Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany

David Blackbourn

The history of nineteenth-century Europe was punctuated by episodes in which scores of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of people flocked to obscure spots where the Virgin Mary had supposedly appeared. These popular movements were likened by contemporaries to the Crusades. They were one of the most obvious signs of the great religious revival of the nineteenth century and served as a counterpoint to the more familiar political upheavals of the time. The best-known example is undoubtedly Lourdes (1858), and most people who think about these events at all probably associate them with predominantly Catholic countries, such as France, Italy, and Ireland, where a number of nineteenth-century apparitions were given official church approval. But Marian apparitions also occurred in Germany, and the essay that follows is mainly concerned with one of them.¹

Modern apparitions have come in waves. One such wave occurred in the aftermath of the French Revolution, in France itself and in Italy and Germany under French occupation. There was a further set of apparitions in the 1830s and 1840s, this time particularly in France, most notably the visions of the novice nun Cathérine Labouré in Paris (1830) and of two young shepherds in the Alpine village of La Salette (1846). Then, following the celebrated visions of Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858, came the most extensive wave of European apparitions in the nineteenth century. In the following twenty years, visions of the Virgin were reported in France, Italy, Ireland, and Bohemia, as well as in Germany. By the twentieth century, the idiom of the Marian apparition had established itself so firmly that it had eclipsed other kinds of religious vision still widely claimed a century earlier: burning crucifixes, bearded and ragged old men, plagues of caterpillars, and celestial omens (although the

¹. I have completed a book-length study on this: Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany (Oxford, 1993 and New York, 1994). In some of the notes below, readers are referred to chapters of this book for evidence and further details.
picked rags and collected dirty hospital linen with her father, a bankrupt miller.5

The visions bestowed status and authority on the visionaries. In relaying the purported words of the Virgin, they determined who should approach the apparition site, how they should behave, and the procedures that would lead to a miraculous cure. They instructed that chapels be built, told of secrets they could not divulge, and prophesied woe for the sinful (and the skeptical). The new status of the children also offered subversive possibilities. Eugène Barbedette, one of the Pontmain seers, was asked by a group of prominent Catholic laywomen and female religious in Fougerès if the Virgin bore any resemblance to one of them. “No,” he replied, “compared with the Blessed Virgin you are all ugly.” So many of the younger seers had lived Cinderella lives before their apparitions, and they now experienced that happy reversal of fortunes so characteristic of Cinderella and other folktales, with the Mother of God cast in the role of fairy godmother.

Similar considerations apply to adult visionaries: the Romantic writer Clemens Brentano observed that the visionary Anna Katharina Emmerich had been “abandoned by all and ill-treated like Cinderella.” The women in question—they were almost always women—had commonly experienced recent illness and bereavement and often occupied a marginal position within the family or community. Adult female seers, like their youthful counterparts, acquired a rare authority as the conduits through which divine dissatisfaction was expressed, and there are plenty of instances where it seems that they were avenging themselves, consciously or unconsciously, on a harsh world. Sometimes they were angry, lashing the mighty for their sins. An eighteen-year-old from Normandy, imprisoned for arson, returned to her village and recounted the dire predictions of the Blessed Virgin about what would happen if a chapel were not constructed in honor of Our Lady of La Salette. The strictures and warnings reported by the servant-visionary Estelle Faguette of Pellevoisin in the 1870s were matched by those of other young Frenchwomen of the period.6 These messages delivered by the weak to the strong were usually less apocalyptic and extravagant; yet they were always there by implication. The respect conferred by the apparitions gave women a chance normally denied them to


slough off harsh responsibilities. Like illness, the status of visionary was a resource of the weak, a means of escape; it also offered a veiled means of protest against real or imagined ill-treatment.

Many of these elements were present in the apparitions that took place in the Bohemian village of Philippdorf in 1866. Magdalena Kade was a thirty-year-old unmarried weaver's daughter with a long history of illness, including convulsions. Her father died when she was thirteen, and her brother inherited the family home; her mother died in 1861, and in 1864 Kade moved out to live with another family, probably as a servant; in 1865 she was the victim of a series of cruel lampoons written by a fellow villager. Admitted back by her brother because of illness, she lay in bed beneath a picture of the “suffering Mother,” surrounded by her brother’s lodgers. The apparitions began four weeks after she had returned home. “Cured,” as the Virgin Mary had promised, Magdalena Kade became the center of medical attention and prompted a local cult of “Mary the salvation of the sick.” Thousands of pilgrims went to the village, and the visionary was feted by visiting priests and persons of influence.9

There is value in this approach; it is surely better than presenting the visionaries as a bundle of clinical symptoms. But even if we interpret the individual experiences in this way rather than reduce them to a category such as “hysteria” in the manner of contemporaries, Jean-Marie Charcot and Richard Krafft-Ebing, our explanations remain limited.10 These were collective as well as individual phenomena. External pressure as well as emotional upheaval usually provides some indication of why the apparitions took place when they did, and external stress of one sort or another certainly suggests why these events enjoyed the resonance they did. If we look at the waves of apparitions, some common elements stand out. One is the background of war and postwar anxiety, from Napoleonic Europe through the visions that stalked the battlefields of Italian unification and the Franco-Prussian War to the wave of apparitions that followed World War II. In content as well as timing, these were intercessions by the “Queen of Peace.” It is also apparent that clusters of apparitions occurred at times of political turmoil or when Catholics felt themselves under threat from civil power. This motif recurs from Labouré’s apparitions in the revolutionary France of 1830, through the wave of Marian visions during the secular state-building and anticlerical decades of the 1860s and 1870s, to the explicitly anticomunist message of Fatima in 1917 and the “cold war apparitions” of the 1940s and 1950s.11

In the essay that follows, I want to place the German apparitions of the 1870s in several contexts. Is there anything in the lives of the visionaries and their families that might suggest how these events came about? To what extent does economic and social crisis help to explain the popular resonance of the German apparitions, as it clearly does in La Salette, Lourdes, Knock, and many other cases? What is the connection between the apparitions and larger changes in Catholic popular piety in this period, and what can we learn from such episodes about relations between clergy and laity? I attempt, finally, to examine some of the connections between the apparitions and the Kulturkampf in Prussia. By looking at a dramatic example of the interplay between piety and politics, one that eventually engaged the attention of army, bureaucracy, judiciary, press, and parliament, I hope to cast some light on Bismarckian Germany from an unfamiliar angle.

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary were widely reported in Germany during the 1870s, especially from the western and eastern margins of the new empire, including Alsace, the Palatinate, the Rhineland, Silesia, and Posen. The three most publicized cases were in Mettenbuch (Lower Bavaria), Dittrichswalde (the Ermland), and Marpingen (the Saarland).12 I shall concentrate on the last of these, not only because it has the richest and most varied archival evidence but because it also acquired the largest public and political resonance.

Marpingen was a large village with about 1,600 inhabitants situated in the hill country of the northern Saarland, solidly Catholic and largely unremarkable.

