THE CATHOLIC POOR RELIEF DISCOURSE AND THE FEMINIZATION OF THE CARITAS IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

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When one intends to investigate “Christian Feminization and Masculinization in Europe” - as was the subtitle of the original workshop in which a first version of this text was discussed - one should certainly include taking a closer look at German Catholicism. In doing so, I would like to follow up on my current research project within the special research area Fremdheit und Armut (Strangeness and Poverty) at the University of Trier. This project investigates the Catholic poverty discourse in Germany as well as its contribution to the construction of a Catholic identity following secularization until the middle of the century.

With regard to the question of a feminization of the Caritas in the nineteenth century, it is also possible to consider current everyday experiences. Today, many women still work in social professions, although they usually only predominate in less well-paid positions, for instance, as geriatric assistants or nurses. Regarding the history of social work, these everyday observations correspond with women’s socio-charitable efforts being connected to both the development of women’s non-domestic employ-

1 www.sfb600.uni-trier.de
2 Here, the term discourse applies to a complex of linguistic output, which appeared at a certain time and place, and which systematically organizes a certain subject matter. As a product of society, the discourse itself is subject to certain rules and describes the domain of ‘what may be said’. The limitation to linguistic output is due to the project’s concentration on written sources, which does not mean that a discourse in general only contains linguistic output. For an introduction into this discussion, cf. Landwehr, Geschichte des Sagbaren, 97-102.
3 The discussions on identity terminology cannot be taken into consideration at this point. It should merely be noted that, within my project, the term is not understood in the essentialist sense of the word, but as a construction that is based on processes of negotiating attributions to oneself or others. For an introduction cf. Pyka, “Geschichtswissenschaft und Identität”; Wagner, “Feststellungen".
ment and the development of the women’s liberation movement. This connection is also identified in descriptions concerning the history of the women’s movement. Thus, a recent instructive overview of women’s history and the history of the women’s movement states that, for many middle- and upper-class women of the nineteenth century, the commitment to the poor and oppressed was “the preliminary stage and vehicle of efforts towards their own gender”. Furthermore, there was a close relationship between women’s ‘deeds of love’ and religion, allowing for the recognition of “a widespread feminization of religion”. By drawing on the religious dimension in order to “demonstrate the effect and value of social intervention by women in particular”, religion should not have opposed the process of female consciousness, but should rather have proved beneficiary. This touches on a further historiographic dimension of the question, i.e. the discussion on a feminization of religion, which achieved a certain attention since Barbara Welter’s propositions of the 1980s.

Against this background, the following investigation will cast an eye on German Catholicism and place a greater emphasis on the first half of the nineteenth century. The discussions regarding the feminization thesis not least consider the possible chronology of this alleged process - a controversial issue and by no means a clarified subject. As far as this is concerned, a closer look at the early nineteenth century might help to examine whether a possible ‘feminization of religion’ in the German context occurred directly at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Following a brief look at the feminization thesis, a more extensive chapter directed at the discourse history will question whether and to what extent the Catholic poverty discourse actually documents elements of a feminization process within the given research period. Finally, I will illustrate the practice of Catholic poor relief and pose the question whether this practice substantiates a feminization of the Caritas.

**BRIEF NOTES ON THE FEMINIZATION THESIS**

Some statements made by contemporaries along with other observations gave reason to speak of a ‘feminization of religion’ occurring in the nineteenth century. I have critically analysed and dealt with this thesis as well as its variants elsewhere. At this

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4 For an overview, see Wendt, *Geschichte der sozialen Arbeit*, 467-518.
5 Bock, *Frauen*, 156. In a non-German context, cf. e.g. works by Lewis, *Women’s Welfare*; Id., *Women and Social Action*.
6 Bock, *Frauen*, 160.
7 See, in particular, the editor’s introduction in this volume as well as the most recent research report by Van Osselaer and Buerman, “Feminization Thesis”.
8 Ibid., 515-518.
9 In this connection, the term ‘German context’ points to the fact that Germany as a nation-state did not yet exist during the period of investigation, and loosely refers to the German-speaking lands including major parts of the Austrian Empire (those that were part of the Old German Empire until 1806, i.e. for the most part the German-speaking *Erblande*) not included in the new nation-state during the founding of the new German Empire under Prussian supremacy in 1871. As an overview, see e.g. Siemann, *Vom Staatenbund*.
10 Schneider, “Feminisierung der Religion”.
A more detailed explanation: Ibid., 143.

One of the critical points of the feminization thesis is that it is frequently encountered in a rather general and far-reaching, demanding form. By contrast, I take the view that the feminization thesis should be limited in its range. Furthermore, we should distinguish whether there are areas of ‘feminization’ of varied intensity, which would diverge denominationally and regionally.

According to my observations, a graphic model that uses concentric circles can be helpful to describe circumstances for German Catholicism. This model serves to illustrate that an area of maximum feminization (church attendance and receipt of sacraments, pilgrimages and membership in purely devout sisterhoods) is followed by areas with a high yet less intensive feminization, which could also include the Caritas domain. This assumption will be investigated more closely.

**THE CATHOLIC POVERTY DISCOURSE AND THE FEMINIZATION OF THE CARITAS**

For its analysis of the Catholic poverty discourse this research project evaluates 44 Catholic and two Protestant periodicals, a long series of sermon works (53 Cath., 8 Prot.) as well as 40 prayer books.

Following our results so far, it is certain that these sources revealed a considerable involvement with the social needs of mankind. We were able to collect 4000

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11 A more detailed explanation: Ibid., 143.
relevant references, which differed significantly with regard to the kind of source and the given statements. Roughly speaking, there are two diverging partial discourses: a liturgical-paraenetic and a pastoral, practical-political discourse. Within the liturgical-paraenetic discourse, found particularly in prayer books, sermons and many pastoral letters, poverty is a very general phenomenon of misery and suffering, presented as a time-indifferent social constant. From a reservoir of traditional biblical references a traditional theology of poverty unfolds due to the use of traditional religious semantics. Poverty and poor relief are strongly individualized and revolve around individual failure (sin) and the virtues of charity and mercy. The pastoral, practical-political poverty discourse is significantly more specific, analyses manifold causes of poverty without losing track of religious and moral deficiencies as essential factors. At the same time they often develop detailed concepts of poor relief or describe suitable implementation attempts. Some differences, which cannot be taken into consideration at this point, appear in internal Catholic ‘camps’ between the followers of the late Enlightenment, which existed during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the ultramontanes.

