Christianity and the creation of Germany

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Shortly after the proclamation of the Second German empire in 1871, the future Prussian court preacher Adolf Stoecker rejoiced, remarking: "The holy Protestant empire of the German nation is now completed." This statement exemplifies the important, if often overlooked, contribution that Christianity made to the construction of modern Germany. The phrase itself recalls the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' that perished in 1806 and demonstrates the ongoing resonance of the imperial idea for conceptualising the nation throughout the nineteenth century. But by substituting the word 'Protestant' (evangelisch) for the word 'Roman', Stoecker also asserted that creating this new Germany was not simply a matter of 'blood and iron' or even of establishing acceptable constitutional relationships among the member states. In a very fundamental way it entailed resolving a question left open since the Reformation: what kind of Christian nation would Germany be?

Christianity exercised a telling influence on the creation of modern Germany. After 1815 confessional pluralism existed in most of the major German states, compelling each one to develop new legal and social policies to deal with the reality of religious co-existence. The redrawing of state boundaries also necessitated alterations in ecclesiastical organisation and the clarification of church-state relations. Such measures were intended to promote interconfessional peace, but as religious revivals renewed a sense of confessional particularity among Catholics and Protestants, state policies increasingly touched off dissent and socio-political conflict. By mid-century, the heightened sense of confessional difference had constructed a minefield for German politicians that affected domestic politics, church-state relations and, above all, public discussions of the 'German question'. Christian concepts and symbols permeated the discourse of nationalism and understanding of the state, but Protestants and Catholics constructed discrete, rival visions of this nation. Prussian might

1 As cited in Nowak, Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland, p. 158.
resolved the closely related questions of Germany’s territorial and confessional definition in favour of Protestantism in 1870. Yet, despite the strong Protestant bias in German national rhetoric between 1870 and 1914, Germany never stopped being at heart a Christian state. On this basis, even Catholics could claim membership in the nation, which distinguished their experience both from German Jews and socialists and from French and Italian Catholics.

The Christian state

With Napoleon Bonaparte’s defeat in 1815, the question of German Europe’s future organisation loomed over the Congress of Vienna. During the Wars of Liberation (1813–14), nationally minded intellectuals like Ernst Moritz Arndt, Joseph Görres and Friedrich Jahn called for the creation of a state to unite and protect the Christian people of Germany. Instead, the statesmen at Vienna recognised thirty-eight German sovereign states and grouped them loosely together as the German Confederation (Bund). The Bund was an even weaker expression of German political identity than the old empire had been. It also preserved many of the empire’s shortcomings as a German nation-state. Many ethnic Germans still lived outside of the Confederation’s borders, three states had foreign sovereigns (Luxemburg, Hanover, Schleswig), and the Bund’s two largest members, Austria and Prussia, ruled considerable territories outside the Confederation. The Vienna Settlement did appreciably alter the relationship of these two states to ‘Germany’. Prussia became more closely tied to German Europe through its acquisition of the Rhineland and Westphalia. Conversely, Austria’s gains in central Europe and Italy diminished her status as a German state, the possession of the Bund presidency notwithstanding.

The return of peace, however, did not fully extinguish nationalist yearnings. At universities across German Europe, student fraternities (Burschenschaften) arose to champion German nationalism and resist the politics of reaction promoted by the Austrian minister and dominant personality of post-Napoleonic German Europe, Clemens von Metternich. The student movement peaked in October 1817 with a festival at the Wartburg castle where, exactly 300 years before, Martin Luther had defied imperial (Habsburg) and papal authority. By making this reference to the Reformation and framing the German national struggle in religious and confessional terms, the students did more than just make a powerful political statement. They established a precedent for nationalist discourse that became especially prominent in later years. In the end, however, Metternich prevailed. Taking advantage of the public outcry against former fraternity student Karl Sand’s murder of the reactionary
playwright August von Kotzebue in 1819, Metternich compelled the German Diet to pass the Carlsbad Decrees and the Vienna Final Act. With the first measure, Metternich shut down the Burschenschaften and imposed a confederation-wide regime of censorship. The second empowered the Bund to act against any political changes that would threaten either monarchical power or particularism.

Mounting hostility towards nationalism helps to explain another facet of the 1815 agreements: the absence of Confederation-wide solutions to the complex ecclesiastical problems ensuing from the Holy Roman Empire’s collapse. Chief among these was how to define the Catholic Church’s legal status in the new German states. Certain prominent Catholic churchmen, notably Heinrich Ignaz von Wessenberg of Constance and Karl von Dalberg, the last imperial chancellor, strove to establish a national Catholic Church. Wary of an overly independent German church, however, the papal secretary, Cardinal Consalvi, preferred that the Congress only proclaim a concordat that fixed uniformly the legal relationship between church and state throughout the Bund. The German princes liked neither idea. They felt that a national concordat would impinge upon their sovereignty, whereas the existence of a national Catholic Church might foster unwanted nationalist movements.