11. Detailed argument and references in Blackburn, Marpingen, chap. 1; T. Kselman, Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), and N. Perry and L. Echeverria, Under the Heel of Mary (London, 1988) deal extensively with the political context.
12. The extensive printed sources on these cases include, on Marpingen: A. F. von Berg (Adam Fauth), Marpingen und das Evangelium (Stuttgart, 1877); W. Kramer, Die Erscheinungen und Heilungen in Marpingen (Würzburg, 1876); F. von Lann, Die Muttergottes-Erscheinungen in Marpingen (Saar) (Ahlöting, n.d.); Marxinger—Wahrheit oder Lüge? (Münstertal, 1877); Die Marpingener Mutter-Gottes-Erscheinungen und wunderbaren Heilungen (Paderborn, 1877); Marpingen und seine Gnadennachrichten (Münster, 1877); J. Rebbert, Marpingen und seine Gegner (Paderborn, 1877); N. Thomae, Die Erscheinungen in Marpingen (Stuttgart, 1877); and Mettenbuch: B. Braunnmüller, Kurzer Bericht über die Erscheinungen U. L. Frau bei Mettenbuch (Degendorf, 1878); and Dittrichswalde: "Die Erscheinungen der unbefleckten Empfangen in Dittrichswalde," Der Sendbote des göttlichen Heiles, 14 (1878), 56–62; "Die Erscheinungen zu Dittrichswalde," St-Bonifatius-Kalender für das Jahr 1879, 147–59; and Alsace: "Wunder in Elsass," St-Bonifatius-Kalender für das Jahr 1893, 89–104; Berg, Marpingen und das Evangelium, 26–27; on Silesia: Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 29 August 1876; and on Posen: Költische Zeitung, 6 September 1876.
able.13 It was in the diocese and the Prussian administrative district of Trier, part of the Rhine Province, to which that area of the Saarland had belonged since 1834. Marpingen was some miles from the nearest railhead, in St. Wendel, and it was, as one contemporary put it, "not marked on normal maps."14 True, the village was not quite the isolated community some later depicted. A growing proportion of village men earned their living in the Saar coalfield to the south, peasants conducted business in nearby market towns, and figures as various as the rural postman, notaries, moneylenders, knife grinders, and traveling musicians passed through with news. At the beginning of July 1876, however, attention in Marpingen was centered on haymaking, which had an important place in the annual agricultural cycle. Work began at dawn, and all available hands were pressed into service. Children were no exception, and the village school had a "haymaking-holiday."15 Those too young to take part or to help with the care of farm animals were given the task of gathering berries or other fruits of the forest.

It was in order to gather bilberries— Wälen in the local dialect—that, on the hot Monday of 3 July, a number of young girls found themselves in the Härwelwald, a hilly wooded area with many rocky gullies a few minutes away from Marpingen. There were five girls in all. Three were eight-year-olds and fast friends: Katharina Hubertus, Susanna Leist, and Margaretha Kunz. With them in the woods were Katharina’s six-year-old sister, Lischen, and another six-year-old, Anna Meisberger. The girls had separated to look for berries and were not together when the Angelus sounded and they started to make their way home. Between the wood and the village was an area of wild meadow with thick bushes around it. It was here that Susanna Leist suddenly called out, bringing Katharina and Margaretha hurrying to her, and drew her friends’ attention to a “figure in white.” When the girls reached home, agitated and frightened, all three described seeing a woman in white with a child in her arms. The reactions of parents and neighbors are disputed, but it is clear that the girls remained in a state of excitement. Margaretha slept badly and prayed a lot, Katharina dreamed of the woman in white, and Susanna was reluctant to go to bed at all. The following day they returned to the spot and knelt down to pray. According to their account, after they had recited the Lord’s Prayer three times, the apparition appeared again to Margaretha and Katharina—although not to

Susanna, the original seer. “Who are you?” they asked the figure in the local dialect and received the reply: “I am the Immaculately Conceived.”16

The apparitions continued. The figure, now confidently identified by adults as the Blessed Virgin, instructed that a chapel be built, encouraged the sick to come to her, and asked that water be taken from a nearby spring. Soon there were reports of miraculous healings, and within less than a week thousands of pilgrims were streaming to Marpingen. Reports spoke of twenty thousand in the village, with up to four thousand at the apparition site, singing, praying, and taking away foliage or handfuls of earth. In the words of the parish priest, Lourdes was “fearful compared with the mighty current that here is breaking through all barriers.”17 The three seers subsequently claimed visions in other parts of the village—in their homes, in barns and stables, in the school, in the graveyard and the church—and what they described became more luxuriant. The Virgin appeared with and without the Christ child, sometimes accompanied by angels. She was dressed now in white, now in gold or azure. The apparitions also took on darker tones. On one occasion the girls reported seeing the Virgin clad in black, on another they described a celestial procession passing over the graveyard. The devil also made several appearances. The apparitions were to continue for fourteen months.

Marpingen became a cause célèbre. Journalists, priests, and the sellers of pious memorabilia descended on the village, along with pilgrims from Germany and abroad.18 Supporters and opponents dubbed Marpingen “the German Lourdes,” even “the Bethlehem of Germany.”19 “It is an undeniable fact that the whole world is talking about Marpingen,” wrote one sympathetic commentator.20 “Marpingen has become the center of events that have shaken the world,” suggested another.21 The hyperbole was forgivable. A bar brawl in a different part of Germany began when one man insulted another by calling him a “Marpinger.” (A local court found him guilty of slander and sentenced him to a fine of fifteen Marks or three days in jail.)22 One newspaper, linking the themes of the apparitions and the Eastern crisis that was dominating the press, ran an editorial under the headline “Marpingen and Stambul.”23 Bismarck himself made slighting remarks about Marpingen, and his interest

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16. Accounts of the apparitions can be found in LASB, E 107, 1–14; Bistumsarchiv Trier (BAT), B III, 11, 14/3, 1–49; see also the published sources in note 11 above.

17. LASB, E 107, 424: Jacob Neureuter, notebook entry of 11 July 1876.

18. See Blackburn, Marpingen, chap. 4.


22. A report from the town of Deutz in the Saar- and Mosel-Zeitung, 17 October 1876.

reflected another element of the village's new celebrity (or notoriety). The apparition movement collided with the machinery of state. The result was a lengthy struggle that was to extend from Marpingen and the surrounding areas of the Saarland to the courtrooms of the Rhine Province and the Prussian parliament in Berlin.

In trying to unpick the beginning of these events, let us start with the visionaries. By common consent, Margaretha (Gretchen) Kunz was the most developed of the three seers and the dominant figure among them. The word that seemed to occur to everyone who met her was geweckt—bright or sharp. Her father had died in a mill accident five months before her birth, and it would be surprising if she did not experience some resentment from her brothers and sisters, as the last-born of a large family, another mouth to feed in suddenly straitened circumstances. We know that the life of the family changed after the death of Jacob Kunz. He had owned a share in the Alsweiler mill, and the family belonged to the solid middle peasantry ("cattle-peasants") of Marpingen; one of Margaretha’s uncles was a village notable. But the mill was subject to forced sale, his widow was unsuccessful when she challenged this in the courts, and Jacob Kunz left debts. Margaretha’s elder brothers went down the pit, and her sister Magdalena became a servant girl in the village. It is worth noting the parallels here with the fourteen-year-old Mathilde Sack, a tailor’s daughter who was the central figure in the Mettenbuch apparitions. She also had had to come to terms with a fractured family and a loss of family respectability: her mother had died when Mathilde was eleven, her father had been jailed, and she disliked her stepmother. After leaving to work variously for a goldbeater and a confectioner and in domestic service (she was dismissed by one dissatisfied mistress), Mathilde finally left the unhappy family home when her brother went into the army, going as a farm servant to her aunt in Mettenbuch, where apparitions were reported soon afterward. There are echoes in both cases of Soubirous, bankrupted miller’s daughter and unhappy farm servant. There is no doubt that the German visionaries felt guilt, fear, and uncertainty in their new roles; but there was also awareness of the new attention they commanded. They jealously guarded the apparition sites, issuing warnings to the parish priests and indicating with a shake of the head that certain individuals should not approach. They spoke of secrets, told pilgrims that a celestial omen would be explained and—in Marpingen—"prophesied" the death of a sick child. Katharina said that she had been told to become a nun. The Mettenbuch seers fashioned for themselves, from devotional scraps and fragments, the image of a better world. They described Mary wearing “gold shoes and white stockings” and “angels, as they ate grilled fish from a golden table”; the Virgin reportedly gave instructions that they make up and drink daily from a concoction that sounds like a rustic ambrosia. The Madonna of Marpingen was more domesticated, as the seers described her appearances in particular houses and other village landmarks. There was doubtless a reassuring element to this: a Blessed Virgin who could be associated with Schäfer’s meadow, or with the round stone that stood at the end of the upper village, was rendered benign, placed firmly within a bounded world. Their message that Mary had graced these everyday spots also cast the places themselves in a new light and enhanced the status of the messengers, for through their privileged position the children placed their own stamp vicariously on places and properties that were normally an adult preserve. More directly, the behavior of the Marpingen seers was often puckish and pert to the point of childish malice, especially in the case of Margaretha.