**THE POOR RELIEF SITUATION IN GERMANY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, subsistence crises still existed in Germany, which created the overall ‘age of poverty’ that according to Karl Heinz Metz preceded the ‘age of security’ that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. The years 1770-72, 1816/17 and 1846/47 are particularly known as the times of classical famine crises. Due to the incipient industrialization these classical famine crises were accompanied by new economic depressions. These, however, did not intensively affect the broader German population until the second half of the nineteenth century. The seemingly unstoppable and continued impoverishment during the first decades of the nineteenth century assumed such massive forms that contemporaries germanicized an English term for this new and threatening phenomenon: pauperism.

Institutional pillars of Catholic poor and sick relief, monasteries/convents and in part foundations, which perhaps could have countered this poverty, had already been lost on a large scale during the secularization process. This gave impetus to the already observable trend of communal and state dominance with regard to poor relief. Until the mid-nineteenth century and to some extent later on, the birthplace-related ‘home principle’ constituted an essential characteristic of the poor legislation. Every community or town was to take care of its own poor. The fundamental

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12 A detailed description of the research concept and first results are presented in the following volume: Schneider, *Konfessionelle Armutsdiskurse* (editor’s introduction; articles by Michaela Maurer and Ingmar Franz).
13 Metz, *Die Geschichte*, 13-14, 45-46.
14 Concerning the upswings, cf. the classic study by Abel, *Massenarmut*.
15 Cf. Schulz, “Armut”.
distinction was therefore made between ‘native poor’ and ‘poor stranger’. In 1842, the Prussian Kingdom broke with the previously dominant home principle in its poor legislation which, however, remained valid in other German states. In Prussia, the responsibility of supporting the poor was transferred from the birthplace community to the residential community.

So far, relevant research is largely lacking in terms of the actual involvement of the church in public relief through its official representatives (priests) or its significance in charity associations. They were frequently involved in the communal poor councils, and sometimes even did their file keeping.17 In Austria, the parish poor institute formed the major part of public poor relief from the late eighteenth until the mid-nineteenth century.18 Whether we can justifiably speak of a marginalization of denominational poor relief in the nineteenth century, as has been done in significant earlier research19, is therefore in need of more detailed analyses.

DISCOURSES ON POVERTY, SICKNESS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

As several studies, including those on German areas, have shown, more and more constructions of gender differences emerged in the course of the nineteenth century, in which the different ‘natures’ of women and men frequently recurred.20 These differences also appeared in theological discourses21 which, however, also contained objections.

One of them came from the famous Viennese theologian and cathedral preacher Johann Emanuel Veith.22 For Veith it was a self-evident fact that women display a more truthful devoutness than men. He rejects any references (known to him) to the female gender character which declared devoutness as a female virtue predicated on the natural weakness and emotional orientation of women. In fact, he emphasizes the strength of the female gender by means of a line of ancestors of holy women, a strength that was based on their faith in God. In this article he does not refer to the Caritas at all. However, with his rejection of the contemporary gender anthropology23 he repudiates a stylization of women who were ‘naturally’ inclined to “compassion and tears”.

In his fourth sermon on the ‘Caritas’, Veith not only mentions several charitably active women in Church history, but stresses the fact that Christian women proved themselves “so frequent and manifold” in the succession of Mary as “heroes and

17 This was the case in areas west of the Rhine, where the poor legislation was still that of Napoleonic times, as well as in Bavaria and Nassau. Cf. Gatz, “Kirchliche Mitarbeit”, 58. For Bavaria: Eder, Helfen, 63-66. For Nassau: Blum, Staatliche Armenfürsorge, 63 ff.
18 See Scheutz, “Demand and Charitable Supply”.
20 See, e.g. Frevert, ‘Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann’.
21 Wagner, Die himmlische Frau.
23 See Honegger, Die Ordnung der Geschlechter.
caretakers of holy love [Caritas]”.

As evidence he cites female congregations who were active in the mission and the Sisters of Charity who would work away from home dealing with epidemic diseases. His full-blooded praise is also directed at charitable women’s associations, which were established everywhere among the secular classes. These associations did not donate money, but rather called on the poor in their accommodations in order to help them in their physical misery and ‘moral squalor’. Thus, he is not afraid to refer to them as angels and to regard them as a symbol of a better future. His sometimes imprecise formulations suggest that he recognizes a particular vocation of Christian women therein. With this, Veith refers to institutionalizations of female charity, which need to be presented more thoroughly within the next section of the study at hand.

The current literature stresses, and with good reason, the fact that fields of employment were strongly influenced by gender constructions. Sabine Braunschweig claims that “the definition of women’s labour and men’s labour cannot be based on work contents” and that “an association to ‘traditional’ female or male tasks is either constructed when required or vehemently disputed”. This follows popular gender stereotypes, which in turn can be modified, shifted or altered by ‘new associations’.

Low social status and a low income are the most significant structural features of female professions, which Braunschweig considers a given, particularly with regard to the nursing professions. The “ability to care, the knowledge, but also psychological qualities were not evaluated as skills, they were considered part of the female gender character” and therefore justified the low salary and the lack of recognition of specific professional qualifications. At the same time it should be noted that representatives of the early women’s movements wanted to extend the sphere of female action by returning to a specific female tradition of poor relief and sick care, thus wanting to reclaim the poor relief territory which had been taken over by men. Against this background, this chapter shall investigate whether charitable activities within the Catholic poverty discourse were coupled with the female gender, whether sick care in particular was constructed as a female activity, and to what extent connections to religious dimensions were established.

