"For the Catholics in the Empire it is like Germany in its foreign policy, only enviers and enemies, only scorn and ridicule," declared Matthias Erzberger, the young hotspur of political Catholicism, in 1914.¹ The dual perception of German isolation and Catholic isolation expressed the dilemma of German Catholics. To be a loyal German and a loyal Catholic—in whatever terms one defined these concepts—was in a world of enemies both a goal and a burden.

The post-Napoleonic reorganization of Germany in 1814-15 left the bulk of Catholics as minorities under Protestant rulers. Catholics experienced discriminatory treatment and frequent conflicts between canonical and state law, especially in cases of religiously mixed marriage. The Prussian solution to German unification excluded Austria and left the Catholics a permanent minority at around one-third of the population. The Kulturkampf (struggle between Church and state) of the 1870s was an attempt to break the power of the Catholic hierarchy and to loosen the ties between Germany and Rome. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck branded the members of the Catholic Center party Reichsfeinde, "enemies of the Reich," lumping them with Poles and Socialists. The open Kulturkampf backfired, actually solidifying Catholic unity, but Catholics continued to suffer the humiliations of the "little" or "silent Kulturkampf": legal restrictions on Catholic church services and processions; discriminatory state funding of schools, parishes, and ecclesiastical salaries; battles over custody and religious education in mixed marriages; the requirement in Saxony that school children attend Protestant religious instruction if Catholic instruction were not available with the proviso that, if they did so until age twelve, they were then Protestant.²

Catholics used such expressions as via dolorosa, "exile," or
"ghetto"—the term most often used in German Catholic historiography—to characterize their situation. Yet Catholic spiritual and political leaders accepted the Catholic situation as the fate of a minority of believers in a hostile world; redress of grievances would come about only through legality: through slow arduous labors in the courts, the legislatures, and the press. Monarchical loyalty was always a powerful force among the Catholics, and nationalist loyalty reinforced it as the older dreams of a Habsburg-led Grossdeutschland faded and more and more young Catholics grew to adulthood within the Empire. Stung by accusations of half or divided loyalty, they sought to demonstrate their patriotism by supporting the government on the national (military and colonial) issues and by opposition to socialism. The outbreak of the First World War seemed to sweep aside all barriers, to end Catholic isolation at the price of almost complete Germanic isolation in the world. Catholic theologians and writers identified the war with the will of God and the scholastic concept of a just war. But Catholics continued to bear the stigma of belonging to an international church or to suffer the insinuation that Pope Benedict XV favored Germany's enemies and the insulting identification of Martin Luther and the Reformation with German national destiny. In practical political terms, the Protestant suspicion was unjustified, yet in another sense it was justified: as long as they remained in an international church and adhered to the rationalism inherent in canon law and scholasticism, German Catholics could not compete with Protestants in an ideological nationalist fanaticism.

Catholics did not expect nor want the end of the monarchy in the fall of 1918, but its collapse brought them relief. Under the Weimar Constitution, legal restrictions on religious activity fell away—the first Corpus Christi procession on Berlin's Unter den Linden created a sensation—but the church continued to enjoy state funding, now administered more equitably. The Center party, as the party of the middle, became the indispensable coalition partner in the government of the nation and the larger Land. Party members held the chancellorship in six of the fifteen cabinets between 1918 and 1933, while non-Centrist Catholics, Wilhelm Cuno and Franz von Papen, headed two cabinets. Anti-Catholicism continued, however, and took an increasingly right-wing orientation in reaction against the Centrist role in the Republic. Enemies of the Republic branded its controversial flag as the banner of the three Internationals: the Red (Socialist), the Gold (Jewish), and the Black (Catholic). Anti-Catholicism had long since taken organizational form in various groups, particularly the Protestant League for the Protection of German-Protestant Interests, created in 1839. With its 300,000 members the League embraced a high percentage of Protestant clergy, teachers, and officials; it flooded Germany with cheap anti-Catholic and anti-Socialist tracts.
Protestants frequently justified their anti-Catholicism intellectually through discussions of Catholic inferiority. The modern world of freedom, science, scholarship, technology, and industry was identified with the Protestant nations. One Protestant pastor noted that the Protestant Northern states had defeated the "Southern Catholic states" in the American Civil War, freeing the slaves. At around the turn of the century, Protestant writers had underscored the higher German Catholic rates of fertility, infant mortality, death, and criminality to show Catholic inferiority while Catholic writers countered with the higher German Protestant rates of divorce, suicide, and illegitimacy. By the 1920s the clash over "moral statistics" was somewhat passé, and the higher Catholic rates, for example, of fertility and infant mortality, were declining to close the differential.