At the same time, the story told by the girls was shaped by adults. Pious accounts later emphasized that the parents had used carrot and stick to try to force the children to back down. Frau Kunz supposedly told Margaretha that if she continued to tell lies, her brother Peter would “beat her half to death” when he came back from work. But the later testimony of the seers makes it clear
that they were prompted and encouraged almost from the beginning, as adults reworked the story of a "woman in white" into a recognizable apparition narrative.\textsuperscript{35} It is possible to reconstruct how support for the apparitions spread from the upper village, where the visionaries lived, into the rest of Marpingen via family clans and friendship networks—predominantly female clans and networks. Village women played a prominent role in nurturing the apparition movement, although the evidence also suggests that attitudes toward the apparitions were decisively influenced when village notables and other "men of good character" gave their support.\textsuperscript{36}

A microlevel analysis of how the apparitions were taken up in Marpingen tells us much about the lines of authority in the village, about the relations of adults and children, men and women, notables and village poor. I have been able to give only the briefest sketch here. The positive local reception of the apparitions is also revealing in other ways. The ease with which a "woman in white" could be transformed into Mary Immaculate casts light on religious change in Marpingen during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The zeal with which Mary’s intercession was greeted tells us something about Catholic anxiety, even desperation, in the 1870s. And the eagerness with which villagers exploited pilgrims commercially indicates the economic plight of Marpingen in the same decade. In following up these points, we need to turn to Marpingen’s relations with a larger world, particularly to the ways in which external pressures affected the village and made it more receptive to the apparition story.

One of these pressures affected the villagers as Catholics. In 1834 the latest of its many recent temporal rulers, the duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, sold the small principality of Lichtenberg, to which Marpingen belonged, to the king of Prussia.\textsuperscript{37} Thereafter the area belonged to the Rhine Province, subject to Prussian state-building and under the aegis of a Protestant dynasty, a Protestant state church, a Protestant field administration, and a Protestant officer corps.\textsuperscript{38} Some in Berlin clearly believed that Prussia also had a Protestant mission, although few went as far as Foreign Minister Johann Peter Friedrich Ancillon, who called in 1832 for a "Protestantization of the Catholic Rhineland."\textsuperscript{39} Anti-Catholic discrimination was endemic, and one Catholic priest declared that he would sooner live under the Turks.\textsuperscript{40} Where, as in the case of state forestry or mine officials, the lines of denominational and social conflict coincided, the potential for Catholic alienation and discontent was multiplied. There were numerous signs of this in the decades preceding German unification on Protestant-Prussian terms. The third quarter of the nineteenth century also saw mounting communal tension. The historical patchwork quilt of Protestant and Catholic communities on the western border of Germany and the further intermingling of the denominations through new demographic patterns made this tension especially severe in the Saarland. Marpingen’s miners experienced it in the coalfield.\textsuperscript{41} All villagers witnessed the fierce denominational struggles (over shared churches, the construction of new buildings, the ringing of church bells) that erupted in villages throughout the area—in Offenbach, Kappeln, Weierbach, Oberreidenbach, and Sien.\textsuperscript{42} One of these disputes, beginning in 1863—64 and resurfacing in the 1870s, occurred in Berschweiler, an immediately neighboring village and the birthplace of Margaretha’s mother.\textsuperscript{43}

What sharpened Catholic feelings in the 1870s was the harshness of the Prussian Kulturkampf, a conflict in which eighteen hundred priests were jailed or exiled, wanted notices were issued for bishops, homes were searched, and sixteen million marks’ worth of church property was seized.\textsuperscript{44} The diocese of Trier was seriously affected. In December 1873 the diocesan seminary was closed down, and in March 1874 Matthias Eberhard became the second

\textsuperscript{35} BAT, B III, 11, 14/3, 59–65: Margaretha’s "confession," 26 January 1889. Frau Leist told the girls on the first evening: "Go back into the woods tomorrow, pray, and if you see her again, ask who she is; if she says she is the immaculately conceived, then she is the Blessed Virgin." Susanna, when asked who had suggested they return to the woods, was silent for fifteen minutes, then replied: "It was not my mother;" LASB, E 107, 60–61: Leist interrogation on 31 October 1876. On apparitions as "fictions," see J. Kent, "A Renovation of Images: Nineteenth-Century Protestant 'Lives of Jesus' and Roman Catholic Alleged Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary," in The Critical Spirit and the Will to Believe, ed. D. Jasper and T. R. Wright (Basingstoke, 1989), 37–52.

\textsuperscript{36} See details and references in Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 4.

\textsuperscript{37} On this background—six changes of sovereignty between the 1760s and 1834—see Burgert, Heimathbuch, 94–113, 195–205; M. Müller, Die Geschichte der Stadt St. Wendel (St. Wendel, 1927), 189–91, 229; and O. Beck, Beschreibung des Regierungsbezirks Trier (Trier, 1868–71), 2:66–73.


\textsuperscript{39} F. E. Heitaj, Die Saar Zeitung und die Entwicklung des politischen Katholizismus an der Saar von 1872–1888 (Saarlouis, 1931), 17.


\textsuperscript{42} Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz (LHAK), 403/10611, 251–358, 429–58, 573–715; LHAK, 403/10612, 11–26.

\textsuperscript{43} LHAK, 403/10611, 517–52.

\textsuperscript{44} On the repressive aspects of the Kulturkampf, see M. Scholle, Die Preussische Strafjustiz im Kulturkampf, 1873–1880 (Marburg, 1974).
sian bishop to be arrested, receiving a fine of 130,000 marks and a nine-month prison sentence.45 He died six months after his release from jail, exactly one month before the Marpingen events began. The diocese was, in the emotive phrase of the time, "orphanned." Marpingen was directly affected by the so-called bread-basket law, which removed state subsidies from priests who refused (as virtually all did) to declare support for the government's measures. There is evidence of the strains that this produced in the village.46 Indirectly, Marpingen watched priests in other Saarland parishes be arrested, particularly in neighboring Namborn, where the hunting down and arrest of Jakob Isbert in July 1874 resulted in one of the most violent episodes of the Kulturkampf. Namborn was in the same deanery as Marpingen, and the crowds that stormed the railway station at St. Wendel in an attempt to free Father Isbert included many from surrounding rural areas. The rural mayor who arrested the priest, the anticlerical Wilhelm Woydt, also had responsibility for Marpingen, where he was deeply unpopular. It is a measure of local sentiment that he was known as the Devil of St. Wendel.47 In the wake of official repression, there was heightened Catholic feeling, partly militant, partly mystical. With each new onslaught, the sense of panic and desperation brought reports of stigmatists and prophets, signs of a collective longing for some kind of supernatural intercession and deliverance.48

The Kulturkampf was not the only source of pressure and anxiety in Marpingen. Historians disagree about many aspects of the "Great Depression," but no one disputes that 1873 saw the advent of agricultural crisis and industrial recession.49 Marpingen was hit by both. Land prices had collapsed after earlier speculation, leaving high levels of debt; prices were low, credit was

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46. The law generally hit poorer, left-bank Rhineland parishes harder. On the Marpingen clerical income, see BAT, 70/3676, 43–46, 81–84; on the tensions that resulted, see BAT, 70/3676a, 158–59; Father Jacob Neureuter to the vicar-general of Trier, 30 October 1893.


48. On Elisabeth Flesch, the "blood sweater" of nearby Eppelborn, and other cases, see Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 3.