In fact, the princes made only one Confederation-wide statement on religious policy, but it was significant. Because the territorial reorganisations of 1815 had made the major German states denominationally pluralistic, Article Eleven of the 1815 Act of Confederation decreed: ‘In the states and territories of the Confederation, confessional differences among Christians may not justify any distinction in the enjoyment of civil and political rights.’ In this manner, confessional parity became a fundamental principle of German administration and law, guaranteed by the Confederation’s Diet and, more appreciably, by the respective political might of Protestant Prussia and Catholic Austria. Yet parity also restricted full citizenship to German Christians. For while states could not use religion to discriminate among Christians, they could use religious beliefs to deny non-Christians (e.g. Jews) civil and political rights.²

The other major ecclesiastical questions found resolution on a state-by-state basis. With respect to Catholicism, two tasks remained: delineating diocesan boundaries and fixing the relations between church and state. The settlement of the first issue itself broke new ground: as far as possible diocesan boundaries would coincide with state borders. The borders of Fulda (Hesse-Kassel), Hildesheim (Hanover) and Limburg (Nassau) were thus redrawn, the old

² Clark, ‘German Jews’, p. 127.
bishops of Constance divided into the dioceses of Freiburg (for Baden) and Rottenburg (Württemberg), and the former electoral diocese of Mainz restored as the see for Hesse-Darmstadt. At the same time, the Vatican strove to create mutually favourable agreements with the states on such issues as ecclesiastical pay, clerical nominations, education and the Catholic Church’s general ability to manage its internal affairs. This resulted in the Bavarian concordat in 1817, a Prussian convention in 1821, and more informal arrangements with Hanover and Württemberg. In Austria, however, Metternich held firm to the policy of Josephinism, whereby the clergy functioned as state agents of religion, morality and public order. Taken together, the post-Vienna settlements put the Catholic Church in a position vis-à-vis the state remarkably similar to that which the Protestant churches had known since the Reformation: subject to close state regulation and supervision.

German Protestantism was also affected by the new political geography, for several states now found themselves home to a variety of Protestant traditions. Propelled by a sense that the old reasons for intraconfessional division were no longer valid, Protestants in Baden, Nassau and the Hesses created new, united state churches. King Frederick William III adopted a similar strategy, but in fusing the Lutheran and Reformed churches in old (pre-1815) Prussia by royal fiat, he aroused the ire of many churchmen, above all Berlin’s leading theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. The predominantly Reformed Prussian Rhineland and Westphalia, however, remained outside the union, receiving their own church constitution in 1835. In Bavaria too multiple models of Protestant church organisation co-existed: union in the Palatinate and a confessional Lutheran church for the rest of the kingdom.

The same factors that encouraged the development of united Protestant churches also promoted peaceful relations between church and state and among the Christian churches. Rulers desired an alliance between throne and altar. They regarded the churches as necessary pillars of order and authority, and relied on clergy to serve as local agents of state power. Churches likewise lent the princes their support, seeing the latter’s conservative policies as complementary to their own efforts to root out religious rationalism and promote the rechristianisation of German Europe. The Holy Alliance between Catholic Austria, Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia stands as one of the clearest expressions of this Romantic ecumenism. But it also appears in the contributions of Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach, the founder of the influential Protestant Evangelische Kirchenzeitung, to the Catholic Politisches Wochenblatt, and in the intellectual exchanges between Protestant and Catholic theologians at the University of Tübingen.
The post-1815 religious revivals would undermine this socio-confessional
harmony. Within both Catholicism and Protestantism a strong sense of denom-
national particularism emerged, and increasingly the 'awakened' felt called
to stand up against what they regarded as distortions of true ecclesiastical and
doctrinal practice. In eastern Prussia and Silesia, orthodox Lutherans not only
criticised the United church's deviation from Lutheran theology, but refused
to use the required liturgy. Faced with such open resistance, the Prussian state
arrested non-compliant ministers and laymen after 1830 and sent troops to
occupy recalcitrant parishes. In 1837 King Frederick William finally allowed
the 'old Lutherans' to emigrate, but the underlying problem of religious
conscience remained unresolved.

By contrast, the conflicts that arose in western Prussia and Bavaria were
touchstones for gauging the true extent of confessional parity and religious
freedom in the Bund. In the overwhelmingly Catholic Rhineland and West-
phalia, anxiety mounted steadily in the face of the Prussian state's anti-Catholic
actions. It brought Protestants from old Prussia to fill government positions,
keeping local Catholics out of public employ. Then in 1825, the old Prussian
ordinance on mixed marriages was introduced. Accordingly all children from
such marriages were to be raised in the religion of the father. This not only
conflicted with the Catholic practice of raising all such children as Catholics
but clearly favoured the immigrant Protestants. An uneasy peace held until
1836 when the new, Ultramontane bishop of Cologne, Clemens von Droste zu
Vischering, insisted on applying canonical norms strictly. The Prussian govern-
ment demanded the bishop's resignation and, when he refused, it suspended
him from office and forced him from the diocese. This 'Cologne Incident'
galvanised Catholic opinion throughout Germany, fanned by the publication
of hundreds of leaflets pro and contra. It also led Catholic leaders to cease co-
operation with conservative Protestants, who defended the Prussian state's
policies, and develop their own, confessional political programme. Similarly
provocative and conducive to confessional conscience-raising was the Bavarian
'Genuflexion Edict' of 1838, by which every soldier, regardless of denomin-
ation, had to kneel when the Holy Sacrament passed during a religious proces-
sion. Protestants now rebelled against this affront to their religious sensibilities;
nevertheless, seven years passed before Ludwig I rescinded the order.