But the Catholic population continued to be disproportionately concentrated in rural areas and underrepresented, especially in the larger cities. Catholics worked in disproportionate numbers in farming and traditional handicrafts. They were underrepresented in banking, commerce, technical industry, and professional pursuits. Among bankers, brokers, army officers, university professors, and certain categories of engineers, Catholics had as much as 50 percent underrepresentation. On the other hand, several marginal and vulnerable pursuits such as vintners, agricultural laborers, seamstresses, and unskilled construction workers had as much as 50 percent overrepresentation. In the crucial coal-mining and steel industries, Catholics dominated all levels of both white-collar and manual employment because these industries were located in Catholic areas (Silesia, Saarland, the Rhine-Ruhr basin). Yet ownership and management rested predominately in Protestant hands. Further evidence indicates that Catholics paid less taxes than Protestants because they earned a lower average income, that within particular industries and crafts Catholics had a lesser degree of technical education and occupied less responsible positions, and that Catholic craftsmen and retailers were economically marginal, employing little help and relying disproportionately on family members.

The origins of the Catholic deficits are beyond the scope of this chapter; their political effects, however, are of consequence here. The marginality and vulnerability of the Catholic occupational structure suggests a potential susceptibility to radical movements. Fascist, radical-Right, and anti-Semitic movements are widely supposed to have their social bases among the peasants and in the lower middle class (Kleinbürgerum) of retailers, craftsmen, and petty officials. Standing in opposition both to big labor and big business, these social classes are assumed to become radicalized out of a perception of relative or absolute deprivation. This analysis was based on the historical fact that German Protestant peasants and
Kleinbürger deserted the liberal and conservative parties en masse, giving their votes by 1932 overwhelmingly to the Nazi party. Catholics, by contrast, continued to cast their ballots for the Catholic political parties to the number of 5.5 million, although perhaps 6.5 million gave their votes to all other parties combined. A populist anti-Semitism, based on resentment of Jewish wealth, was to be found in Catholic ranks especially among the southern agrarian wing. The anti-Semitism might link up with anti-socialism or a general repudiation of modern culture, but it was by no means identical with antirepublicanism or sympathy with nazism.10

Occupational and class analysis from Aristotle on has appeared to provide the most pertinent explanations of political behavior. But we must continually place political behavior in its full social context and explore the ways in which family, school, church, ideology, age, deference, association, and region may mediate, modify, or focus the demands of social class or economic interest. Why did German Catholics demonstrate a relative immunity to the appeals of fascism? On the other hand, why was this relative immunity not sufficient to allow them to develop an effective resistance?

If we reinterpret economic marginality as attachment to traditional occupations and limited mobility, marginality may have screened Catholics from certain types of antirepublicanism. Proportionately few Catholics were the colleagues of conservative antirepublicans in the officer corps, the university professoriate, the higher bureaucracy, or the management of heavy industry; those that were, did not act very differently from their colleagues. Conversely, Catholic miners and steelworkers adhered to their labor unions, had job and class interests in common with their Socialist or Communist colleagues, and suspected the reactionary nature of Hitler's movement. Catholic peasants appear to have specialized less than Protestant peasants, practicing a more traditional mixed agriculture. Thus despite relative poverty, their economic vulnerability may have been less.11 Priests and a few substantial farmers still provided the social leadership of the villages. Even after 1933 in many Catholic villages, Nazi members were scarce, and Nazi organization weak.12