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short, and—in the words of one writer—the moneylenders were active "from three o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night."50 (Villagers would later show a certain insolent pride in parading the visionaries before these same moneylenders and cattle dealers in Tholey.) Bailiffs serving distress orders and the itinerant poor crowding the highroads testified to the crisis.51 Marpingen was also severely affected by the industrial recession in the Saarland. By the middle of the 1870s, half of the employed population worked away from the village in the southern Saar coalfield, which developed so fast in the 1850s and 1860s that it was dubbed "black California."52 The loss or reduction of their income had a demonstrably adverse effect on Marpingen.53 Indeed, the new way of life of this first generation of miner-peasants marked a significant break in the life of the whole village. The miner-peasants walked to work early on Monday morning and returned late on Saturday night, living effectively as Gastarbeiter for six days a week in poor accommodations, subjected to quasi-military discipline by mine officials and distrusted by many indigenous miners as rate-busting rustics (and "backward" Catholics). They lived in two worlds, at home in neither. For those they left behind, central aspects of life were also transformed, including farm work and the organization of it, relationships between husband, wife, and children, and family marriage strategies.54 The Marpingens seers had brothers and other extended family members who earned a living in this way; many of the "rival children" who later claimed apparitions also had absent fathers and brothers; miners' wives and children were to be prominent in reporting "miraculous" cures.55 These circumstances are surely


51. Testimony of the gendarmer Hentschel in Der Marpinger Prozess vor dem Zuchtpolizeigericht in Saarbrücken, ed. G. Daubach (Trier, 1879), 163; Müller, Die Geschichte der Stadt St Wendel, 276.


53. LASB, E 107, 434.


55. See details in Blackbourn, Marpingen, chaps. 4–5.
significant, especially when we put them together with other pieces of evidence. Broken families were, as we have seen, a motif in many apparitions, in Germany and elsewhere. We also know something about the strains that arose in similar commuting villages in Württemberg and in other communities where the adult males were regularly away seeking employment, such as the Weiberdorf (village without men) in the Eifel depicted in Clara Viebig’s novel of that name.56 We have the evidence, finally, of a curious parallel to the Marpingen events two years later in the Friuli, when an outbreak of “collective hysteria” arose among the women of Verzegnis at a time when most of the village men were absent as migrant seasonal laborers.57 These examples suggest that we take seriously the social-psychological dimension involved at Marpingen, where the strain of economic and social dislocation was borne by families.

This angle of approach also requires that we look at the place occupied by women and children in the changing devotional forms and popular piety of the decades before the 1870s. The word “changing” needs to be emphasized, for it would be wrong to regard what happened to Marpingen simply as the “traditional” response of a pious community to the threats posed by a “modern” state and economy. The history of Marpingen earlier in the century shows how misleading that would be. In the 1840s the village was still being described in the most unflattering terms by its parish priest. Lack of interest in church services, card playing, enthusiasm for the tavern, dancing through the night on feast days, unruly young people, the negligent upbringing of children, crude sensuality—these were “quite general” in the parish.58 Even by the standards of contemporary clerical disapproval, the village seems to have stood out, and events in the first half of the nineteenth century suggest an unusual degree of spite and hostility toward successive parish priests. Father Heinrich Licht had his windows broken; Father Matthias Hoff had serious differences with his flock over dancing and standards in the local school; Father Joseph Bicking, in the 1840s, had problems over almost everything, meeting with verbal and physical abuse, which may have led him eventually to leave Marpingen.59

The transformation that occurred in the following generation is essential to an understanding of what happened later. The changes were similar to those described by Jonathan Sperber in his study of popular Catholicism in the Rhineland and Westphalia.60 In Marpingen, as elsewhere, there was a purposive renewal of piety and a reassertion of clerical control. Religious brotherhoods and sodalities were founded; a well and a shrine linked to the legend of a miraculous image of the Virgin were restored; church attendance improved, and illegitimacy rates fell.61 The parish priest in 1876 (he had been there since 1864) was Father Jacob Neureuter, one of the new breed of intensely Mariolatrous clergy produced by the more independent seminaries of the 1850s and 1860s, and the cult of the Virgin Mary was central to the religious revival in Marpingen, as it was across Europe. It touched everything—sodalities, hymnals, statutory, even the liturgy—and formed the centerpiece of a recharged, emotionally laden piety.62 This change was paralleled by two others. One was the “feminization” of Catholicism (much less studied in the German case than in some others).63 The second was the growing emphasis on the child as a symbol of purity and simple faith. Children, for their part, grew up in a world increasingly suffused with the songs, the flowers, the perfumes, and the images of a cloying piety centered on the Virgin Mary. They were also being prepared


59. Derr, “Geschichte der Pfarrei Marpingen,” 11—12, 20—29. 35. Bicking had a further problem with irregular church bookkeeping, a “hateful business”; see BAT, 70/3676, 20: Bicking to the vicar-general, Trier, 23 October 1847. See also Derr, 22—25, 30, 34—37.


for communion at a younger age, something that may have influenced several German visionaries of the 1870s. 64 These changes were reinforced by the great popular missions held in Germany in the 1850s and 1860s, and they received the warmest encouragement from Pope Pius IX, for whom the cult of the Virgin Mary in general and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in particular were major preoccupations. 65 

All of this might suggest a substratum of truth to the charge leveled by officials and liberals, in highly characteristic terms, that clerical inspiration was at work on susceptible women ("madwomen," "hysterical women") and children ("the maids favored by the Deity"). 66 In Marpingen we have young girls who had just begun study of the catechism at school, instructed by a parish priest who had placed his own oil painting of the Virgin and child in the local church and sermonized about Lourdes and by a teacher who had also related the story of Bernadette. 67 Moreover, the apparitions began on the very day—3 July 1876—that thirty-five bishops, five thousand priests, and one hundred thousand lay Catholics were gathered for a major "coronation" ceremony at Lourdes. 68 It was a time when details about the Pyrenean apparitions were widely reported in the Catholic press, when Catholics in Marpingen (as elsewhere in Germany) would certainly have been voicing the common lament that the Virgin had not yet graced German soil. Lourdes had an obvious impact on German Catholics. Where such apparitions had been approved as exemplary, the church threw its formidable institutional weight behind them. It showed great organizational flair in promoting the apparitions as official cults, sending in religious orders to run sites such as the Lourdes Domain as specialists and learning from the great exhibitions of the period when it came to the transportation of pilgrims by railway or the use of lighting for dramatic effect. Through sermons, popular pamphlets and the word-of-mouth accounts of those who had been on major "national pilgrimages" (which began in the 1870s), expectations were aroused and the faithful everywhere learnt what the Blessed Virgin "ought" to look like. 69 The effects of this can be seen at Marpingen, where a routinely familiar story about a woman in white was reshaped by local crisis and the longing for deliverance, by the contingencies of time and place, and not least by the agency of particular adults into a rather different story about Mary the Immaculately Conceived.

At the beginning the responsibility of the clergy was indirect: they followed popular sentiment much more than they led it. This remained true as the apparitions continued, although the degree of clerical enthusiasm should not be underestimated. Very large numbers of priests visited Marpingen. Of the five hundred or so pilgrims in the village on 28 August 1877, around forty were members of the clergy. The exceptionally large crowd six days later included "hundreds" of priests from Germany and abroad. 70 Some idea of the geographical spread can be gleaned from the unlucky twenty who were caught and prosecuted for the illegal celebration of mass in Marpingen. They came not only from the Rhine Province and the nearby Palatinate but from Baden, Westphalia, and East Prussia. 71 Widespread clerical belief in the apparitions is plain: priests wept when the three girls told their story, accompanied triumphal processions of the "miraculously" cured to the visionaries' homes, and took Marpingen water away with them. 72 This is not surprising, given their training and the circumstances of the 1870s. The apparitions must have represented a solace for many, a sign of grace in a cold, hard world "sunk in materialism," and an intercession of such potency that it would join the progressives out of their materialist complacency. 73 In the words of one: "I firmly hope and believe that things are still to happen here at which the Kulturkämpfer will marvel, as once did Columbus and his fellows when they discovered America." 74 Priests with notebooks became a familiar sight in Marpingen; and by prompting the visionaries (however innocently), as they certainly did, by recording the events, and by publicizing them in the press and in cheap pamphlets, many priests helped to legitimate events that they saw as a great cause. 75 

Yet there were clerical skeptics, too, and with good reason. Among visiting priests and those who corresponded with Neureuter, there was concern at aspects of the visionaries' accounts, particularly the descriptions of the devil: "dark points," in the words of one; "curious matters that make an extremely