The noisy responses to the Cologne Incident and the Genuflexion Edict
were symptoms of the heightening of confessional tension in Germany. But like
the 1844 pilgrimage to Trier, which brought roughly half a million Catholics
from across Germany to view the Holy Robe, these affairs also fostered a sense
of national Catholic and Protestant community, thereby contributing to the
revival of German nationalism. Still, the lines of confessional division were hardly cast in stone. In Prussia, Frederick William IV strove to heal the rifts that occurred during the reign of his father. Upon ascending the throne in 1840, he ended the persecution of the Orthodox Lutherans and made peace with the Catholics. He also supported the completion of Cologne cathedral, celebrating it in 1842 as a great German, Christian monument. This spirit of reconciliation, however, stopped short of outright religious tolerance. In 1845, a Prussian cabinet order authorised the repression of the liberal Protestant ‘Friends of Light’ (Lichtfreunde) movement. Furthermore, at a joint meeting of the Prussian provincial assemblies in 1847 the influential conservative Protestant theologian Friedrich Julius Stahl successfully argued that Prussia should not grant Jews full civil rights, for ‘it would violate the principles of a Christian state, if non-Christians were allowed to hold public offices’. 3

Forging the German nation-state

Well into the 1840s, German conservatives emphasised the Christian character of monarchical rule to hinder political and social change. Dissatisfaction with the status quo, however, was rising. The industrial and cultured middle class resented existing economic regulations, censorship, and the enduring restrictions on political activity. Peasants were suffering from a series of bad harvests and rising indebtedness. These tensions exploded in 1848 as word spread of the latest Parisian uprisings. In March, rural revolts shook Baden, Hesse and Thuringia. Popular unrest forced Frederick William from Berlin and Metternich from Vienna. Then in May, representatives from across German Europe assembled at St Paul’s Church in Frankfurt am Main to give birth to a German nation.

The Frankfurt Assembly was the brainchild of German liberals, a predominantly bourgeois Protestant group. Since the late 1810s they had actively fostered the development of Germany’s identity as a cultural nation (Kult Nation). The Grimm brothers’ grammars and folk tale collections called attention to a shared linguistic culture that transcended state boundaries. The humanistic Gymnasium provided a common educational experience for the middle class and nurtured in them an appreciation of German literature, language and music. A national consciousness developed too, in the networks of middle-class gymnastic societies, singing clubs and shooting associations, particularly at events like the 1847 Lübeck all-German choral festival. And as liberals came

to view the establishment of a national state as the only way to save Germany from its political, legal and economic backwardness, these organisations served as a quasi-public space in which liberals elaborated and advanced a political programme.

Even among liberals, defining this Germany at Frankfort proved difficult. Yet, early on in the discussions a consensus did emerge to de-emphasise religion's role in public life. This certainly reflected the influence of the liberal majority, who felt that the existing system of church-state relations (Staatskirchentum) thwarted political and social progress. But it also came about because Catholics and liberal-moderate Protestants wished to escape from the heavy hand of state tutelage in ecclesiastical affairs. Hence, Catholic deputies voted en bloc for most of the liberal proposals concerning religion in the 'Basic Rights of the German People' (Grundrechte), even though Catholics never endorsed the liberals' sense of what 'religious liberty' meant. As approved in January 1849 and incorporated into the Imperial Constitution that March, the Grundrechte guaranteed Germans freedom of belief and conscience. It also separated church and state to an important degree. Religious institutions would organise their affairs without state interference. Conversely, churches would lose their status as state institutions. They would forfeit their educational privileges, and the maintenance of birth, marriage and death records would devolve to the state. The constitution, however, did not make all religious organisations equal: only recognised churches would enjoy complete freedom of religious assembly.

In the meantime, the parliamentarians struggled to set Germany's territorial boundaries. As late as December 1848, a considerable majority favoured the so-called 'greater Germany' (großdeutsch) approach. This meant that all the Bund's existing members, including Austria, would be part of the new nation-state. Political and confessional concerns spoke in favour of this arrangement. Smaller and medium-sized states (e.g. Baden, Hanover, Saxony) wanted to counterbalance Prussia's might. Catholics viewed Austria's inclusion as the best way to protect Catholic interests. Yet, since most of the Habsburg empire's subjects were not ethnically German, many nationalists opposed incorporating all of Austria into Germany. The Austrian government itself resolved the Assembly's dilemma. When the Habsburgs returned to power in December, Prince Schwarzenberg announced that Austria would have nothing of the Assembly's nationalist schemes. By default, the Assembly embraced the 'small German' (kleindeutsch) solution (Germany without Austria), and in April 1849 it offered the imperial crown to Frederick William of Prussia.
Frederick William's rejection of the imperial distinction effectively wrecked the National Assembly's plans. By June the delegates had been dispersed from Frankfurt, ending the experiment in popular nation-building. None the less, Prussia continued to explore the possibilities of forming a *kleindeutsch* state with the other German princes, over Austria's stated objections. Only upon learning late in 1850 that Russia would support Austria should war break out did Frederick William back down. At the Bohemian town of Olmütz, he agreed to restore the German confederation as it had existed before the upheavals of 1848. Austria regained its pre-eminence within German Europe, Germany remained divided, and the politics of reaction returned.