SICK CARE AND THE FEMALE GENDER CHARACTER

Claudia Bischoff cites what she calls the controversy over whether men or women possess a special aptitude for charitable functions, particularly with regard to the care of the sick. She refers to a number of contemporary articles, which would have ulti-

24 Veith, Charitas [ ], 84-111. Quotation on 109.
25 See ibid., 110.
26 He speaks of a “profession of Christian Women” on 109, however, he refers to the old meaning of the word, which implies a “vocation”.
29 Examples in Bock, Frauen, 161 ff.
imately decided this controversial issue “in favour of women”. In the Caritas sermon mentioned above, Johann Emanuel Veith does not attribute charitable actions to the female gender character in general. And he is not alone. It should be noted as a rather important initial result that, in general, these kinds of attributions rarely occurred in the context of the Catholic poverty discourse in the first half of the nineteenth century. An initial explanation for this could lie in the assumption that certain matters can be taken for granted and need no discussion. In contrast, it is impossible to assume that there existed such a general perception of gender constructions in the time under investigation, particularly since men were in fact active in sick care during the early nineteenth century. We shall return to this issue at a later stage. A further explanation results from the biblical and Christian tradition, which, as is generally known, calls upon every Christian to practice charity. This sets boundaries, although by no means impassable, to any form of one-sided attribution.

One of the few texts with a clear gender attribution manages to harmonize one with the other: “Every Christian is entitled to deeds of Christian love; serviceable care however is an activity best suited for women”. Catholic authors were also faced with the fact that male members of religious orders were charitably active and thus also engaged in sick care. Even within this special territory, it was difficult for authors to pursue such polar constructions.

The few scripts that use the female gender character as an argument are all the more worthy of note. In 1832, one author states in the Breslauer Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie, an important mouthpiece of the anti-ultramontane circles in German Catholicism, that most people generally agreed that “the female gender is more suited to attend to the sick than the male”. A comparable statement, despite a deviant church-political and theological orientation, can be found in one of the most important Catholic periodicals, the Katholik: “Over the centuries experience has also shown that only the female gender with its singular sensitivity, its warmer sympathy for the suffering of others, its patience and cleanliness is exclusively suited for nursing the sick.” This is a passage taken from the text in which the (suspended) Protestant theologian Johann G. Bartholmä had his say in favour of the Sisters of Charity in 1838.

In 1833, the founder of such a female congregation and future Archbishop of Cologne, Clemens August Droste zu Vischering, used a rather similar wording in his book on the Sisters. He asks the rhetorical question whether “women or men

30 Bischoff, Frauen in der Krankenpflege, 78-92; quotation on 79.
31 Sintzel, Geschichte, 19.
32 BZKT, 5 (1832), 55. Regarding the history of the Catholic press in Germany until 1848 cf. Pesch as well as Schneider, Katholiken auf die Barrikaden?, 44-94.
33 With regard to the Katholik as the fierce apologetic mouthpiece of the strictly Catholic so-called Mainz circle cf. ibid., 63. The journal appeared on a monthly basis, from 1844 onward it appeared three times a week for a few years and was directed at an educated audience, especially the clergy.
34 Katholik, 25 (1845) 149, 691.
35 See Bartholmä, Die barmherzigen Schwestern. Bartholmä converted to Catholicism shortly before his death in 1839. I owe this information to Eder, Helfen, 90 ff.
36 Droste zu Vischering, Ueber die Genossenschaften, 15. This passage is also quoted and discussed in Schaper, Krankenwartung, 147.
were generally more suited to nurse the sick”, and answers tersely by referring to the general existing consensus that favoured a ‘female care’.37

None of these authors had a more detailed justification for their assumptions. In another book on the Sisters of Charity, Michael Sintzel proposes a justification insofar as he draws on ‘nature’, which according to him had enriched the female gender far more.38 Furthermore, as an insight from “the study of the soul” he elaborates that

women are far more capable of executing piety, which is oriented towards the hospital service, than men, because women combine their greater ability to devoutly seize the smaller means of life with their even greater skill of morally devising these as opposed to the more outwardly and generally understanding man. ... Indeed, with regard to the sick, women possess a greater strength of moral disposition and persuasion than men, because they have the greater gift of affiliating to an alien individuality by entering into it. In particular, women come closer to the sick and primarily the poor sick by their mental communication. Women possess more of the necessary humility, not humiliated by the care of the poor, while the self-confident strength of man expresses pride. ... Men lack the naturally protected shamefacedness, which establishes an important moral effectiveness; ... men lack that strength of austerity for quiet concealed purposes, which women are so capable of, following an appropriate ascesis. Furthermore, men do not subordinate to that certain form of obedience, which receives the commandment from above without scrutiny and which willingly executes the rich service of thousands of encounters on a small scale. Finally, men lack the form of love committed and devoted to the neediness of strangers, which applies such an immeasurable sacrifice without the prospects of great successes in the outside world by displaying a unique readiness for equal, single and small needs. ... Man is a natural egoist. The woman, however, remains alien even with regard to her self-love. She is the vestal of love.39

This explanation closely follows contemporary constructed gender images and applies them to a specific area, that of relief care.

The more specific question whether women should also nurse men or whether this should be reserved for male nurses, is answered by Droste zu Vischering to the effect that women would be permitted to do so, whereas the care of women by men was prohibited.41 The famous doctor and member of the Munich Görres circle, Johann Nepomuk Ringseis, commented in the renowned and, in German Catholicism, favourably received *Historisch-politische Blätter*(HPB) that despite some counterarguments, “also with regard to the care of sick male patients, preference of female attendants

39 Ibid., 282.
40 In addition to Frevert, ‘Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann’ and Bock, *Frauen*, see also: Habermas, *Frauen und Männer*; Schmid, “Weib oder Mensch”.
41 See Droste zu Vischering, *Ueber die Genossenschaften*, 16.
over male attendants” is superior beyond any doubt. There are in fact voices, which as a matter of course are describing organized care according to the gender principle.

