

Summary

Karl-Joseph Hummel/Christoph Kösters, eds. *Kirchen im Krieg: Europa 1939-1945* (Paderborn: 2007).

The years of the Second World War between 1939 and 1945 have always occupied center stage in scholarship on National Socialism. The war was the necessary precondition for the unprecedented mobilization of German society, unleashing of horrific violence, and commission of monstrous crimes by the state. These developments can be seen as the second, the »true« revolution of National Socialism. In nearly every respect, therefore, and especially for the churches of the 20th century, the war must be perceived as an unprecedented challenge.

How did Europe's two large churches respond in the face of this challenge? The present volume takes stock of new scholarship on the Christian churches in the Second World War. Its articles focus substantially on European space, on transnational relations, on the development of national churches in the annexed and occupied countries, and on the conduct of the churches in »Hitler's Germany.« The various perspectives of research into »Church« – as an institutionalized religious entity, as the embodiment of religious teachings and norms, as a social milieu, and as subjective religiosity – and their respective relationships to »War« are examined in their political, social, and cultural-historical dimensions.

For the churches, the Second World War was first and foremost a European war. Part I of this volume therefore concentrates on the European dimension of this field of scholarship. Two transnational authorities are examined first: the Holy See, as a universally recognized subject of the law of nations, and the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, still »under construction« (»im Aufbau begriffen«) during the war years¹. Research interest in recent years focused, for understandable reasons, on the question of their response to European anti-Semitism and the Nazi genocide of Jews, whereby the arguments re-

¹ Thomas Brechenmacher, »Der Heilige Stuhl und die europäischen Mächte im Vorfeld und während des Zweiten Weltkriegs«; Armin Boyens, »Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen im Zweiten Weltkrieg«.

mained peculiarly focused on the person of Pope Pius XII.² Such a restricted perspective shuts out the Protestant and also the Orthodox Churches of Europe, whose reactions to the persecution of Europe's Jews have only been inadequately explored. It also overestimates the actual possibilities for political action possessed by the Pope, the Ecumenical Council, and the patriarchs of the Eastern Churches. A more realistic historical picture emerges when the conduct of church leaders is seen in connection with the multifaceted actions of churches in the occupied and annexed territories of Europe: in other words, an accurate historical measure of how much room for manoeuvre, politically and ecclesiastically, they really had.

Alongside these questions, Part I collects comparative case studies from Western, Northern, and Eastern Europe³. In the confessionally mixed Netherlands, the Catholic Church stood shoulder to shoulder with other confessions in an ecumenical »defensive front« that opposed the German occupiers. In Catholic Belgium, on the other hand, the Church joined the monarchy in keeping a clear distance especially from radical nationalist movements of their own countrymen. In laicized France, the Catholic bishops sympathised with the Vichy regime until the end, seeing in it an agent of moral renewal. The Protestant Church of Norway under Bishop Bergrav resisted the rule of Vidkun Quisling, whose regime supported the German occupiers. By contrast, the church in occupied Denmark kept a noticeably lower profile. In the »Generalgouvernement« in Poland, the Catholic Church, intertwined with the underground Polish state, carried out a multifaceted struggle of resistance. Far less known are the Polish-Lithuanian and Polish-Ukrainian conflicts that seethed beneath the surface of the German occupation and that also possessed religious-confessional dimensions. In Slovakia, the Catholic Church hitched itself to the collaborating regime of Josef Tiso, with which it shared confessional and patriotic goals, while trying to ensure distance between the Slovak heraldic cross and the German swastika.

The reader is struck by the diversity of wartime circumstances, which differed in occupied countries from those in unoccupied ones,

² These positions are summarized in José M. Sánchez, *Pius XII. and the Holocaust. Understanding the Controversy* (Washington: 2002).

³ Lieve Gevers, »Der belgische und niederländische Katholizismus im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein Vergleich«; Marie-Emmanuelle Reytier, »Die französischen Katholiken im Zweiten Weltkrieg«; Jens Holger Schjørring, »Die lutherischen Volkskirchen in den nordischen Ländern während des Zweiten Weltkriegs«; Emilia Hrabovec, »Der Katholizismus in Ostmitteleuropa und der Zweite Weltkrieg«.

in countries at war from those that were neutral, and in states confronted with secessionist movements from those of stable nation-states. The churches' reactions varied depending on Nazi occupation practice, but also on the particular historical preconditions and religious-confessional relations in the territories in question. One of the most important variables was the binding effect of the »national«: wherever the churches were pillars of a beleaguered national identity, the population's rejection of National Socialism as an occupying or annexing force created a broad basis for potential resistance. In the German churches, on the other hand, this binding national identification hindered resistance. And elsewhere, secessionist collaborating regimes appeared to offer the possibility of uniting, for the first time, national and religious aims. Of course, the articles here also reveal the broad currents of »grey compromises«, for which terms such as »attentisme« and »accommodation« have acquired currency.