Yet, it was too late to turn back the clock. With the exception of Austria, most German princes – including Frederick William – ruled constitutionally after 1850. Significantly, the constitutional provisions for legislative institutions and elections opened up German political life as never before. Long term, this also undermined rulers' efforts to revive censorship and restrictions on political associations. Moreover, the princes granted the Christian churches much of the freedom promised by the stillborn imperial constitution of 1849. The Prussian constitution of 1850 gave the Catholic and the Protestant churches significant autonomy to run their internal affairs. Frederick William even placed the direction of the Protestant church in a new organisation, the Superior Church Council (*Oberkirchenrat*), which no longer reported to the Prussian ministry for church affairs (although it remained responsible to the king as *summus episcopus*). To gain Catholic support for their conservative policies, several states signed new agreements with the Vatican. The most generous of these was the Austrian concordat of 1855, which not only freed the church from state control over clerical nominations and internal administration, but effectively subordinated civil society to the church. The church gained extensive rights over the public schools, and the state pledged to uphold canon law as civil law, particularly with respect to marriage. But even in Württemberg, Hesse-Darmstadt and Baden, the new concordats reduced state influence over episcopal and priestly appointments, gave the churches a freer hand in exercising church discipline and organising religious services, and enhanced the church's role in public schooling.

The years after 1848 also witnessed important changes in the complexion of German Protestantism and Catholicism. The return to reaction strengthened the conservative-orthodox position in many Protestant state churches, particularly in Mecklenburg, Bavaria, Hesse-Kassel and Prussia. Once more, the princes looked to the church to help guard against sinful revolution. But now conservative churchmen used this support to undercut liberal
theologians and silence advocates of synodal government. Liberal Protestantism remained prominent in Baden and the Rhineland. Elsewhere it struggled to survive against the conservatives, who largely controlled clerical appointments and nominations of university theology professors.

Rivalry within the Protestant fold, however, did not check the growing desire to co-ordinate policies among the state churches. A first attempt in this direction had been made at the 1846 Eisenach Congress; it foundered in the face of the princes’ refusal to cede any measure of their ecclesiastical prerogatives. More fruitful were the Evangelical Church Conferences, which from 1852 on also met regularly at Eisenach. The brainchild of the Württemberg court preacher Karl von Grüneisen, the ‘Eisenach Conference’ became an important forum where representatives of the state churches discussed questions of ecclesiastical organisation and religious practice. Its resolutions did not bind the member churches, but they had enormous influence on German Protestantism’s development. Most of the state churches adopted the Conference’s policies for regulating mixed marriages, its revision of the Luther Bible, and its standards for church design and construction. The Conference also published the first national Protestant paper, the *Allgemeines Kirchenblatt für das evangelische Deutschland*, and collected annual statistics of religious practice from its member churches. The Eisenach Conference’s activities greatly contributed to the creation of a national Protestant consciousness, even if church leaders themselves were generally unsympathetic to the rising chorus of *kleindeutsch* nationalism.

In Catholicism, the pivotal development was the triumph of Ultramontanism. Ultramontanes disdained the episcopal, tolerant and pluralist traditions within German Catholicism, which intellectuals like Ignaz von Döllinger still championed from Munich and Bonn. The Ultramontane model stressed instead hierarchy, discipline and absolute obedience to the church’s spiritual head: the pope. The Ultramontanes also fought states’ efforts to push the church out of public life. Instead of the Church compromising with secular trends, they felt that political, social and cultural life should conform to Catholic teaching. Mainz was the initial home of German Ultramontanism. But as Pope Gregory XVI succeeded in making loyalty to Rome the precondition of being a German bishop and as German seminaries came under the influence of priests trained at the Jesuit Collegium Germanicum in Rome, Ultramontane sympathies spread quickly. Indeed, so advanced was the Ultramontane movement among the German clergy, that when Pius IX indicated his opposition to the plan to establish a national bishop and synod at the first conference of German bishops at Würzburg (1848), the bishops quickly dropped it. Public
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outcry over Pius IX’s treatment during the 1848 Revolution had the further consequence of transforming the pope into an icon of lay adoration. Hence, by 1850 Ultramontanism had become as much a popular as a clerical force in Catholic Germany, with the significant exception of Austria. There it remained blocked by Josephinism.

Closely associated with the Ultramontane movement was a revitalisation of Catholic religious practices and sensibilities. Priests revived devotions to the Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception, and established new ones to the Sacred Heart and St Joseph. The church promoted pilgrimages. It organised missions. Women and men flocked to the religious brotherhoods and congregations that were (re-)established in growing numbers after 1850. With its emphasis on sentiment, emotion and the miraculous, this renewal appears at first glance to be a mere restoration of Counter-Reformation and Baroque piety. In fact, it was quite innovative and modern. Priests gradually brought public religious life under their supervision and control. They carefully scripted pilgrimages and processions. They used voluntary associations and newspapers to mobilise the masses and place them more closely under clerical oversight. But these organisations also opened up new spheres of Catholic activity. Local chapters of the Borromeo Society (named after the influential Italian prelate whom Pope Pius IV declared ‘Protector of Lower Germany’ in 1560) disseminated Catholic religious literature and set up lending libraries. Associations like the St Vincent and Kolping societies extended the church’s social mission, and the Boniface Society defended the interests of the Catholic diaspora.