66. Saar- und Mosel-Zeitung, 18 July 1876; and Nahe-Blies-Zeitung, 21 October 1876.
70. LASB, E 107, 165; Marpingen und seine Gnadenmonate, 41.
73. Quotation from LASB, E 107, 359–61; Father Klotz to Father Konrad Schneider, 19 August 1876. Schneider was parish priest in Alswiler, near Marpingen, and spent long periods in the village after the apparitions.
74. Ibid., 364; Father Schneider to Father Bollig, of Mertesdorf, 10 October 1876.
75. BAT, B III, 11, 143, 59–65.
unfavorable impression," in the opinion of another. There were further disquieting elements. Pilgrims streamed there without their parish priests in a manner that seemed dangerously spontaneous. These large unofficial movements of the faithful ran directly counter to the clerical tendency to encourage more organized and controlled pilgrimages. The pilgrims attracted to the "miraculous" children also showed some inclination to neglect the official site of Marian devotion in the village (the well and shrine near the church) and flock instead to the new site in the wood, which lay on the opposite side of the village. In Marpingen, as elsewhere, there is a local topography of apparitions, which we should not neglect. Popular faith in the curative powers of water and of the place itself was strongly tinged with animistic beliefs. At the same time, the commercial opportunities presented by the pilgrimage trade raised the specter of that intermingling of the sacred and profane so often criticized by the clergy—although, it should be said, this problem was touched on by clerical critics of Marpingen less than one might expect.77

The two central issues were undoubtedly "superstition" and clerical control. The emotional drama surrounding the apparitions released popular sentiments that could hardly fail to alarm the clergy. Pilgrims saw processions "floating through the air"; others believed they had been guided to their goal by the "miraculous star of Marpingen"; there were reports of imminent plague from which only those who partook of the water would be spared, of heaven and hell opening up and of demons roaming abroad.78 The Marpingen apparitions also triggered numerous imitations. Within the village itself, a score of "rival children" claimed increasingly extravagant visions.79 Further local apparitions were reported from Gronig, Wemmeldesweiler, Münchwe, and Berschweiler. In Münchweis a group of children worked themselves into a religious ecstasy; at one point a group burst in on Neureuter at Marpingen "bathed in sweat" and asking to take communion. Children and adults saw the devil standing next to the Virgin and dancing around her in the shape of a dog, a donkey, and a cow.80 In Berschweiler a group of a dozen children, mainly girls, fought violent struggles with the devil in front of large crowds. We are told how

76. Die Marpinger Mutter Gottes-Erscheinungen, 24; LASB, E 107, 118–19.
77. On the pilgrims and their conduct, and on the commercialization, see Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 5.
78. Kölnische Zeitung, 23 August 1876; Thoenoes, Die Erscheinungen in Marpingen, 78–81; Berg, Marpingen und das Evangelium, 44; Saar- und Mosel-Zeitung, 6 February 1877; Müller, Die Geschichte der Stadt Wendel, 274.
80. Prozess vor dem Zuchtpolizeigericht, 157 (Neureuter's testimony); LHAK, 442/6442, 73–80; Father Göller to the Landrat of Otweiler, 22 July 1877; the Landrat of Otweiler to the district governor of Trier, 25 July 1877.

“eleven girls rolled on a bed with convulsive twitches and improper movements, while screaming and shouting about the apparitions they were witnessing,” performances that commonly went on beyond midnight.81 A little further afield, the "Virgin in a bottle" at the Gappenach mill, over which the miller, his wife, an impoverished tailor, and a woman known as "the nun of Naunheim" were prosecuted, attracted five thousand pilgrims a day. There was another Virgin in a bottle at Mülheim.82

Many of these cases, especially the ones involving nocturnal activities, were an explicit challenge to clerical authority, often accompanied by threats (especially in Berschweiler and Gappenach). In Münchwies the local priest criticized the "night-time mischief" of local youth in terms remarkably similar to those applied in earlier decades to "unruly" Marpingen.83 Even the original Marpingen apparitions alarmed some local priests sufficiently that they sermonized against them and warned their parishioners off, without conspicuous success. While many liberal and Protestant observers argued that the Catholic clergy should somehow have nipped matters in the bud, a sardonic reporter in the Gartenlaube was more realistic: the clergy was "simply not master of a movement over which it has long lost any control."84 This verdict applies, in more complicated ways, to the parish priests of Marpingen and Mettenbuch. Both were overwhelmed, in the first place, by the new demands on them: correspondents who wanted information and "miraculous" water, pilgrims requiring masses to be said and confessions to be heard, clerical visitors who "tortured" the parish priests with their questions—not to mention abusive mail and inquisitive officials.85 Neureuter in Marpingen and Father Johannes Anglhuber in Mettenbuch were racked by personal doubts about the authenticity of the apparitions and troubled by the possibility of childish mischief or diabolical inspiration, although it is clear that both came privately to believe in them. However, given the formal obligation on any parish priest in this position to maintain a prudent reserve, both came under enormous pressure from their parishioners and others to embrace the apparitions wholeheartedly. The phrases "keep under control" and "do not encourage" echo poignantly
through their correspondence, along with "what should I do?" and "I do not know where to turn." There is evidence that Neureuter came close to cracking under the strain.87

Whenever claims of apparitions and miraculous cures arose, canon law stipulated that a formal ecclesiastical inquiry be held. Marpingen, Mettenbuch, and Dittrichswade were subject to such inquiries, and in each case a negative judgment was the result. The church had problems, however, both in conducting its investigations and in getting its judgments to stick. In the case of Marpingen, the Kulturkampf had deprived Trier of a bishop, and the diocese was being run by members of the cathedral chapter acting as papal legates and using Latin code names.88 The chain of command in the diocese was fragile (this was one of Neureuter’s problems), and a canonical inquiry was hard to organize. Eventually the task was entrusted to an octogenarian Luxemburg cleric with strong German connections, Titular Bishop Johannes Theodor Laurent of Chersones: in 1878 he deemed the account of the Marpingen seers “unseemly,” “unworthy and sacrilegious” and the apparitions themselves inauthentic.89 However, the interplay of piety and politics made it difficult for the improvised hierarchy in Trier to come out openly against the apparitions, for this would have given a weapon to anticlericals and bitterly disappointed the faithful. As a result, the church sat on the Marpingen findings, storing up future trouble for itself from frustrated advocates of the “German Lourdes.”90 In the short term, though, the decision in Trier may have represented prudent calculation, for in the Mettenbuch case, where Bishop Ignaz Senestrey of Regensburg was free to conduct a textbook inquiry, the pastoral letter rejecting the apparitions failed to quell widespread belief in their authenticity. Regensburg continued to be troubled by the issue through the 1880s.91 The silent Kulturkampf in Bavaria, like the open Kulturkampf in Prussia, heightened the popular Catholic propensity to believe in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, whatever its clergy said.

Reactions to the apparitions not only revealed divisions among the lower clergy and between clergy and laity; they also revealed divisions within the laity itself. These had a clear sociological dimension. The miraculous sites attracted large numbers of visitors from the Catholic aristocracy, German and non-German. Spees, Stolbergs, Löwensteins—all the great families were represented in Marpingen.92 The Princess Helene of Thurn und Taxis patronized both Mettenbuch and Marpingen, traveling to the latter with a retinue of seventeen servants.93 At the bottom of the social scale, the apparition sites attracted peasants, agricultural laborers, farm and domestic servants, significant numbers of small tradespeople, and—above all in Marpingen—workers. Marpingen became something of a miners’ pilgrimage.94 Conspicuously absent among pilgrims and other supporters of the apparitions were members of the Catholic bourgeoisie, certainly bourgeois men. There were naturally theologians and publicists who were enthusiastic, and a handful of businessmen appear in the record as having visited Marpingen (although not always with any great faith).95 But in the extensive sources, official and unofficial, hostile and friendly, there is not a single reference to pilgrims who were industrialists or managers, no mention at all of any pilgrim from the middle or higher ranks of the bureaucracy, no pilgrim engaged in the exercise of law, medicine, engineering, or architecture. The social composition of those who went to Marpingen reflects the skewed distribution of Catholics in the overall population. But the striking underrepresentation of the property and educated middle classes also says something about Catholics who belonged to those classes. There were, of course, Catholic doctors, lawyers, officials, and businessmen, but they were precisely the Catholics of whom it was complained that they were “too close to the Protestants and lukewarm,” that they led worldly lives and read novels.96 These were the Catholics who distrusted “excessive” Mariolatry and found episodes like Marpingen more embarrassing than inspirational. From the austere academic Franz-Xaver Kraus, who regarded Marpingen, like Lourdes, as an ultramontane nonsense to the factory owner who