If Catholics were less susceptible than Protestants to the influence of new, radical movements, one major reason was that Catholics, like Socialists, had created their own social and cultural environment, which filtered the impact of general public opinion. Driven into the ghetto of political and social isolation by the Kulturkampf, choosing an intellectual ghetto to maintain the purity of the faith from the challenge of liberalism and the cult of science, Catholic notables had created Verbandskatholizismus, "associational Catholicism." In the 1840s associations were formed to support Catholic journeymen, lending
libraries, and missions, and to hold annual national Catholic Rallies (Katholikentage). In the 1360s Catholic student fraternities were created. During the Kulturkampf, fearing permanent exclusion from the university professoriate, Catholic scholars founded the Gbreses Society for the Cultivation of Scholarship in Catholic Germany. From the 1380s on, Catholic newspaper publishers, peasants, workers, schoolteachers, artists, and art dealers (the "German Society for Christian Art"), white-collar employees, booksellers, and feminists organized. Verbandskatholizismus was a creative response to the new opportunities provided by the liberal freedoms of speech and assembly. It ensured that German Catholicism would remain a Volkskirche—a "church of the people." Yet Verbandskatholizismus also linked together the Catholic notables (the clergymen, nobles, lawyers, and publishers) through mutual association in the fraternities, Gbreses Society, and Center party, an association further cemented by close kinship connections especially along the Rhine-Main axis of German Catholicism. Rallying and organizing the broad masses of the laity, Verbandskatholizismus represented a use of liberal freedoms to create an antiliberal movement on a basis that was simultaneously populist and hierarchical—the masses of the excluded minority led by their "natural leaders." Anti-Semitism might theoretically have been an ideological element of such a movement, but, after some initial wavering during the Kulturkampf, Catholic leaders had the political wisdom to support the rights of all religious minorities.  

As the Weimar Constitution gave new opportunities to the church, it also allowed the final rich unfolding of Verbandskatholizismus: organizations for Catholic youth, high school students, housewives and mothers, university graduates (Akademiker as opposed to scholars /Wissenschaftler), officials, and even industrialists. Yet a subtle shift was occurring: whereas the older associations worked for the economic and social interests of their members, the newer ones generally cultivated liturgy, sociability, and the Catholic Weltanschauung. They may be regarded as a final massive attempt to organize and to isolate the Catholic population.

For the leaders of German Catholicism were alarmed. For decades more German Catholics had converted to Protestantism than vice versa. The net Catholic loss through the "conversion balance" jumped from 4,000 a year in around 1900 to 7,000 a year in the years 1925-30. More alarming still, of every 100 Catholics marrying in 1901, 12 had selected a non-Catholic partner, while by 1925 the figure rose to 18. In the diaspora of the north German cities, as many as 70 out of 100 marrying Catholics took vows with a non-Catholic. The negative conversion balance, the pattern of mixed marriages (more Catholic men marrying Protestant women than the reverse), and the consistent Protestant majority (about 55 percent) of the baptized children in mixed marriages showed that Catholicism lacked respectability.
Upward mobility could be fostered, especially in the diaspora, through conversion or more commonly through marriage into a Protestant family. More generally, growing numbers of Catholics were making their individual union with the nation, ignoring the religious split in disregard of the teachings of church and school.

For a large minority of Catholics, the Church now served essentially to mark the rites of passage: baptism, marriage, and burial. Of those counted in the census as Catholic (a measure based on birth and baptism), around 60 percent partook of the obligatory Easter communion—a figure that remained constant from 1915 through 1938 and was greater than double the corresponding Protestant percentage. The percentage of communicants remained at higher levels in solid Catholic areas but declined to much lower figures in the diaspora.

If three out of five baptized Catholics remained faithful to the church, only three-quarters of these faithful Catholics remained loyal to political Catholicism. During the height of the Kulturkampf, over 60 percent of Catholic voters supported the Center party, a figure that declined to around 60 percent by the turn of the century. For the elections of 1919 through 1924 an average of 54 percent of Catholic men and women voted for the Center and the Bavarian People’s parties; in the elections of 1930–33, around 45 percent. The extent of the decline was masked by the introduction of proportional representation, which brought out the Catholic vote in the diaspora and the religiously mixed regions, and especially by the introduction of women’s suffrage—a measure which the prewar Center had opposed. While the faithful Catholic women voted overwhelmingly Centrist or Bavarian, their husbands, if religiously indifferent, voted Socialist or, especially, Communist, and if religious, increasingly supported the German Nationalist party or the regional peasant parties.