Parts II and III of the volume draw attention to the Christian Churches in wartime German society. First to be explored is the churches' contribution to »mentally and spiritually coping with the war«, whereby both theology and religious ways of deriving meaning (Deutungsmuster) in the everyday experience of war receive special attention. There follow studies on the mobilization of church resources for war, the churches' everyday existence under the pressures caused by the extraordinary conditions of wartime, and the ambivalences in the mutual arrangement between church and regime.

For the churches, »the fundamental right of the state to wage war« was not yet up for debate; consequently, the notion that »wartime service (was) the fulfillment of every Christian's principal duty toward the state in all that is allowed« obtained⁴. The predominant topoi of Christian preaching (which, as far as the sermons of the pastoral clergy are concerned, has been explored only rudimentarily), included calls to courageously perform one's duty. Frequently, one can detect a reliance on traditional theological and pastoral models, which interpret war as retribution and sacrifice – including in popular religiosity⁵. Even if the Second World War no longer witnessed direct blessings of weapons, traditional ways of giving the semantic fields of nation and Volk, Reich and fatherland, a religious coloring continued to operate.

⁴ Cf. Konrad Reppen, »Die deutschen Bischöfe und der Zweite Weltkrieg,« in *Historisches Jahrbuch* 115 (1995), p. 410-452, here p. 427.

⁵ Wilhelm Damberg, »Krieg, Theologie und Kriegserfahrung«; Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, »Der Zweite Weltkrieg und der deutsche Protestantismus. Einige Anmerkungen«; Christoph Holzapfel, »Das Kreuz der Weltkriege. Junge christliche Generation und Kriegserfahrungen«.

Taking the oath of allegiance on the flag is one telling example. The regime seized such tradition-laden rituals and exploited them for its own uses. The Nazi state's need to dominate the interpretation of meaning presented challenges to Wehrmacht chaplains, Catholic soldier-priests in the medical service branch, and Protestant staff officers.

Between religious meanings and real war experience, a noticeable divergence developed – especially on the Eastern Front from 1942/1943 on. The evidence suggests that the brutality of war largely ruined the persuasive power of Christian interpretations and instigated a »wave of mental secularization«⁶. The motivation for combat at the »front« and the »home front« increasingly shrank to a single impetus: the defense against Bolshevism. All in all, the devastating experience of the Nazi war of conquest and extermination challenged traditional theological teachings on the relationship of church and state at such a fundamental level that one can almost speak of a »negative« Constantinian turning point (»negative« Konstantinische Wende) in history (W. Damberg).

Concerning the mobilization of church organizations on behalf of the war effort, the volume highlights the importance of the health-care system, a key sector of the wartime society. The need for medical care, for field hospitals, for temporary and auxiliary hospitals and the necessary trained personnel rose dramatically as the war progressed, and the churches proved themselves indispensable pillars in this area. As »Himmler's storm on the cloisters« (Himmler's Klostersturm) nonetheless demonstrates, radical enemies of the churches managed to circumvent the legal statutes governing use and restitution of such properties. In this way, over 300 convents and monasteries were unlawfully seized under the pretext of necessary wartime measures and, to a large extent, expropriated⁷.

The churches' everyday existence on the so-called »home front« was troubled by a cornucopia of war-specific problems. These ranged from pressures faced by the wives of pastors, whose husbands had been conscripted to the front, to the challenges that demographic upheavals brought on by evacuations, removal of children to the countryside

⁶ Regarding both world wars, see Andreas Holzem and Christoph Holzapfel, »Kriegserfahrung als Forschungsproblem«, in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 182 (2002), p. 279-297, here p. 290.

⁷ Winfried Süß, »Antagonistische Kooperationen. Katholische Kirche und nationalsozialistisches Gesundheitswesen in den Kriegsjahren 1939-1945«; Annette Mertens, »NS-Kirchenpolitik im Krieg. Der Klostersturm und die Fremdnutzung katholischer Einrichtungen 1940-1942«.

(Kinderlandverschickung), and transplanted factories posed for pastoral care. Basic facts of life included the conflation of »front« and »home front«, most visibly expressed in the form of aerial bombardment, as well as accelerated processes of erosion and transformation that were already underway in Catholic and Protestant milieus⁸.

Ambivalences and tensions in the arrangement between churches and the regime can best be summed up under the term »antagonistic cooperation« (W. Süß). This concept runs like a common thread through the efforts to give meaning to the war experience, as well as mobilization of the parochial or congregational hospitals and the day-to-day existence of the churches. It is also reflected in the civilian labor force in church installations. The war situation led to both churches utilizing foreign civilian laborers and prisoners of war. At the same time, the churches exploited the limited possibilities for providing pastoral care to oppressed forced laborers⁹. By the same token, the pastoral care and welfare assistance that both churches performed for their members who suffered persecution as so-called »non-Aryans« must be considered in the context of wartime antagonistic cooperation¹⁰. The notion that the churches' aid efforts inadvertently contributed to perfecting the Nazi extermination apparatus is based on a one-sided view of the historical facts. With the exception of the German Christians (Deutsche Christen), anti-Semitism was not an integral element of Christian faith; to speak of a »Catholic« or »Protestant« anti-Semitism is therefore historically inaccurate¹¹. On the other hand, the churches' ambivalent relationship to anti-Semitism sheds additional light onto their conduct regarding the Jews.