87. Details and references in Blackburn, Marpingen, chap. 6.
90. See Blackburn, Marpingen, chap. 11.
92. Müller, Die Geschichte der Stadt St. Wendel, 275; LASB, E 107, 162, 166, 361–62; Prozess vor dem Zuchtpolizeigericht, 84; Marpingen und seine Gnadenmonte, 46; Marpingen—Wahrheit oder Lüge? 44–45.
94. Blackburn, Marpingen, chap. 4, has a detailed sociological breakdown of the pilgrims to both Marpingen and Mettenbuch. See also Mallmann, "Aus des Tages Last!"
95. LASB, E 107, 86–92, 236.
96. E. Gatz, Rheinische Volksmission im 19. Jahrhundert (Düsseldorf, 1963), 97–98. Conversely, the skepticism about Marpingen among “thinking” Catholics was exploited by Protestant writers; see Berg, Marpingen und das Evangelium, 40.
expressed himself scandalized by the affair, these attitudes were widespread. They were especially prevalent in the educated middle class, and they extended to figures prominent in Catholic public life. Thus Julius Bachem, lawyer, publicist, and leading Center Party politician, did everything possible to distance himself from the supernatural claims on which Marpingen rested.

Yet Bachem defended the inhabitants of Marpingen, in the parliament and in the courts, against charges that arose from events there. This combination of personal skepticism and public defense was not hypocritical but rather another telling sign of the times. It was the great—involuntary—achievement of the Prussian state and their liberal allies that they did so much to paper over the real divisions among German Catholics. The very reasons that made it difficult for the church to win popular support for its rejection of the apparitions were the same ones that tended to bring German Catholics together—for all were tarred with the same brush. To understand this, we have to appreciate the scale of the political and bureaucratic offensive faced by Catholics in the 1870s. Liberals were in many ways the pacemakers here. It was, after all, a left-liberal—the doctor, pathologist, and scientific popularizer Rudolf Virchow—who coined the phrase Kulturkampf. And the fierceness with which liberals supported this "struggle of civilizations" demonstrates their heady belief in progress, defined above all against the "dead hand" of the church and Catholic "backwardness." The reactions of liberal politicians and press to Marpingen reveal a boundless contempt and hostility. The apparitions were painted as an example of deception and credulity—the "Marpingen miracle swindle", the "crassest stupidity", "mindless superstition", "a colossal swindle based on stupidity", a product of the "credulous bigoted masses." A darker, pseudo-scientific language also colored these denunciations. Apparition sites were habitually described as a Sumpf, or swamp; believers (especially women) were the victims of "mania" or "hysteria"; the episodes were a form of collective pathology, an "epidemic popular disease." The apparitions were also, in the view of many liberals, an attempt to foster "hatred" against the Reich and to inflame the "fanatical mob" into "revolutionary upheaval."

Contempt, dehumanizing language, fears for public order—all made it easier for liberals to support repressive measures, urging the government to "proceed with maximum energy against this antistate and treasonable agitation." Among National Liberals, who identified themselves strongly with Bismarck, "energetic measures" were constantly invoked. Energy, strength, endurance, lack of sentimentiality were "manly" virtues, the self-image with which National Liberals warmed themselves as they "struggled" (or backed the struggle of the state) against the clerical enemy. Left-liberals such as Virchow and newspapers like the Frankfurter Zeitung had greater misgivings about the methods employed in the Kulturkampf. The latter argued that Marpingen was a swindle that would have been better dealt with by "manly and honorable words and open discussion" than by repression. Yet they were also committed by the logic of their position to a firm prosecution of the anticlerical struggle in which they so passionately believed. Marpingen provides a perfect instance of the way that progressive liberals allowed Bismarck to wage "proxy wars" (Stellverteitékrieger) on their behalf. As a result, the state, which had censored liberal newspapers and dismissed liberal officials in the 1850s and 1860s, was now cast in the role of a progressive cultural steamroller. The price paid by liberals was acquiescence in the repressive measures taken in places like Marpingen.

How, then, did the Prussian state act in Marpingen? The authorities remained ignorant of what was happening for a week. The local gendarmerie was in jail on an immorality charge, and the only state-appointed official in the village, the Ortsvorsieher, provided no information to his superiors. The local Landrat, the decisive figure in the Prussian field administration, was on holiday. When his deputy, District Secretary Hugo Besser, and Woytt, the local rural mayor, first heard about Marpingen and the size of the crowds gathering there, they overreacted. Besser panicked, and Woytt seems to have used the，并且他的态度得到了广泛的传播。他们，尤其是那些在中学、大学和政治团体中占主导地位的专家们，都表示了对神迹的怀疑和憎恶。他们将这种现象视为一种催眠状态，认为这是一种"集体性"的疾病，是对 "普通民众"的攻击。这种观念在身为自由主义者和科学普及者的路德维希·维克霍夫（Rudolf Virchow）的领导下得到了进一步的强化。他将宗教势力比作"爬虫的势力"，并将那些持怀疑态度的人称为"异端"和个人主义的标志。但这种态度并没有得到广泛的认同。相反，这种现象被描绘为一种"神话骗局"，一种"荒谬的愚蠢"，一种"巨大的骗局"。这种现象被描绘为一种"迷信"，一种"伪科学"的语言。这些批评者将现象描述为一种"沼泽"，信徒（尤其是女性）是"疯狂"或"歇斯底里"的受害者；这些事件被描述为一种"集体"的病理学，一种"流行的民众病"。这些现象被认为是"对国家和叛国的威胁"。其中，一些自由主义者，尤其是那些与俾斯麦立场一致的自由主义者，坚持认为"有力的措施"是必要的。他们将"精力"、"力量"和"缺乏感情"视为"男子气概"的美德，这些美德与国家的自我形象相符。这些自由主义者对"代理战争"（Stellvertreterkriege）的恐惧超过了对政治的恐惧。但它们在逻辑上仍然支持对进步的自由主义者的压制，因为这些自由主义者允许俾斯麦发动这种"代理战争"。结果是，国家，当它被认为审查了自由主义报纸并解雇了自由主义官员时，现在被贴上了"进步的文化蒸汽压路机"的标签。但它的代价是自由主义者的屈从，屈从于对压制措施的接受。
opportunity to revenge himself on a community that resented his vigorous support of the Kulturkampf and was also in dispute over his salary. The result was a halfhearted effort by the two men and a group of gendarmes to read the riot act to four thousand singing and praying pilgrims, followed by a telegram to the nearest garrison, in Saarbrücken, requesting assistance. Shortly after noon on 13 July, ten days after the apparitions began, the eighty-strong 8th Company of the 4th Rhenish Infantry Regiment, under Captain von Fragstein-Riemsdorff, arrived in St. Wendel to be briefed by the district secretary. They set off for Marpingen soon after 6 P.M., going cross-country and using forestry tracks. They approached the woods at about 8 P.M., sounded a drumroll, which caused confusion even among the soldiers (some mistook it for the order to load rifles), and proceeded to disperse the crowd with fixed bayonets. The company was then billeted in Marpingen at the village's expense, starting by requisitioning beds, food, hay, and other provisions (including wine) in the early hours of the morning. The commanding officer later observed laconically that “the inhabitants of Marpingen showed themselves to be slack and grudging in the lodging of men and the procuring of necessary provisions, etc., so that energetic action and blunt measures were necessary on my part to regularize the circumstances of the case.” Writing in the Kölnische Volkszeitung, Matthias Scheeben suggested that the behavior of the military “was worse than that to be expected of troops in an occupied country.” Writer and newspaper were later prosecuted for this slur.

