjects of considerable criticism from sections of lay and lower clerical opinion at various points during the Second World War.

The differentiated nature of popular Catholic opinion crucially served to underpin the 'antagonistic co-operation' which marked church–state relations at the institutional level.¹²⁹ Many laypeople directed vociferous criticism not only at the authors of state anti-clerical policies but also at senior clergymen, when they were held responsible for exacerbating church–state tensions. Catholics' combination of patriotic and religious identities therefore frustrated not only the ambitions of anti-clerical radicals within the Nazi Party and SS to create a de-Christianised 'national community' but also the desires of churchmen hostile to the regime to protest publicly against it and maintain leadership of a cohesive confessional 'milieu'. Rather than passive subjects of church–state relations determined at the elite level by the Nazi leadership and episcopate, lay Catholics exerted a considerable influence on their formation and conduct. The desire of most Catholics for an end to church–state

¹²⁷ Quoted in Peter Longerich, *"Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!": Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006), 283.

¹²⁸ Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen II*, 858.

¹²⁹ Süß, 'Antagonistische Kooperationen'.

conflict won through over the course of the war years, and particularly as of late 1941, as the war intensified and increasingly turned against Germany.¹³⁰

It was only following the Nazi regime's destruction in early 1945 that the clerical hierarchy in the Rhineland and Westphalia was able to firmly re-establish its leadership of these regions' Catholic communities. Pastoral letters and sermons now monopolised the nationalist languages the Church had recently been obliged to share and contest with the Nazis, with dominant memories of Catholic resistance against Nazism – shared by the Western Allies – ensuring their on-going legitimacy.¹³¹ As a range of contemporaries observed, the local episcopate emerged within the British occupation zone as de facto spokesperson for the interests of the German population – championing its material grievances, contesting de-nazification and appealing for the swift return of prisoners of war from Allied captivity.¹³² This development was crucial in restoring episcopal leadership within the Catholic milieu and ensuring the latter's survival as a social and cultural phenomenon during the Adenauer era, even if clerical hopes of a full-blown religious revival were disappointed.¹³³ The residual nationalist influences of *Volksgemeinschaft* therefore formed part of the milieu's 'restoration' in the late 1940s and 1950s, highlighting the on-going co-existence between these forms of patriotic and religious identification among West German Catholics during the early post-war period.¹³⁴ The episcopate's revived influence nevertheless ensured that the memory of an internally coherent Catholic milieu opposed to Nazism predominated in the early Federal Republic, obscuring from view the manifold instances of accommodation and co-existence in the recent past, as observed by Franz Wiemers in Münster on 16 January 1943.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ See LNRW. ARH, *RW 34/03*, 60, report of 22 June 1944, LNRW. ARH, *RW 58*, 3741, 120, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, *R 43/3535*; Bormann's letter of 6 Feb. 1945; Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil II: Dikate 1941–1945. Band I Juli–September 1941* (Munich: K G Saur, 1996), 232, 258.

¹³¹ For example, AEK, *Gen II 23.23a*, 12, *The Task of the Churches in Germany* (London, 1947), 7–8.

¹³² *Ein Tagebuch*, 1520–1; Julius Posener, *In Deutschland 1945 bis 1946* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2001), 29–30, 103–4; Schmitz and Haunfelder, eds., *Humanität und Diplomatie*, 272; Löffler, ed., *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen II*, 1152, 1176, 1230–31; Damian van Melis, "'Strengthened and Purified through Ordeal by Fire": Ecclesiastical Triumphalism in the Ruins of Europe', in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940 and 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231–42.

¹³³ Thomas Großbölting, *Der verlorene Himmel: Glaube in Deutschland seit 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2013), 24–7.

¹³⁴ For residual forms of nationalism in society and culture during the Adenauer era, Gregor, *Haunted City*, 119–59; Malte Thießen, 'Schöne Zeiten? Erinnerungen an die "Volksgemeinschaft" nach 1945', in Wildt and Bajohr, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft*, 170–4; Matthew D. Hockenos, 'Die Kirchen nach 1945: Religiöse Abbrüche, Umbrüche und Kontinuitäten', in Gailus and Nolzen, eds., *Zerstittene "Volksgemeinschaft"*, 292–3.

¹³⁵ For dominant memories of uniform Catholic and Christian opposition to Nazism in the early post-war period, see Gregor, *Haunted City*, 123; Christian Schmidtman, "'Fragestellungen der Gegenwart mit Vorgängen der Vergangenheit beantworten": Deutungen der Rolle von Kirche und Katholiken in Nationalsozialismus und Krieg vom Kriegsende bis in die 1960er Jahre', in Andreas Holzem and Christoph Holzappel, eds., *Zwischen Kriegs und Diktatureinführung: Katholizismus und Protestantismus in der Nachkriegszeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 174–6.