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY AND THE FEMALE GENDER CHARACTER

The unambiguous context of all quotations put forward here is the Sisters of Charity caring for the impoverished sick. This is exactly a focal point of the Catholic discourse regarding the poor and sick relief, and closer to the discourse of the 1830s and 1840s. It is distinctly noticeable that, from 1831 onward, this partial discourse entered the overall discourse on Catholic poor relief and fundamentally influenced it following the publication of Clemens Brentano’s book on the Sisters of Charity of St Borromeo. Within the Catholic press, hundreds of writings of different lengths and styles (brief news, reviews, elaborate article series) dealt with this topic, even beyond the ultramontane-oriented organs. Furthermore, a series of books and brochures was published on the Sisters of Charity. Even the Protestant Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung (EKZ) took notice of the topic.

By contrast, male charitable congregations (Brothers of Mercy) hardly appear in the Catholic poverty discourse of these decades. There are only very sporadic incidences of their being included in any deliberations. For example, in the Historisch-politische Blätter the hope is set on the actions of the Sisters rather than on the Brothers of Mercy to solve the poverty problem. This is justified with the thought that male mercifulness has its place in dangerous individual situations (e.g. on the St Bernard Pass), i.e. not in everyday poor relief. Other authors do not deny the merits of the male hospital orders in the past. However, they take for granted that the female species is generally better suited for the care of the sick and poor, which would also have been the opinion of the majority of contemporaries.

62 Historisch-politische Blätter, 24 (1848), 102. This journal was the mouthpiece of the influential Munich circle around the Catholic publisher Joseph Görres, who would contribute articles himself or temporarily work in the editorial staff. It appeared every fortnight and was directed at well-educated circles, also those outside the clergy. With its circulation of almost 2000 copies, it had one of the largest coverages of Catholic journals in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Munich circle united late Romantics and the ultramontanes. Concerning the journal cf. as introductory reading Schneider, Katholiken auf die Barrikaden?, 62, 77-83.
63 Cf. Sintzel, Geschichte, 13-15, here a contemporary doctor is quoted following this argument.
64 Cf. Brentano, Die Barmherzigen Schwestern. Concerning the Sisters of St Borromeo in Germany cf. Gatz, Kirche und Krankenpflege, 268-300 (see also older literature there).
65 In her unpublished thesis Annika Morbach managed to determine 187 thematizations in seven ultramontane journals between 1828 and 1850. Morbach, Der katholische Diskurs, 54 ff.
66 In addition to the abovementioned thesis by Morbach, an initial analysis of the material with a different perspective was provided by my former colleague Bircher, “Religious communities”.
67 EKZ, 12 (1833), 137-150 (review of Brentano). However, in 1830 an article on the Sisters of Charity already appeared: EKZ, 6 (1830), 169 ff; 177-180. The EKZ represented the strict section of Prussian Protestantism. See Kriege, Geschichte.
68 HPB, 21 (1848), 570.
69 Cf. BZKT, 5 (1832), 55. Also Sintzel, Geschichte, 19.
The detailed characterization of the Sisters of Charity links the Catholic poverty discourse to the (civil) discourse on women in general. A closer look at the article titled “Über die barmherzigen Schwestern und deren Einführung in Wien” reveals the following characterizations. The “tender sex” in the shape of the Sisters of Charity practices “devotional love”, demonstrates “perseverance, patience and faithfulness”, exhibits “most tender compassion” and “unresting practice”, is “helpful as an angel”, performs “every service” and “accepts every effort” namely for the sake of Jesus, as it is the “heavenly-spirited virgins” who have the “courage to fight against the charms of the world” and who perform “deeds of Christian love” as “God-enthusiastic souls” by performing “wise sick care”. They are characterized by “evangelical zealousness of love”, “heroic sacrifice”, “humility”, “gentleness”, “modesty”, “abstinence”, “pudicity” and “angelic purity” and thus honour the female gender to the highest adornment and at the same time demonstrate its dignity. Other characterizations of the “ideal femininity” from Brentano’s book enter the press such as “diligence”, “orderliness and cleanliness” or “adeptness” or “wise housekeeping”. The conformance with essential elements of the civil ideal of women is unsurprising. However, it is again surpassed in a typical Catholic manner, as we deal with “tender virgins” and “pure brides” whose “treasure of adeptness” “emerges solely from sheer virginity” and who have “hands of angels”. The angel motif, in particular, relativizes the ‘normal’ gender affiliation of the Sisters and practically transforms them into genderless beings. This is thus an increasingly common factor in explaining why the Sisters, in particular, would also be permitted to nurse men.

By contrast, another connection to the general gender ideal also originates from the motif of ‘motherliness’. One author argues in his article, which appeared in the *Katholik* and the *Sion* in 1836, thus reaching a large Catholic readership, that the Sisters of Charity’s renunciation of the joys of motherhood enabled them to become “mothers of orphaned children”. In one of the many books on the Sisters this motherly action is very insistently and emphatically characterized: “The Sisters’ love creates food, warmth and cleanliness for the sick; but it also does ineffably more! It brings comfort, it guides around the evil paths, it encourages, yes it brings comfort, an image of heavenly love, like being comforted by one’s mother.” [...] “Give

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51 *Sion*, 1 (1832), 262 ff., 286 (article sequence with excerpts of Brentano’s scripture). Complementary reading without a direct reference to Brentano is provided in: *Sion*, 6 (1837), 569-574, here 569 ff. *Sion* was a widespread church journal, especially in Bavaria, with a more popular orientation than the *Katholik*. It appeared between 1832 and 1875.
52 *Sion*, (1832), 244, 285 ff., 294.
53 From contemporary books see also Sintzel, *Geschichte*, 42 ff., 292; Buß, *Der Orden*, 46.
54 Also Schaper, *Krankenwaltung*, 148.
55 Quoted according to *Sion*, 5 (1836), 885-888, here 887. The article was taken from the *Katholik*, 16 (1836), 37-45. “Motherly care” is attested to the Sisters in *Süddeutsches Kirchenblatt*, 5 (1845), 53. Regarding the new mother ideal of the civil circle since the late 18th century cf. indications provided by Köser, *Denn die Diakonisse*, 77 ff.
me mothers for the poor sick, they are in need of motherly care!”  