Thus, the Weimar Republic provided new opportunities for German Catholics, but intensified the old temptations of assimilation to the Protestant majority. Common to the opportunities and temptations was the possibility of escape from the ghetto and union with the nation. Conversion, intermarriage, or opposition to the Center party formed individual paths of union. But the Catholic notables had long been urging a collective path of union, a collective uplifting of the Catholic population based upon cooperation with the national government and demonstrations of national loyalty. The generation of Center leaders who came to the fore in the 1890s had continued to fight to overcome the liabilities of the Kulturkampf. But they had also taken a hard look at the deficiencies of German Catholics in education, income, and occupational status. They proclaimed to young Catholics that it was their "duty" (Pflicht) to study harder, to work harder, and to be more ambitious, while the nexus of
Verbandskatholizismus was to provide moral support, scholarship funds, and an old-boy network to advance the bright young Catholics. Center leaders documented discrimination in the civil service and the universities. They then lobbied with the Prussian and imperial governments to increase the numbers of Catholics appointed, emphasizing Catholic national and monarchical loyalty, and at least tacitly trading Center political support in return for appointments. 21

Whether such efforts bore fruit or whether Catholics profited from a general upsurge of educational and economic opportunities, progress could be charted between 1900 and 1930 in the growing numbers of Catholic secondary pupils, secondary schoolteachers, and university students, the Catholic "deficit" dwindling or even disappearing among these groups. During the Weimar Republic, the Socialist and Centrist coalition partners in the state of Prussia collaborated in political patronage, and the Catholic deficit among politically appointed officials disappeared. 22 But fiscal restraints upon hiring as well as the seniority of Protestant officials perpetuated the Catholic deficit among tenured civil servants.

The Catholic gains were also bought at a price. As limited as they were, they provoked a hostile reaction, which centered around the Protestant League, Protestant civil servant associations, and the Nationalist and German People's parties. 23 Protestant officials found in the Catholic gains yet another reason or pretext to drift away from the Republic.

And the Catholic nouveaux arrivés assimilated themselves to the views of the conservative Protestant circles they entered. For example, the Catholic historians Heinrich Finke, Aloys Schulte, and Martin Spahn drifted further and further away from the Center party with which they had been associated early in their careers. Finke supported the right-wing proannexationist Vaterlands partei during World War I, while Spahn became a Nationalist Reichstag deputy and eventually joined the Nazi caucus. 24 To these men, Matthias Erzberger, who had never attended a university, who had engineered the Peace Resolution of 1917, signed the armistice, and led the Center into alliance with the Left, represented all that had gone wrong with political Catholicism. Max Wallraf also hated the "disastrous" (Unheilvoll) Erzberger. A high official in the empire whose career owed much to the lobbying of Centrist politicians, Wallraf became a Nationalist Reichstag deputy. He regarded the antirepublican Nationalist party as "Christian, social, and national," embracing all classes and both Christian denominations—but not Jews. 25

By the 1920s several Catholic families were among the greatest industrialists in Germany: the Thyssens and Kühne shut in steel, and the ten Hompels in cement. Whereas the older Thyssens, August and Joseph, had belonged to Catholic social and cultural
organizations, August's son Fritz would provide Hitler with money and contacts. The Klöckners and ten Hompels remained loyal Centrists, but their presence in the Reichstag caucus created friction with the Catholic labor unions. The Reichstag deputy Rudolf ten Hompel disliked the "Super democrat" Erzberger, even proposing, after Erzberger's lawsuit against Karl Heinrich Helfferich, to exclude him from the caucus. A vigorous critic of the Christian unions, ten Hompel favored a right-wing coalition, even a dictatorship, to lead Germany out of the depression. 26

If the Spans, Wallrafs, or Thyssens represented individual cases of defection from political and associational Catholicism, signs of large-scale dissolution were present. Membership in the worker-oriented People's Association for Catholic Germany (Volkswerin für das katholische Deutschland) declined by perhaps 50 percent between 1922 and 1933. 27 The Christian unions likewise dwindled in numbers in the later Weimar years. The voting base for political Catholicism slowly shrank, while the Bavarian Catholics in 1920 created their own Bavarian People's party in opposition to the policies of fiscal centralization and alliance with the Left of the national Centrist leadership. The Bavarian Populists allowed their state to become a haven in the early Weimar years for all varieties of antirepublican movements from the terrorist Organization Consul to the Nazi party. In 1925 they endorsed the Protestant Prussian General Paul von Hindenburg for president against the Catholic Rhineland's Wilhelm Marx. After having created such havoc, the Bavarians drifted back toward the political middle in the later Weimar years.