Ultramontanism’s achievements also fuelled an increase in interconfessional polemic during the 1850s and 1860s. Although many Protestant churchmen longed for a similar increase in devotion among their own flocks, they were sceptical of what passed for piety among Catholics. Individual pastors as well as many laymen with only weak ties to the organised churches (often called ‘secular’ or ‘cultural’ Protestants (Kulturprotestanten)) took a dimmer view of the situation. Pointing to the Westphalian Protestants who attended Jesuit missions and the Boniface Society’s proselytising activities, they charged the Catholic Church with trying to destroy Protestantism. To fend off the attack, such Protestants unleashed a torrent of sermons and popular literature that glorified the Protestant past and belittled Catholicism as emotional, superstitious, feminine and foreign. Liberal politicians and middle-class intellectuals, including the noted historian Heinrich von Sybel, broadened the

4 For a fuller account see chapter 5 above.

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scope of anti-Catholic rhetoric by declaring Catholicism intellectually and morally backward, a view that Pius IX duly reinforced with the 1864 Syllabus of Errors.

This anti-Catholicism became even more significant after 1859 with the onset of the ‘New Era’ in German politics. Capitalising on public dissatisfaction with clericalism, liberals throughout the Bund took power in the state parliaments and strove to reverse the previous decades’ concessions to the churches. In Prussia, the Chamber of Deputies protected liberal Protestants like Adolf Harnack and the adherents of the Protestantenverein. In Baden, anticonservative protests triggered the elaboration of a new Protestant church constitution in 1861. But the main concern was the Catholic Church. In Austria, liberals campaigned to abrogate the 1855 concordat, which they felt not only blocked social and cultural progress, but undercut Habsburg claims to lead Germany. Over the strenuous protests of Catholic groups, Baden passed a law in 1864 that made local school councils, and not the clergy (Protestant or Catholic), responsible for school oversight. Bavarian liberals also hoped to curtail the church’s educational privileges, but the reforms were ultimately blocked by the parliament’s upper house.

The confessional name-calling that accompanied these disputes also spilled over into discussions of the German question, which was reinvigorated by Piedmont’s defeat of Austria and the declaration of an Italian nation-state in 1859. Liberal groups like the German National Association (Nationalverein) advanced their kleindeutsch programme by asserting that Austria’s enthrallment to Catholicism made it incapable of uniting, much less leading Germany. Similarly, Protestant publicists, reviving the nationalist rhetoric of the early 1800s, asserted that German culture was a particularly Protestant creation. Thus Germany would have to have a Protestant head. Otto von Bismarck, who became Prussian minister-president in 1862, only encouraged this undermining of Austria’s position as he plotted to make Prussia the master of German Europe. Not surprisingly, given this constellation of forces and Prussia’s support for the antipapal Italian state, German Catholics in the 1860s backed Austria and the großdeutsch nation-state. But as conflict between Prussia and Austria loomed after 1864, the medium and smaller states and even most of the Protestant state churches joined the großdeutsch ranks. The German princes continued to fear Prussia, and the churches regarded as sacrilege secular Protestants’ portrayals of kleindeutsch nationalism as a religious, and specifically Protestant cause.

Prussia’s quick defeat of Austria in 1866 greatly clarified the German question. The German Confederation was dissolved and Austria excluded from
Germany. Although Prussia made no territorial demands on Austria, it annexed Frankfurt am Main, Nassau, Hanover and Hesse-Kassel and forced the remaining German states north of the Main into a North German Confederation. Prussia dominated this new Confederation, but because it did not encompass the southern German states, German unification remained unfinished. The events of 1866 also altered the balance of confessional relations in Germany. With the omission of Austria and the southern German states, the proto-German nation became overwhelmingly Protestant, making Prussia’s victory at Königgrätz seem the confessional triumph of which nationalists later boasted. More critically in this time of heightened religious tension, the Bund’s demise meant that the German states were now free to alter their policies on confessional parity.

For this very reason, the Catholic deputies to the North German parliament wanted the new constitution to guarantee religious freedom. The liberal majority, however, branded this plea for toleration as disloyalty to the nation and voted down the Catholics’ motions. Although Catholics held a more pluralist sense of German identity, their acceptance of the new Germany really was not at issue, as events soon showed. When relations between France and Prussia worsened after 1867, leading Catholic opposition figures such as August and Peter Reichenperger publicly endorsed Prussia’s position. As war broke out in 1870, Catholics joined their Protestant neighbours in justifying it and sanctioning war aims like the ‘return’ of Alsace. Nevertheless, the Franco-Prussian war effectively established Germany’s identity as a Protestant nation. Journalists, politicians, academics and pastors on both sides of the Rhine framed the war as a clash between Protestant Germany and Catholic France. Germans and French interpreted the German alliance’s easy victory as evidence of Protestantism’s and German Kultur’s moral superiority. Finally, since Prussia’s triumph gave birth to a German Empire (Kaiserreich) that included the southern German states, Protestantism was even given credit for consummating German unification.