The relationships in these orders and congregations are stylized according to a family pattern, with the Mother Superior caring for her daughters like a mother. In some respects, these and other similar statements concerning the “motherly ministration” or “motherly care” of the Sisters of Charity anticipate the concept of a ‘spiritual motherliness’, which underwent a major upturn particularly in the civil women’s movement of the second half of the nineteenth century. It served not least to legitimize female employment in those areas, where an analogy to the ‘natural’ female activity as a mother (i.e. education and care) could be established. In this construction, activities at school or the hospital appeared as an extension of the ‘natural’ family. It also implied the entitlement and, to a certain extent, the right to participate in shaping society in a specifically female way and to provide it with warmth and elements of comfort, which were considered women’s responsibilities at home.

Even although we come across the term ‘tender sex’, any semblance of ‘weakness’ is eschewed with regard to the Sisters of Charity. They are spry and powerful young women and represent the counterpart to young men doing military service. The Mother Superior can be compared to a commanding officer, and the group of Sisters to a legion. In 1848, a comparison is drawn in the HPB between the charitably active Sisters and the Prussian Landwehr, i.e. the military territorial defence force. The typical gender discourse is also prised open by changing weakness into strength, as the alleged ‘weak virgins’ resist the Zeitgeist in their religiousness, while the seemingly enlightened strong men succumb to it. In almost the same manner the women overcome the “inherent female tendency for beautiful clothing” by directing this energy towards decorating the churches. The fierce missionary assignment that the Sisters carry out for God and Church across the world therefore culminates in its renewal: they clean up the “battlefield of secular life”, collect and heal its debris and “religiously bury its corpses”. At this point, the offensive character of the ultra-montane strategy is significant. Other statements describe the Sisters as the “bulwark of church”, thus assigning a more defensive-defending role to them.

56 Reinkens, Die Barmherzigen Schwestern, 183.
57 See e.g. Sintzel, Geschichte, 152 ff. or Brentano, Die Barmherzigen Schwestern (1852), 100 ff.
58 Sintzel, Geschichte, 102.
59 Ibid., 171.
60 As introductory reading cf. Bock, Frauen, 129, 159; Wendt, Geschichte der sozialen Arbeit, 480 ff. A more detailed account is in Taylor Allen, Feminism; Sachße, Mütterlichkeit als Beruf, 110-116; Breitenbach, Frauen.
62 Cf. HPB, 21 (1848), 571.
63 Sion, 5 (1836), 887.
64 Sion, 1 (1832), 308.
65 Sintzel, Geschichte, 72.
66 Reinkens, Die Barmherzigen Schwestern, XI.
According to all the material presented so far, the Catholic poor relief does in fact appear as a women’s matter. However, these are not just any women. The Catholic poverty discourse focuses on a specific type: the Sisters of Charity. This is particularly apparent in an argumentative pattern, namely the juxtaposition of the Sisters of Charity and paid secular care staff. The success story of denominational sick and poor relief by Catholic Sisters and Protestant deaconesses since the 1830s lets people forget the paid caretaker as a ‘normal’ salaried profession, which was taken up by men as well as women. As the recent example of the major Vienna General Hospital showed and proved in detail, the number of women among the ‘caretakers’ increased not least because of the worsening pay. This counteracted the original concept of a nursing care for men by men (and women for women).67

In the sources analysed, the Sisters of Charity represent the ideal, the paid staff represents the antitype, and without making distinctions between church or public facilities. This accords with the characterizations which project nearly all the bad human characteristics onto the paid staff: they strive for private advantages, neglect the impoverished sick from whom they can expect no reward, they embezzle all belongings, are uneducated, crude and clumsy, and act arbitrarily instead of maintaining orderliness.68 They are accused of having resorted to the service as a form of “sheet anchor” for lack of other alternatives and not out of inner vocation.69 As such, the service of love for the sake of Christ and divine reward is contrasted with paid service.70 It is striking that the antitype frequently occurs in masculine terms, for instance in form of “paid guardians” who acted with the “corporal cane” and without any gentleness.71 A letter by the Prussian President von Zerboni is repeatedly mentioned, which states that “in no institution with male employees who merely did their service out of duty” could he observe such positive work as with the Sisters of Charity.72 Without playing down the deficiencies on the part of the paid caretakers, the structural problem is by all means identified: the low pay and the lack of security in case of sickness and age does not appeal to those of suitable character, but to those people from poorer backgrounds who have no other alternative.73

A very extensive article in the *Breslauer Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie (BZKT)* illustrates that it was not just simply a matter of a men-women dichotomy.

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67 Cf. Walter, “Krankenpflege”, 30 ff. A more detailed account is in id., *Pflege als Beruf*. See also Schaper, *Krankenwartung*, 116-118. On pp. 53-63 Schaper also describes the work and living conditions of paid caretakers around the year 1800.