Few bishops were as outspokenly antirepublican as was Michael Cardinal Faulhaber, Archbishop of Munich, at the 1922 Catholic Rally. Condemning the November Revolution as "perjury and high treason," he blamed Germany's distress on the Weimar Constitution. The episcopacy in general, however, opposed the most extreme right-wing organizations. The Fulda Bishops' Conference, embracing the Prussian bishops, warned Catholics in 1924 against membership in the paramilitary organizations and forbade participation by the clergy. While the warning applied in theory to the republican Reichsbanner as well as the right-wing groups, the Centrist press tended to ignore this, and public controversy centered around the unsuccessful attempt by Catholic nobles to have the ban on the Stahlhelm lifted. 28 The hierarchy likewise stood firm against another attempt of right-wing Catholics to assimilate themselves into the culture of German nationalism, refusing to lift the ban on duelling among university students. In 1930-31 all German bishops, including Faulhaber, issued warnings against National Socialism "as long and insofar as it adheres to a religious and cultural program which is irreconcilable with Catholic teaching," or with other qualifying provisos. 29 But the connection between episcopacy and Center party, always problematic, became more distant. The bishops, generally conservative monarchists in sentiment, were mostly
elderly men from rural or small-town backgrounds who had studied and frequently taught theology or canon law (rather than secular subjects), sought to avoid offending the growing number of devout Catholics who had switched from the Center to the parties of the Right.

Thus, in the Weimar Republic, Verbandskatholizismus was already beginning to decline at the moment of its fullest unfolding, at the very moment when it had perfected the ghetto. All Catholic spokesmen and social strata were breaking out of the ghetto, seeking union with the nation by many paths. The gains made along these paths by Catholics did not suffice to convince Catholics that they were no longer stepchildren in the fatherland, yet they also provoked politically dangerous Protestant hostility.

In several newspaper articles in 1924, the Catholic writer Peter Wust had proclaimed "The Return of German Catholicism out of Exile." He condemned the "anxious and nervously cramped defensiveness," the "cramped and ashamed" Catholicism of the Kulturkampf generation and its successor of the 1890s. He declared that at around 1900 Catholic youth such as himself had thirsted after a "strengthening, refreshing spiritual drink" because they all were "heirs" of Friedrich Nietzsche. German Catholicism for him had gone over to a spiritual offensive based on its achievements in philosophy, literature, and politics. Wust's enthusiastic vagueness and his invocation of Nietzsche as well as the vociferous and confused controversy that he provoked suggest the turn to "vitalism," the vague, enthusiastic Lebensphilosophie among many younger Catholics, a broad, but foggy path toward union with the nation. Catholics increasingly spoke of adhering to the Catholic Weltanschauung rather than Catholic Lehre (teaching or doctrine), even their terminology reflecting their assimilation to the national norms.

Yet the Catholic spiritual and political leadership remained in a limbo between ghetto and nation. In the death throes of the Republic, the Catholic leadership reverted to extreme parochialism. The perennial Centrist role in the governing coalitions had not sufficed to overcome the Catholic deficits. In April 1931 the Centrist caucus in the Prussian Landtag introduced a bill in support of—to use the current American term—"affirmative action": a favoring of Catholic candidates until the deficit in the civil service was overcome. The bill found no support from any other party, yet provoked severe Protestant hostility. In Baden in 1932 the hierarchy and the Centrist leadership pushed through a concordat at the price of destroying the last democratic majority in the Landtag. The Reich Concordat of 1933 was a desperate attempt to salvage Catholic rights at the expense of abandoning political Catholicism and giving Hitler his first foreign-policy triumph. Severe social, geographic, and religious cleavages made Germany a congeries of unequal minorities, and most of them in 1932-33 pursued a policy of sauve qui peut; Catholics were no different.
But the leadership also desired union with the nation. The Centrist caucus in the Reichstag, after sharp internal debate, voted unanimously for the Enabling Act in March 1933. The bishops only days later had withdrawn the warnings against National Socialism, while admonishing against illegal and subversive activity (that is, resistance). The trauma of having been branded Reichsfeinde continued to work its pernicious effects.