The Christian German empire

There was a fair amount of truth behind Adolf Stoecker’s glorification of the new Kaiserreich as a ‘Protestant empire’. Protestants comprised roughly two-thirds of Germany’s population. Protestant religious and cultural values figured prominently in statements of German national identity. The state Protestant churches abandoned their former resistance to the nation and actively propagated nationalist symbols and rhetoric. Bismarck and liberal politicians
even tried to force Catholics to assimilate into this Protestant nation. But this Kulturkampf (literally: culture war) actually strengthened Catholic solidarity and deepened the Catholic–Protestant divide. Nevertheless, because imperial Germany remained a fundamentally Christian state, even Catholics found meaningful ways to claim citizenship in the nation. In Austria-Hungary, too, Christianity played a critical symbolic role in keeping the fragile, multinational dual monarchy together.

The Franco-Prussian war completed the territorial dimension of German nation-building, but internally the process had just begun. The Kulturkampf represented a pivotal, if ultimately unsuccessful facet of this effort. It was triggered by two developments: the declaration of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, which raised new questions about Catholics’ political loyalties, and Catholic successes in the 1871 Reichstag elections, which created a major Catholic bloc in the new parliament. Faced with this potential oppositional force, Bismarck decided to launch a pre-emptive strike. A pious man himself, the chancellor had no problems with Catholicism per se. But Bismarck fervently believed that churches should not meddle in politics. Indeed, since coming to power, he had tried to reduce the Protestant church’s influence over Prussian politics, and thus had no intention now of permitting Catholicism to establish itself as a political force. Bismarck’s plan to disarm political Catholicism delighted liberal politicians, who provided the parliamentary backing for the crusade. Yet, the phrase the left-liberal Rudolf Virchow coined for this struggle, the Kulturkampf, suggests that the liberals wanted to do more than prevent Catholicism from becoming a political force. They wanted victory over Catholicism itself, the long-delayed conclusion of the Reformation.

Because the 1871 imperial constitution made ecclesiastical affairs the prerogative of the individual states and not the imperial government, only a few of the Kulturkampf measures applied empire-wide. The Kanzelparagraph, inserted into the Imperial Penal Code on 10 December 1871, banned priests from discussing political matters from the pulpit. In 1872 the Reichstag also expelled the Jesuit, Redemptorist and Lazarist orders from Germany. At the state level, noteworthy clashes erupted in Baden, Bavaria and Hesse-Darmstadt, but the primary theatre for the Kulturkampf drama was Prussia. The stage for conflict was set with Bismarck’s appointment of the liberal Adalbert Falk as minister for education and cultural affairs in February 1872. That March, the Prussian parliament placed the supervision of all schools under state instead of clerical control. One year later, it passed the ‘May Laws’, giving the state extensive control over priests’ training and appointment.
Widespread resistance to these measures compelled Bismarck and his allies to escalate the attack. New legislation allowed the state to suspend or exile priests who refused to obey the May Laws. Government officials could also seize church property and, after 1873, suspend financial support from recalcitrant clergy (the 'bread-basket' law). The toll of these measures was considerable. As of 1878, only three of eight Prussian dioceses still had bishops, some 1,125 of 4,600 parishes were vacant, and nearly 1,800 priests ended up in jail or in exile. Approximately 16 million Reichsmarks appropriated to the Catholic Church went unspent. Finally, between 1872 and 1878, numerous Catholic newspapers were confiscated, Catholic associations and assemblies were dissolved, and Catholic civil servants were dismissed merely on the pretence of having Ultramontane sympathies.

Nevertheless, the Kulturkampf ultimately failed. Why? In part, state officials and liberal politicians underestimated the degree to which Ultramontanism had integrated the clergy into Catholic society. Thus, when the state moved against the priests, the laity—and especially laywomen—took it personally. They staged demonstrations to protest against the arrest of clergy and auctions of church property. They collected money to cover for the funds withheld by the state, helped loyal priests escape to non-Prussian territories, and even organised an underground church. The persecutions also galvanised the Catholics politically, which translated into massive support for the pro-Catholic Centre Party. But the Kulturkampf also foundered because conservative politicians and the Protestant churches refused to endorse it. Indeed, the school inspection laws and the 1873 law that transferred their traditional registration of births, marriages and deaths to civil authorities affected Catholic and Protestant church alike, to the consternation of the latter. Thus, when Pope Pius IX died in 1878, Bismarck decided to reverse course. By the time he resigned from office in 1890, almost all of the Kulturkampf legislation had been either repealed or disabled.

The Kulturkampf was supposed to integrate Catholics into Protestant Germany. Instead, it widened the gulf between Catholics and Protestants. Accused of being national enemies (Reichsfeinde) and vilified as disturbers of the peace, German Catholics increasingly severed their ties with their Protestant neighbours, creating a socio-cultural world of their own that scholars have alternatively described as a Catholic ghetto or milieu. They bought from Catholic-owned shops and read newspapers published by and oriented towards Catholics. Distinctly Catholic approaches to folk literature, church architecture, art, and even historical writing and scholarship also emerged after 1870, all of which the Protestant middle class roundly disparaged. Most significantly,
Catholics created an ever-widening array of social, cultural, charitable and economic organisations to meet their special, confessional needs: from literary and sporting societies to teachers' organisations, credit unions and women's clubs.