68 Cf. Sion, 6 (1837), 571 ff.; *Katholik*, 25 (1845) 149, 691.


70 Cf. *Katholik*, 25 (1845) Supplement 11, 308; Reinkens, *Die Barmherzigen Schwestern*, X (Foreword by Dieringer).

71 Cf. e.g. *Katholik*, 25 (1845) Supplement 11, 308; Reinkens, *Die Barmherzigen Schwestern*, X.

72 SKB, 5 (1845) 21 (according to Brentano); *Katholik*, 25 (1845) 149, p. 692.

The review of Clemens Brentano’s text in 1832 already stated that it was “a general and loudly declared truth of experience that a care of the impoverished sick, which emanated purely from the purpose of Christian love and divine reward had large and significant advantages over the sick care that was assumed only with a temporary regard to a mundane reward”.74 The article mentioned above was published following year, with the title “Wird die im christlichen Geiste zu verrichtende Hospital-Kranken-wartung von Mitgliedern religiöser Ordens-Vereine besser besorgt, als von weltlichen Lohnwächtern?”.75 This question is also elaborately discussed in the various books on the Sisters of Charity already quoted here,76 each with similar arguments, so that this article can be considered representative. The author, priest Joseph Sauer from Breslau, at first clarifies the position that the female gender is better suited, so that his further elaborations attempt to clarify the question of whether the clerical Sisters or the secular payment claimants deserved priority.77 Though “most voices already opted for the former”, this “judgement was not a general one”.78 As was to be expected, this extensive essay draws exactly this conclusion. It is achieved by the author developing a detailed requirement standard for a nurse, which comprises physical, technical, mental-characteristic and religious aspects. Measured by this standard, many women are unqualified to carry out this form of occupation.79 Directed at the universally understood principle of human dignity – also of the impoverished sick, a topos which is remarkably and explicitly used by the author,80 everything finally points in favour of the Sisters of Charity, because “true love of mankind and the altogether impartiality” cools down in the face of “temporary nutritional worries” and human dignity would no longer be taken into account, if “the deep religious feeling did not live within and guide the human being”.81

These statements illustrate the extent to which the Catholic poor relief discourse was connected to the superordinate discourse regarding the position of religion and church in the post-revolutionary society in general as well as the discourse on the sense and non-sense of religious orders. These discourses and their requirements strongly influenced the poor relief discourse.82

The discourse on the Sisters of Charity was undoubtedly influenced by interests. In the Catholic sources analysed it clearly served to provide the Sisters of Charity with a competitive advantage over the secular competition by proving their suitability.

74 BZKT, 5 (1832), 67-76, here 68.
75 Ibid., 5 (1833), 45-72; 6, 6-45.
78 BZKT, 5 (1833), 56. Voices in favour of well-educated secular ‘sick caretakers’ are also dealt with by Buß, Der Orden, 464-466, 492 ff.
79 According to BZKT, 6 (1833), 15.
80 Regarding this complex cf. my article: “Poverty need no longer despair...”.
81 BZKT, 6 (1833), 26 ff.
82 Cf., on the Protestant side, regarding Fliedner’s deaconesses’ institution the information given by Köser that Fliedner and his wife Friederike were influenced by moral concepts of the bourgeoisie, but also by specific religious concepts of the circle around the awakening movement. Cf. Köser, Denn die Diakonisse, 83.
At the same time the Sisters also provided the opportunity to (re-)occupy important societal domains in secular and church institutions. However, the negative characterization of paid nursing personnel also existed outside of internal Catholic discourse. Catholic authors could repeatedly refer to secular authorities, as did the literature on the history of nursing.83

The political relevance of such discourses also receives a certain acknowledgement in the debates of the second half of the nineteenth century. In Austria, for instance, the argumentative patterns described were reproduced in the fight between liberals and conservatives in order to transfer the care of the sick to the Sisters of Charity as extensively as possible and to remove secular nursing personnel: “True care can only result from Christian love”. As observed in the case of Austria after 1887, this discourse had developed “much more strongly than the discourse on the supposed ‘natural’ suitability of women for nursing”.84 On the other hand, the anti-Catholic liberal discourse before and during the Kulturkampf in Germany, which involved the development of female order members and charitably active Sisters to a negative type, needs to be taken into account. Their professional efforts were questioned and their charitable actions portrayed as sheer attempts to expand the realm of church influence and power.85

SISTERS OF CHARITY AND DEACONESSES IN COMPETITION

The discourse on best nursing personnel was related to a denominational conflict, one which grew considerably more severe in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is not without reason that the thesis of a ‘second denominational age’ was advanced in recent German research.86 Even though it is possible to argue against a one-sided version of the thesis, there is no doubt that intensified denominational competition and polemics existed, particularly in view of the denominational press.87

Against this background this discourse gains its own form, as a significant number of Catholic periodicals attentively registered the emergence of ‘Protestant Sisters of Charity’ and vice versa, as the Protestant press would ask whether it was possible for German Protestantism to generate its own form of Sisters of Charity.88

83 Cf. e.g. Schweikardt, Die Entwicklung, 42-45.
84 Cf. Walter, “Krankenpflege”, 33. The second attempt to enforce female order members is dated by Walter to 1887, after the first attempt rapidly failed following the concordat of 1855 due to the temporary political dominance of liberalism.
87 Without being able to go into detail, I would like to refer to some sharp criticism of Protestantism as a spiritual, revolution-promoting force, analysed in Schneider, Katholiken auf die Barrikaden?, 353-368.
88 Cf. EKZ, 6 (1830), 169-171, 177-180. In conclusion, the article on the history of the Sisters of Charity poses the question: “should it not be possible that in terms of less confined forms, similar associations could be established among us?” Evidence is provided for Fliedner’s efforts to establish a deaconesses’ institution due to his specific preoccupation with the Sisters of Charity, particularly the Sisters of St Clemens in Münster, and his wording in the statutes. Cf. Köser, Denn die Diakonisse, 89 ff., 193 ff.
People were highly aware of the fact that the charitable profession of the Catholic Sisters of Charity had a substantial weight in the controversy about the right church and played an important role as an apologetic argument. Denominational conceptions of the female image and the gender roles involved are reflected in this partial discourse alongside conventional controversy-theological differences. This is evident in the various reactions to the suggestion made by a Protestant author who supported the Protestant efforts for an increased deaconry in the *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* in 1842. In addition to an improved organization of stationary and ambulant sick care he also emphasized the motive “to guide the physically and, more so, mentally-sad position of so many virgins who are denied the destined existence as a wife, mother and housewife.”

Here, he argues against the background of the dominant Protestant female image directed to marriage and motherhood, but which was proving increasingly difficult in the real situation of society (the so-called *Frauenfrage*, which means the question of women’s rights and opportunities outside marriage). The Catholic answer condemned the incitement to establish a female Protestant poor-care association as a solution to the ‘surplus of women’. Busy wives and mothers as well as younger women who still had plans to get married would not be able to meet the demands. By contrast, “how different” were Catholic Sisters of Charity who would abjure everything and serve Christ in form of the poor sick in an ‘undivided’ manner, i.e. without any other intentions or goals.