The civilian authorities now pursued a dual-track policy, the first part of which aimed to discover the “instigators” of the whole affair. The local Landrat, the district governor from Trier, examining magistrates, and public prosecutors descended on the village and began a lengthy round of inquiries and disciplinary measures. Neureuter and two neighboring parish priests had their homes searched and their correspondence seized; all three priests were then arrested and removed from their posts as school inspectors. Two village schoolteachers were transferred away from the village, and further arrests were made. All the women in the village aged between twenty-five and fifty were subject to a mass identification parade to discover who had placed a cross at the apparition site. There were numerous interrogations, especially of the three girls and their parents (Margaretha was questioned twenty-eight times), and the children were removed from their homes and placed under surveillance in an orphanage in Saarbrücken designed for Protestants. One of the key figures in all of this activity was Leopold Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Meerscheidt-Hüllessem, a senior Berlin detective dispatched to Marpingen by the ministry of the interior at the beginning of October. Meerscheidt was later to play a major part in the surveillance of socialist activities in the 1880s and in compiling the list of suspected homosexuals maintained by the criminal police in Wilhelmine Germany. He operated in the village under a false name, passing himself off (not altogether successfully) as a sympathetic Irish-American journalist with the New York Herald, for which role he had been provided with appropriate papers. By happy chance, the cover name chosen for this detective was “Marlow.” His activities in Marpingen included those of the agent provocateur and recalled the dirty tricks practiced by the Prussian criminal police in the era of Karl Hinckeldey and Wilhelm Streiber during the 1850s. Eventually the efforts of “Marlow” and others led to charges being brought against twenty adults for fraud, aiding and abetting fraud, and public order offences.

The second part of the authorities’ actions was aimed at preventing the inhabitants of Marpingen or visitors from turning the Härtewald into a pilgrimage site. This was to be achieved by heavy policing. Access to the woods was periodically restricted or denied altogether, and they were regularly patrolled, first by the infantry company (withdrawn two weeks later), then by gendarmes and a company of the 8th Rifle Battalion posted to the village in February 1877. More than a hundred villagers were fined for entering the woods, even when they went to cut straw, reach their meadows, or take a shortcut to the railway station in St. Wendel. On one occasion gendarmes seized the heavily pregnant Katharina Meiserger, the only one of a group of fourteen or fifteen women who had failed to flee, and she was “harassed” (drangsaliert) to reveal the names of her companions; on other occasions gendarmes surprised people by jumping out from behind bushes. Numerous villagers were also interrogated, and subsequently fined, over the illegal provision of bed and board to pilgrims, an activity that could lead to a late-night

knock on the door, even for those whose barn accommodated, say, a knife grinder who visited the village every year.  

There were many examples of arrogance and petty harassment in the treatment meted out to villagers and pilgrims alike, although upper-class pilgrims largely escaped this. Some of the heavy-handedness in Marpingen was the responsibility of particular gendarmes and local officials—the bigoted Mayor Woytt, the hard-line Landrat Rumschöttel, the vigorously anti-Catholic District Governor Arthur von Wolff. Yet their individual actions cannot be divorced from a larger system—one that expected the mounted, quasi-military gendarmerie to look down (physically and metaphorically) on the populations they policed, that had placed Rumschöttel in St. Wendel after 1848 as a troubleshooter, and that had weeded out officials less committed to official Kulturkampf policy than Wolff. Moreover, other aspects of the state response to Marpingen clearly came from the top, notably the nefarious activities of "Marlow." That the Prussian state should have acted more represively than its Bavarian counterpart did in Mettenbuch comes as no great surprise, certainly given the circumstances of the 1870s. What might seem more surprising is the severity of the actions in Marpingen compared with Dittrichswalde, where the visionary children were actually Poles. The differences serve as a salutary reminder that the western border was also regarded as extremely sensitive—in some ways more sensitive than the eastern border, because more recently digested into Prussian administration, and because the Franco-Prussian War was so fresh in the memory. Coercion in Marpingen was partly fueled by overheated fears of French plots, in which villagers were cast as the enemy within. There, then, a larger structural pattern that governed the response to Marpingen; but the contrast between events there and in Dittrichswalde must be explained ultimately as a matter of dynamics or momentum. Initial overreaction in Marpingen was a by-product of poor intelligence and local inflexibility. This led to the early calling in of the army, a fairly widespread feature of Prussian "policing." And once the mailed fist had been used, the agencies of the state—army, police, ministry of the interior, field administration, legal bureaucracy—found themselves committed to a position from which it was difficult to withdraw without loss of face. Distinctions should nevertheless be made. The gendarmes and the field administration, with the ministry of the interior ultimately behind it, generally took a harder line than the legal bureaucracy. This had something to do with professional pique among judicial officials in the Saarland that bureaucrats in Trier, Koblenz, and Berlin were interfering in their sphere of competence (the arrival of "Marlow" is a case in point). It may also be related to the larger proportion of Catholics in the judicial branch than in the field administration. In the end, however, there was another distinction: between a ministry of the interior and field administration that pressed for cases to be made, even where (as in Marpingen) it was an uphill struggle, and judicial officials who recognized that it was an uphill struggle and resented the misuse of their time. Marpingen reveals some of these tensions. It also shows how arbitrary bureaucratic actions could be checked by the rule of law. It is significant that the major trials arising out of Marpingen ended in acquittals when courts declined to accept the version of events offered by army officers and by "Marlow." Moreover, like the notorious Zabern case in 1913, when the Prussian army ran amok in an Alsatian garrison town—a case that offers some parallels—Marpingen became a cause célèbre not least because public opinion and political exposure made it one. Leading Catholic publicists, such as Georg Dalsbach and Edmund Prince Radziwill, wrote about the affair, papers like the Kölische Volkszeitung highlighted the abuses that had taken place, and the conduct of the authorities was the subject of a full-scale debate in the Prussian parliament on a motion tabled by the Center Party. Overreaction and high-handedness there certainly were; but we should recognize that in the Prussian

119. These examples (out of many) in BAT, B III, 11, 14/4, 71, 174–75, 178.
120. The senior Prussian legal official, Karl Schorn, singles out the mishandling of Marpingen by particular individuals in his highly critical account, Lebenserinnerungen (Bonn, 1898), 2:259–62.
121. Detailed arguments on this point in Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 9.
122. The handling of Mettenbuch by district officials in Degendorf, Rege, and Viechtach, and the responses from the provincial authority in Landshut, can be followed in SAL, 164/2, 164/11, 814, and 164/18, 697.
123. The soldiers who intervened were initially briefed that insurrection was afoot: LASB, E 107, 425. Belief in, and rumors about, a French "plot" colored many subsequent actions: ibid., 29, 150–52, 155, 198.
125. See, for example, LHAV, 442/6442, 113–14; report by Examining Magistrate Emil Kleber on the state of the Marpingen inquiry, 17 September 1877. Kleber's summary of evidence in LASB, E 107, is larded with skeptical notes, especially where the role of Meerscheidt was concerned.
126. On the trial of Scheben and the Kölnische Volkszeitung, whose acquittal was upheld on appeal, see LASB, E 107, 17; BAT, B III, J, 14/4, 27; LHAV, 442/6442, 135–41; Bachem, Erinnerungen eines alten Publizisten, 136; and Frankfurter Zeitung, 30 May 1877. On the major trial, at Saarbrücken, see Prozess vor dem Zuchtpolizeigericht, esp. 43–50 (the testimony and cross-examination of Meerscheidt), and 275 (Defense Counsel Bachem's savage attack on the policeman, unproved by the presiding judge). See details of other legal cases in Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 10.
state of the 1870s, there were also limits imposed by the rule of law and political embarrassment. 129

There is a further point here. One of the most striking features of events in Marpingen was the difficulty faced by the state in successfully exercising its authority. It is clear that a whole range of nominal state officials—the parish priest, schoolteachers, successive local Ortsvorsteher, the village watchman, the communal forester—failed, sometimes spectacularly, to cooperate with the gendarmes and investigating authorities. 130 In some cases prudence may have played a part in this. In other communities the lives of those branded as Judasses were made very uncomfortable. 131 In Marpingen, the evasive and contradictory statements made by the schoolteacher Magdalene André probably owed something to nervousness of this sort. 132 For the most part, however, non-cooperation resulted from sympathy with local opinion against outside authority. This sympathy only grew as arbitrary measures increased. Conversely, one reason for the brusque interrogations and petty harassment of local people by some officials and gendarmes was undoubtedly frustration caused by the wall of silence they encountered, as the tight-lipped solidarity of villagers compounded the lack of cooperation from minor local officials. 133 Much the same happened in other areas during the Kulturkampf, and it raises a final set of questions about the nature of Catholic resistance to the Kulturkampf.