Significantly, this 'ghettoisation' also encouraged a nationalisation of Catholicism. Catholics abandoned their großdeutsch and particularist mentalities, thinking and acting instead in terms of the kleindeutsch nation. This posture was already apparent in the moral and material assistance that Catholics across Germany provided to the Prussian faithful during the Kulturkampf. The empire's leading Catholic newspapers, especially the Kölnische Volkszeitung and the Berlin-based Germania, had a national readership, and the regular conferences of German bishops at Fulda promoted unity within the entirety of German Catholicism. Catholic associational life also had a manifestly national character. Hiking, gymnastic and music clubs were organised into empire-wide confederations. Furthermore, groups from the Görres Society for the Promotion of Knowledge in Catholic Germany to the twin pillars of Catholic social action in the Wilhelmine period - the Volksverein für das Katholische Deutschland (the Popular Association for Catholic Germany) and the German Caritas Bund - explicitly defined themselves in national terms.

After 1900 Munich-based intellectuals and younger clergy sought to lower the ghetto walls. But until 1914 the most effective agent of Catholic integration was the Centre Party, the very organisation Bismarck meant to cripple. The Centre not only defended Catholic interests in the state and federal legislatures, but also provided them with a way to participate actively in political life. The Centre gained a crucial measure of respectability with its decision to back conservative tariff legislation in 1879. And by 1890, Centre Party leaders were using their solid and remarkably stable block of votes to lend critical support to successive German chancellors, thereby becoming a major party of government. They also backed fiscal and legal reforms, such as the new civil code of 1900, in exchange for concessions on religious issues and better employment prospects for Catholic civil servants. Indeed, the Centre gave pre-war German Catholics a respectability and sense of membership in the nation-state of which their Italian and French counterparts could only dream.

The interplay between Catholicism and politics followed an altogether different course in Austria between 1866 and 1914. Austria's loss at Königgrätz precipitated a political crisis, resulting in the creation of the Dual Monarchy and the definitive introduction of constitutional government in 1867. It also brought the liberals to power, who quickly moved to restore the upper hand to
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In church-state relations. Between 1868 and 1874 they passed laws to guarantee religious freedom, end the church’s educational monopoly and separate civil from canon law. In 1870 the concordat itself was declared void. There was, however, no Austrian Kulturkampf. After fifteen years under the concordat, the Catholic Church was thoroughly discredited. The bishops themselves were in no position to resist effectively had they so desired (and most did not). Finally, in contrast with their German counterparts, Austrian liberals wanted to divest the church of its political authority and public power, not destroy it. Hence, they allowed the church to continue to benefit from state patronage and support, albeit only as a privileged public corporation.

Under the leadership of Karl Lueger, a political organisation rooted in Austrian Catholic culture did emerge to challenge the liberals after 1882: the Christian Social Party. But while Christian Socialists defended Catholicism against liberalism and social democracy and exploited parish and church networks to build their organisation, theirs was never a church or confessional party. Lueger won over the lower middle classes by downplaying clericalism and embracing petty bourgeois anti-Semitism, all of which made his movement suspect in the eyes of the church hierarchy. Lueger’s confirmation as lord mayor of Vienna in 1897 marked the end of the liberal era. It also established the Christian Socials as an official ruling party, an honour regularly denied the German Centre before 1914.

Austrian discussions about religion and politics were also unique because, with the exception of Georg von Schönnerer’s abortive Free from Rome movement, they lacked a nationalist dimension. In Habsburg Austria state and emperor served as the objects of patriotism, not a confessionalised nation-state, and the dynasty remained resolutely Christian throughout the liberal campaign to de-emphasise the state’s religious character. Symbolic of this link between religion and dynasty was the emperor’s participation in Vienna’s annual Corpus Christi procession, which recalled the legendary sanctification of the Habsburgs’ right to rule through the Eucharist. Indeed, the more nationalist rivalries threatened to dissolve the empire, the more Emperor Franz Joseph turned to religion to inspire patriotism based on loyalty to the crown. This explains both his recognition of the pro-dynasty Christian Socials and his prominent participation in the activities of the Eucharistic Congress, which Vienna hosted in 1912.

In fact, Austrian and German Catholic efforts to downplay the confessional dimension of citizenship were astonishingly consonant with Bismarck’s own efforts to found the German empire on a secular basis. He intentionally established both of the two principal imperial institutions – emperor and
constitution – without any reference to religion or divine grace. Nevertheless, over the course of the *Kulturkampf*, the equation of Protestantism with German nationalism became routine not just for cultural Protestants, but for Protestant Germany in general. The anti-Catholic legislation did not itself change the minds of church authorities and conservatives. Rather, the shift stemmed principally from German Protestantism’s status as a state religion (*Staatsreligion*), where the head of the state was also the head of the church. With the *Kaiserreich* legitimately established, church authorities transferred obedience to king and state to the new emperor and nation. Pastors celebrated the emperor’s birthday and the anniversary of the German victory at Sedan as religious events. Church leaders, like *Oberkirchenrat* President Herrmann, proclaimed the church’s duty to help the nation develop its most noble powers and overcome its gravest weaknesses. Protestant ministers also joined in the attacks on Catholicism, which now appeared as unrepentant foe of both Protestantism and the nation-state.