Here, the traditional Catholic fulfilment of the female role becomes apparent, i.e. the ‘profession’ as an order member, which is even more highly esteemed than marriage. At the same time Catholic voices would also agitate for an introduction of the Sisters of Charity. Even though convents were not care-providing institutions for ‘needy daughters’, a religious order in these times would nonetheless be a shelter and tower of strength for the ‘countless virgins’ who lived the vow of poverty, celibacy and obedience due to bitter hardship.

Given the mentioned suggestions, the *Sonntagsblatt für katholische Christen* - published in Münster and distributed across Northwest Germany as a popular weekly paper - voiced the fear that due to the many young women who had no marriage or motherhood prospects, the Protestant institutions would be used as care institutions and that these women would be “degraded to being common nurses who can usually be acquired for money”.

This again not only confirms the above-mentioned dichotomy as a main perspective, but it constructs, as in the case of the *Sion*, a divide between a Catholic and Protestant poor relief, which is not openly stated yet clearly recognizable to the reader. Therefore, the *Sion* could even predict that attempts to establish church institutions of “serving love” within Protestantism would contribute to “elucidate Protestants on the instability of their churchly position”.

Even where people were willing to acknowledge the merits of the deaconesses’ institution founded by

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89 Quoted according to *Sion*, 11 (1842), 803-808, here 803.
90 Concerning its development cf. Gause, *Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung*.
91 See *Sion*, 11 (1842), 804, 811 ff.
92 *Sion*, 12 (1843), 89-94, here 93. The background consists of the government’s refusal to permit settlements of the Sisters of Charity in the Kingdom of Württemberg.
93 *Sonntagsblatt für katholische Christen*, 1 (1842), 220-225, 243-251, here 251.
94 *Sion*, 11 (1842), 814.
95 Most recently detected in the study by Köser, *Denn die Diakonisse*. 
Theodor Fliedner, they would still concede a higher status to the Catholic Sisters of Charity. The deaconess may be a good nurse, but unlike the Catholic Sisters she will not be fully dedicated to her service, because with her “icy bible piety” she particularly lacks the Sisters’ “invisible mysterious magic”, radiated by the “brides of Jesus Christ, those virgins eternally affianced and bonded to the lord Jesus”.

The Catholic ideal of virginity, which people recognized in the Sisters of Charity, is therewith proof of Catholic superiority.

PERCEPTION OF FEMALE POVERTY?

Finally, it should be pointed out that there is a large void within the Catholic poverty discourse with regard to women’s poverty. To our current knowledge the real circumstances of poor women were not of interest, since specific forms of female poverty are hardly recognized or mentioned in the different sources reviewed. This is even more so surprising, as research concerning the history of poverty was able to prove for Early Modern Times as well as the nineteenth century that the poor relief supported an exceptionally large number of women. In this respect, Relinde Meiwes’ observation that poverty was not a theme of the Catholic social reformers of the early nineteenth century applies to a broader circle of media and authors. However, a specific group of poor females mentioned in the reviewed corpus is that of the poor widows, a classical topos from biblical times on the one hand, and a mirror image of early-nineteenth-century reality on the other. For instance, the detailed analysis of the poverty statistics of Münster/Westphalia revealed that 60 per cent of poor people supported by public poor relief in Münster were women. Not only were they more heavily represented than men, but, with 63 per cent, widows were by far the largest group among them. The only other group of impoverished females, which is repeatedly mentioned in the reviewed sources, is identified as the ‘fallen girls’ who were accommodated in the ‘houses of mercy’ run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

This particular case not only shows the indeed exceptional practical form of a femin-

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96 Katholik, 29 (1849) 137, 548. Also refer to Katholik, 25 (1845) 108, 502 or SKB, 5 (1845), 57.
97 See also Sonntagsblatt für katholische Christen, 9 (1850), 89 ff., where the lack of this distinctive Catholic feature (virgin status) was held responsible for the “unfruitfulness of facilities for the care of the sick and poor” in Protestantism. See also Buß, Der Orden, 198: “Daher ist diese Frucht der Wohltätigkeit dem die Gültigkeit der Gelübde verwerfenden Protestantismus versagt. Diese mag analoge Associationen erzeugen, aber die Höhe religiöser Congregationen in gelübdlicher Bindung erreicht er nicht.”
98 Fuchs, Gender and Poverty. From a German perspective: Köppen, Die Armut.
100 Cf. for instance a sermon held by Sebastian Winkelhofer on the seventh Sunday following Whit-sun. Sailer, Sebastian Winkelhofers. Also the pastoral letter for Lent by the bishop of Chur in 1830, quoted in Katholische Kirchen-Zeitung, 2 (1830), 158.
101 Glöe, “Frauenarmut”, 264. With regard to the confined poor relief in Münster cf. the contentually and methodically productive study by Dethlefs, “Frauengeschichte”.
102 Cf. e.g. Sion, 6 (1837) Supplement 11, 81-85; Nathanel, 5 (1849), 57-59; Katholik, 20 (1840) 78, 187 and 27 (1847) 82, 333-335 (pastoral letter by Bishop Laurent); Katholische Sonntagsblätter zur Belehrung, 4 (1845) 46, 373-376.
zation of the Caritas in the sense of charitable work by women for women\textsuperscript{103}, but also displays a further element of a Catholic femininity construction in the polarization of the ‘female sinner’ and angel-like virgin. In actual fact, the reports in the reviewed material are consistently characterized by this form of black-and-white depiction.\textsuperscript{104}

**FEMINIZATION OF CARITAS? A GLANCE AT THE PRACTICE**

More recent research has pointed out an international phenomenon under the term ‘feminization of the clergy’ or canonically more correct under the term ‘feminization of church personnel’: namely the emergence of numerous new female congregations or the large increase of women in religious orders and congregations.\textsuperscript{105}