The most obvious sign of Catholic resistance was organizational. At the head of the organizations that defended Catholics during the 1870s stood the Center Party, which secured four-fifths of all Catholic votes at the high point of the Kulturkampf. 134 The Center Party rested, in turn, on a substructure of associations through which Catholic identity was articulated. These included the clubs, or Casinos, of middle-class Catholics, Catholic peasant and journeyman associations, and a host of religious and charitable organizations—Pius associations, Boniface associations, and so on. Bourgeois Catholics played an important leadership role in many of these. Organizations of this kind also gave priests and aristocrats a series of “modern” public roles to bolster the ties of deference that still bound many lower-class Catholics to them. The clergy played an equally crucial role in the development of the Catholic press. The


131. See LHAK, 442/10419, 175–77; Kammer, Trierer Kulturkampfspriet, 36, 75.

132. LASB, E 107, 104, 279–83.

133. On these frustrations, see Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 2.

134. J. Schauf, Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentralpartei (Cologne, 1928), 75.

organized Catholic response to the Kulturkampf through these channels is fairly familiar to historians. 135 Less familiar, but no less important, were the countless examples, large and small, of what contemporaries referred to as “passive resistance.” 136 These included hiding priests on the run or trying to block their arrest, bringing pressure to bear on those (locksmiths, for example) who “collaborated” with the authorities, and secreting church records or funds before state commissioners could seize them. 137

Both forms of response can be found in Marpingen. In an area where formal organization was very thin, village notables worked together with prominent outsiders to publicize what had happened in Marpingen and to seek redress. Well-known priest-publicists such as Radziwill and Paul Majunke helped villagers to use all the available channels of public life to make their case: petitions to the authorities, legal action, and press coverage. Both of these men were also members of the Reichstag, and Radziwill in particular used his position as a member to work for the release of the three girls. Further advice was sought from other Center Party figures. In the long run these initiatives enjoyed much success, although it is fair to say that until a relatively late stage, Marpingen did more for the local fortunes of the Center Party than the party did for Marpingen. 138

Meanwhile, in the village itself, a different kind of everyday resistance was being practiced. Occasionally it was violent; 139 mostly it fell into the category of “passive resistance.” Gendarmes were frozen out or mocked; a public prosecutor complained wearily that the population “performed spying duties on every corner and path, in order to bring the activity of the authorities to a standstill”; house searches had to be undertaken with locksmiths from outside the village; and villagers worked with the sexton and members of the parish council to spirit away money donated by pilgrims, just as elsewhere church funds were secreted. 140 When Neureuter was released from jail at the beginning of December 1876, he received a festive welcome home as the

135. Sperber, Popular Catholicism, 207–76; Blackbourn, “Progress and Piety.”


137. See examples in Kammer, Trierer Kulturkampfspriet; H. Schifferz, Der Kulturkampf in Stadt und Regierungsbezirk Aachen (Aachen, 1929); L. Ficket, Der Kulturkampf in Münster, ed. O. Heltinghans (Münster, 1928); W. Jestaedt, Der Kulturkampf im Fuldaer Land (Fulda, 1960).

138. See details in Blackbourn, Marpingen, chap. 8.

139. LASB, E 107, 18, 38–45, 156–57, LHAK, 442/6442, 157–58; Kölnische Zeitung, 24 November 1876; Nahe-Blies-Zeitung, 1 February 1877; and Saarbrücker Zeitung, 2 February 1877; and Saar- und Mosel-Zeitung, 6 February 1877. Klaus-Michael Mallmann ("Volkssöhnlichkeit," 218–19) exaggerates the degree of violence.

140. LASB, E 107, 166–69, 224 ff, 431–32; Radziwill, Ein Besuch, 4; LHAK, 442/6442, 117 (quotations from public prosecutor Petershov, 20 September 1877).
young men of Marpingen rode out to meet him on the St. Wendel road and provide a guard of honor. The circumstances turned these declarations of faith into implicit acts of defiance. The emblems of the apparition movement—the cross that marked “the place” and the flowers that adorned it, the lighted candles and pictures, the Marian hymns—became potent symbols of non-compliance with the dictates of the state. Again and again, Marpingen Catholics placed the representatives of authority in a vulnerable or laughable position. Officials painted themselves into the position of treating the flowers left at “the place” as evidence of law breaking, just as eleven girls in Schweich were imprisoned for being caught in possession of garlands after celebrating the release of their parish priest. The refusal of villagers to accept the closing of the woods is particularly interesting. It recalls earlier, bitter disputes with Prussian forestry officials over rights to former communal woodland, and it indicates a stubborn reluctance to concede that the state had a right to dictate where Catholics should go and how they should behave. It was, in short, a defense of “public space” and its uses, which had less dramatic counterparts elsewhere during the Kulturkampf. In Münster, for example, efforts to open a narrow road near the bishop’s palace to wheeled vehicles were resisted, the papal flag was defiantly flown in the woods, and—following a ban on flags during a papal jubilee—a young woman climbed up to place a garland of yellow and white flowers on a prominent statue in the Domplatz.

In Marpingen, as in Münster, we are dealing with a particular kind of social movement, one that generally employed moral rather than physical force and proved very difficult to break. It had its own icons and symbols, in the form of rosaries, candles, and the ubiquitous flowers (the symbolic use of flowers during the Kulturkampf warrants a study to itself). In its pattern and texture, this kind of Catholic movement clearly drew on the revived popular piety and devotional forms of previous decades. Yet we should not exaggerate the element of clerical inspiration. The clergy often had to restrain frustrated parishioners, and much of the resistance in Marpingen bypassed a struggling parish priest. Like the enthusiastic popular response to the apparitions themselves, the movements of communal self-defense that I have been describing were hybrids. They owed something to the clergy but could also outrun clerical control. They show a Catholic populace willing to be impressed by rank—by aristocratic pilgrims distributing favors or by a Radziwill taking up their cause—but hardly deferential in the customary sense. They indicate finally, if

Marpingen is any guide, that we should recognize the roles played both by male notables and by women, children, and youth.

The fact that the German apparitions of the 1870s have received so little attention is itself revealing. There are several reasons why Marpingen, say, is less familiar than Lourdes, Knock, or Fatima, not least the fact that it was never officially recognized by the church and persisted as an unofficial cult. But another reason is that this is simply not what we expect of German Catholics. We think of nineteenth-century German Catholicism as somehow more “modern”—as, in many respects (such as theology), it was. When German Catholics faced external pressure and threats, we expect them—like German workers—to form organizations. And this, of course, they did. Formal organizations are not everything, however. Few would now want to argue that the history of the working class in Imperial Germany is synonymous with the history of the Social Democratic Party and the free trade union movement. The point is no less true of German Catholics. Germany was indeed, as Hubert Jedin has said, the “classic land” of Catholic associational life. But there is another history of German Catholics that deserves attention: a history of mentalities, of popular piety, and of the ways that these interlocked with migration and social change, the relations between men, women, and children, and the attempt to reconstruct clerical authority. Redirecting attention to that other history can also, and not least, throw new light on political and legal structures. For it would be as wrong to exclude questions of power and politics as it would be to view them too narrowly. In the brief compass of this essay, I have tried to show that there is no reason at all why this sort of research should lead us to neglect politics. Our histories can, and should, bring together the history of mentalities and organizations, everyday life, and politics.

141. LASB, E 107, 375; Germania, 6 December 1876.
142. On the Schweich incident, see Kammer, Kulturkampfpriester, 94.