So strong was the ecclesiastical and conservative investment in the idea of the Protestant empire that Protestants became alarmed at Catholic efforts at reconciliation with the German national state, particularly the repeal of major elements of *Kulturkampf* legislation. Thus in 1887 Willibald Beyschlag organised the ‘Protestant League for the Defence of German-Protestant Interests’ (*Evangelischer Bund*) to prevent further appeasement of Catholic interests and counter political Catholicism’s rising influence. In the 1890s, other ultranationalist organisations, including the Agrarian, Colonial and Navy Leagues, took up this cause, openly opposing efforts to repeal the anti-Jesuit laws and vigorously protesting against decisions like the 1901 appointment of Martin Spahn, the son of a major Centre Party official, to the University of Strasbourg’s history faculty.

Still, many Germans bemoaned the nation’s confessional divisions. In the final decades of the century, men like Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn and Arthur Bonus called for healing the rift by ‘Germanising’ Christianity. They advocated stripping Christianity of its foreign influences so that it expressed the healthy values and virtues of the German people (*Volk*), a sentiment that also infused Richard Wagner’s final opera, *Parsifal*. Extreme as these notions were, they indicate that the basic understanding of Germany as a Christian nation remained intact, despite the era’s confessional polemics. Thus, in its founding charter of 1876, the German Conservative Party noted that, although the dominant religion of the German nation was Lutheran Protestantism, the party strove, more generally, to preserve ‘the religious life of the German people, maintain and strengthen the Christian ecclesiastical
traditions... and, above all, [to preserve] the Christian confessional school.

Bismarck too conceived of the state’s duties in largely Christian terms, even characterising the social insurance legislation of the 1880s as ‘practical Christianity’ (praktisches Christentum). For their part, Christian organisations, from the Protestant Inner Mission to the Catholic Volksverein, turned to the state to protect Christian standards of morality, as exemplified in their campaigns for new obscenity and prostitution laws.

The Kaiserreich’s Christian orientation also manifested itself in colonial politics. For such prominent advocates of the German imperial mission as Friedrich Fabri, director of the Rhenish Mission in Barmen (Germany’s largest Protestant mission), the acquisition of colonies was a moral necessity and a Christian duty. Both the Catholic and the Protestant communities had a significant missionary presence overseas and received state assistance for this work. Representatives of these missions, Catholic and Protestant, also had seats in the Kolonialrat, the council Kaiser Wilhelm II created in 1890 to co-ordinate German colonial policy. In other words, colonial policy was notably ‘confession-blind’, even if the most zealous advocates of imperialism, the Colonial and the Pan-German Leagues, were essentially Protestant organisations.

Ultimately, it was this underlying idea of a Christian Germany that distinguished Catholics from the two other major groups with contested claims on German citizenship after 1871: Jews and socialists. Because Catholics were Christians, nationalists could countenance their participation in such institutions as the civil service and the army, whereas they rejected that of Jews and ‘godless’ socialists. Catholics and Protestants also agreed that socialist materialism and irreligion posed a major threat to German society. However, they preferred to fight socialism separately. Because of the Kulturkampf, Catholics were loath to support particularist legislation like the 1878 anti-socialist law. Instead they expanded their activities among the working classes, organising trade unions and expanding the range of Catholic charity. When the anti-socialist measures expired in 1890, Catholics decided to meet the socialist challenge head on by founding their own mass-based social and cultural organisation: the Volksverein. Catholics and Protestants, however, closed ranks when socialists attacked the state’s Christian foundations, rebuffing socialist efforts to end obligatory religious education and public support for the churches. Catholics and Protestants also shared anti-Semitic sympathies. But in contrast to Austria, where anti-Semitism was an integral part of Christian socialism’s raison d’être, it had little appreciable role in constituting or maintaining the German Catholic

5 Cited in Tal, Christians and Jews in Germany, p. 125.
milieu. Rather, the main challenge to Jews' Germanness in the Kaiserrreich came from Protestant circles, from high-profile pastors like Adolf Stoecker and from integralist nationalist organisations like the Pan-German League.

When war broke out in early August 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II urged his subjects to defend the fatherland 'without difference of race or religion'. In one stroke, he sought to set aside the divisions that almost forty years of exclusivist, Protestant nationalism had sown. Nevertheless, the speech left little doubt that Germany would still fight the war as a Christian nation. 'Following the example of our fathers, staunch and true... humble before God, but with the joy of battle in the face of the enemy, we trust in the Almighty to strengthen our defence and guide us to good issue.'6 It was this image of a Christian Germany that chaplains and ministers, at home and at the front, repeated and maintained down to the end of the conflict – and of the Kaiserrreich – in 1918.

6 Verhandlungen des Reichstags, no. 1, 4 August 1914, pp. 1–2.