Lastly, Part IV directs our attention beyond the historical break of 1945 and onto the development of research on resistance and the culture of memory, two different research approaches on the topic »church

⁸ Christoph Kösters, »Kirche und Glaube an der ›Heimatfront.« Katholische Lebenswelt und Kriegserfahrungen 1939-1945«; Thomas Flammer, »Migration und Milieu. Die Auswirkungen von Migration auf Kirche und Gläubige am Beispiel der Arbeit des ›Katholischen Seelsorgsdienstes für die Wandernde Kirche‹ 1934-1943«; Ellen Ueberschär, »Zu den Geschlechterbeziehungen in der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche während des Zweiten Weltkriegs«.

⁹ Uwe Kaminsky, »Zwangsarbeit in Evangelischer Kirche und Diakonie«; Christoph Kösters, »Kirche und Glaube an der ›Heimatfront.« Katholische Lebenswelt und Kriegserfahrungen 1939-1945«.

¹⁰ Jana Leichsenring, »Christliche Hilfen für ›Nichtarier‹ und Juden: Die Kirchen und der Umgang mit Christen jüdischer Herkunft und Juden 1933-1945«.

¹¹ For this thematic complex, cf. Karl-Joseph Hummel, ed., *Zeitgeschichtliche Katholizismusforschung. Tatsachen, Deutungen, Fragen. Eine Zwischenbilanz* (Paderborn: 2004).

and Nazi regime«¹². The question of the meaning and significance of Christian-influenced milieu immunity (»Milieuresistenz«, Martin Broszat) is the subject of especially heated debate: some scholars emphasize the limitations of this »immunity« to immediate church-religious concerns and see a flip side of strong political loyalty toward Hitler's state. On the whole, they argue, the binding effect of this political loyalty outweighed any limitations on the extension of state power engendered by Milieuresistenz. Only breaking with the standards of the milieu made possible an active resistance worthy of the name. Other scholars see Milieuresistenz, which upheld a separate confessional identity, as a form of active resistance, even a highly successful one. They argue that it impeded and limited Nazism's efforts at totalitarian hegemony more effectively and more broadly than other forms of resistance managed to do. Perhaps a mediating point of view is most productive: the components of milieu immunity did not quite add up to active political resistance; rather, they amounted to a posture of distance toward National Socialism out of which patterns of refusal, protest, and active resistance could emerge. Anyone who decided on partial or fundamental opposition »crossed the line that demarcated the standards of the Catholic milieu but he remained within the community of the Church.«¹³ The personalities and circles of the Christian resistance, particularly the Catholics among them, generally believed that their thoughts and actions accorded with those of their church. In the Protestant Church, however, this was not always the case: there, internal fissures ensured that resistance also developed in opposition to the Church leadership.

In its final section, the volume deals with cultures of memory as modes for exploring the topic »Church and Nazi regime«. The analysis extends across the entire second half of the 20th century. Topics examined include the – surprisingly broad – spectrum of self-interpretation generated in the 1940s and 1950s by those who had lived through the Nazi period (Erlebnisgeneration), followed by those inquiries that were addressed to the institution of the Church – and focused on the

¹² Winfried Becker, »Christen und der Widerstand. Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven«; Björn Mensing, »Über ›braune‹ Protestanten und protestantische ›Märtyrer‹. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik im deutschen Protestantismus«; Karl-Joseph Hummel, »Gedeutete Fakten: Geschichtsbilder im deutschen Katholizismus 1945–2000«; Franziska Metzger, »Katholische Erinnerungsdiskurse über den Zweiten Weltkrieg in Österreich und in der Schweiz«.

¹³ Heinz Hürten, »Widerstehen aus katholischem Glauben,« in *Widerstand gegen die nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933–1945*, ed. Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (Bonn: 2004), p. 130–147, here p. 143.

personality of Pius XII – during and after the Second Vatican Council. Also reviewed: competing interpretations that emerged since the 1970s in contemporary historiography, on the one hand, and a politically-oriented »theology after Auschwitz,« on the other; and, in the 1990s, the divergence between differentiated historical scholarship and moralistically flavored public debates (Daniel J. Goldhagen and others). In reviewing these developments, the continuity of traditional communities of memory (Erinnerungsgemeinschaften) stands out, particularly where these feature peculiarities of confession, milieu, and generation. The analysis also reveals how these communities of memory were challenged, and eventually overtaken, by a change in mentality that led to far-reaching »pluralization and decentralization of historical discourses« in the final third of the 20th century. The end of that century has seen new developments, including the »cleansing of memory« initiated by Pope John Paul II at the threshold to the new millennium and the unexpectedly timely opening of Vatican archival collections for historical research and theological reinterpretation. A long-held defensive mentality and obstructive posture appear to have been relinquished, thereby enabling a fresh start for research on Catholicism as well.

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(translated from the German by Christof Morrissey)