Both strengths (Verbandskatholizismus, group cohesion, the continuity and conscientiousness of leadership) and weaknesses (marginality, siege mentality) kept political Catholicism a major force to the end of the Republic—but a force crippled by minority consciousness and by a longing for acceptability, respectability, and union with the nation. In normal times—before 1914 or during the mid-Weimar years—Catholics could work hard at overcoming their own deficits and at tasks for the common good, but in the years of crisis—1913 and 1933—they passively submitted to the force of events and to the initiatives of others.
NOTES


4 Or, if we take a longer sweep from Georg Count von Herling to Konrad Adenauer (1917-1963), Catholics or ex-Catholics (Adolf Hitler) headed ten out of nineteen cabinets for a total of thirty-five years.


6 Johannes Forberger, *Der Einfluss des Katholizismus und Protestantismus auf die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung der Völker* (Leipzig, 1906), p. 4. When I told this in November 1979 to a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Bonn, a Protestant, she replied that she had always thought that the southern states were Catholic.

Towards the Holocaust

Statistik des Deutschen Reiches, Neue Folge, vol. 203, pp. 54-75 (census returns from 1907). Hans Rost, Die wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Lage der deutschen Katholiken (Cologne: J. P. Bachem, 1911). Traute Nellessen-Schumacher, Sozialstruktur und Ausbildung der deutschen Katholiken (Weinheim: Beltz, 1969); and T. Nellessen-Schumacher, Sozialprofil der deutschen Katholiken: Eine konfessionsstatistische Analyse (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1973). The only certain statistical evidence for these generalizations come from imperial Germany and the present Federal Republic, but despite the changing boundaries, one can assume that these generalizations apply to the Weimar Republic because of the continuity between the endpoints (1907 and 1960-70) and because of literary evidence from the Weimar Republic.


Hans Rost of Augsburg, for example, was one of the most vehement and persistent Anti-Semites in Centrist ranks. He identified Jewishness with socialism and the corrupting influences of modern society, but he was a staunch opponent of the Nazis. Rost, Gedanken und Wahrheiten zur Judenfrage (Trier: Verlag der Paulinus-Druckerei, 1907); Rost, Katholische Familienkultur (Augsburg: Haas & Grabherr, 1926); and Rost, Erinnerungen aus dem Leben eines beinahe glücklichen Menschen (Westheim bei Augsburg: 1962). Anton Otto Neher, a Catholic economist, attacked Jewish businessmen for allegedly unscrupulous practices, but extolled the Weimar Volksstaat for ending the political oppression of Catholics and making possible the social improvement of the Catholic proletariat. A. Neher, Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Katholiken im westlichen Deutschland (Rottweil: Druck und Verlag des Emanuel, 1927), pp. 22, 31, 103f, 111-13.


Schauff, Die deutschen Katholiken, pp. 64-68, 109-30.


Dr. Goebbig, Die Parität an den öffentlichen höheren Schulen der Rheinprovinz im Schuljahr 1928 (Birkenfeld/Nahe: 1928); Fritz von der Heydt, Die Parität bei der Anstellung der Beamten (Berlin: Verlag des Evangelischen Bundes, 1931).
Heydt was the Bundesdirekter of the Protestant League and the chairman of the League of German Protestant Civil Servant Associations (Verband deutscher evangelischer Beamtenvereine).


26 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Nachlass Rudolf von Hombre, typescript memoirs.

27 Fricke, Die Bürgerlichen Parteien, II, p. 310.

28 See the forthcoming doctoral dissertation by Herr Vogel, "Katholische Bischöfe, Weimar und nationale Opposition," written under the direction of Professor Konrad Repgen at the University of Bonn.


31 Heydt, Die Parität, p. 3.