In the first half of the nineteenth century, eleven new women’s congregations were established in the German-speaking area.\textsuperscript{106} During this period neither male schooling staff nor male nursing communities came into existence, while seven of the eleven female congregations were devoted to sick care, the others to school education.\textsuperscript{107}

In the Prussian kingdom, for which the basis is statistically most certain, the ‘feminization of the church staff’ accelerated in the further course of the nineteenth century. By 1907, almost two thirds of the ‘church staff’ were female order members or members of female congregations (64 per cent).\textsuperscript{108} In the middle of the nineteenth century, there had still been an infinitesimal number of women, while the number rapidly increased to almost half of the ‘church staff’ by the time of the Kulturkampf. The frequently quoted gender-neutral ‘rise of religious orders’ following the Revolution of 1848 is therefore more accurately a ‘rise of female congregations’. The male religious orders and congregations thrived to a far lesser extent.\textsuperscript{109}

The new congregations, however, devoted themselves to charitable work and dominated in the extensive fields of ambulant and stationary care. By the end of the nineteenth century, 600 Sisters worked in the ambulant poor and sick care in the archbishopric of Cologne as opposed to 33 Brothers. In all Prussia 1403 Sisters

\textsuperscript{103} Concerning the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their settlements in Germany cf. Albert, “Ordensleben”, 194 as well as Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, 82.

\textsuperscript{104} Cf. Nathanel, 5 (1849), 57-59: the Sisters are “angels of mercy”, the others are female penitents. The eternal virgins have preserved their sexual purity, the most valuable commodity of the female sex, others must first regain their honour and virtue by means of a penitent life.

\textsuperscript{105} di Giorgio speaks of a “feminization of the clergy” in “Das katholische Modell”, 196 ff. Regarding Germany a detailed account is provided by Meiwes who rightly speaks of a “feminization of church personnel”. Regarding France cf. the classic study by Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin*. Regarding Belgium see Tihon, *Les religieuses*.

\textsuperscript{106} Cf. as a source basis, Albert, “Ordensleben”, 188 ff. I corrected his data for the diagram. The congregations in Metz and Strasbourg were not included and the first settlement of the Sisters of St Borromeo from Nancy in Saarlouis (1810), overlooked by Albert, was newly added.

\textsuperscript{107} See Albert, “Ordensleben”, 188 ff., 199.

\textsuperscript{108} The world clergy provided for 27 per cent, the male orders for 9 per cent. Source: *Kirchliches Handbuch*, vol. 2: 1908/09, 277, 407-454.

\textsuperscript{109} Cf. Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, esp. 74-88. In 1855, 579 women and 397 men lived within orders and congregations in Prussia. By 1872/73 there already were 8011 women and 1037 men (ibid., 77). The following diagram is based on Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, 77.
practised sick care in 148 hospitals, while only 33 men worked in four hospitals. Of 47 Catholic institutions aimed at the education of impoverished, dissolute children, 34 were run by female congregations.\textsuperscript{110} With regard to nursing there is also a substantial overrepresentation of denominational nurses (Sisters of Charity and Protestant deaconesses). In 1887, there were 8271 nurses active in Prussia, of which only 12.5 per cent were men. The denominationally organized employees accounted for 29.4 per cent Protestant and 52 per cent Catholic, which did not correspond to the denomination proportions of Prussia (only 40 per cent of the population were Catholic). Among the Catholic nurses only 289 were in turn Brothers, i.e. just under 7 per cent.\textsuperscript{111}

Could there be more evident proof for a ‘feminization of the Caritas’? Hardly, because for many Catholic women these numbers implied the conquest of a new occupational field with increased professionalization with a substantial social acceptance. It made models of living and organization available that male-dominated civil organizations did not offer.\textsuperscript{112}

For a long time, however, the organized charitable dedication of Catholic women outside the congregations remained rather limited. Georg Ratzinger, the author of the Catholic standard work concerning the history of the Caritas, the first edition of which appeared in 1868 and the second in 1884,\textsuperscript{113} generally advocated the “intervention of the female world” “into the charity domain”. From this intervention he expected a “most wholesome effect”, since “women’s practical view regarding all issues of domestic life” could help eliminate many deficiencies of the poor. However, he links this indication with the complaint that “the educated and propertied women of today” lacked the awareness “not only to be indebted to the poor and helpless with parts of their outward fortunate assets, but also with their personal abilities”.\textsuperscript{114}

With the so-called Elisabethan Societies the local charitable commitment of Catholic lay women actually developed into a clear denominationally structured form after 1840.\textsuperscript{115} As stated on the third Katholikentag of 1849, which insistently recommended them, the women within these Societies were supposed to pursue their “profession” to “lead the way in true Christian love”.\textsuperscript{116} They were expected to restore the Christian status in the so-called disrupted family lives by means of home visits and their influence on the impoverished women.\textsuperscript{117} The development of the Societies was immense, but by the turn of the century there were only approximately 500 local Societies in the

\textsuperscript{110} Evidence provided in: Ibid., 283-286.

\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Schweikardt, Die Entwicklung, 107.

\textsuperscript{112} Cf. Meiwes, Arbeiterinnen des Herrn, 270. Concerning the momentum of women’s professionalization of socio-charitable efforts regarding the deaconesses cf. also Köser, Denn die Diakonisse, 207. However, she also expounds on the relationship of praxis pietatis and profession in terms of the development of ‘sick care’ as an independent employment field.

\textsuperscript{113} Ratzinger, Geschichte. Some information on the author (a great-uncle of the current Pope) is provided in the preface.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 575. This passage is also discussed by Meiwes, Arbeiterinnen des Herrn, 274.

\textsuperscript{115} With regard to these, cf. Kall, Katholische Frauenbewegung, 23-71; Lüttgen, Die Elisabethvereine.

\textsuperscript{116} Verhandlungen, 36. Regarding these so-called ‘Catholic Days’ (Katholikentage), first held in 1848 and still held in Germany today, see von Hehl und Kronenberg, Zeitzeichen. Concerning the Katholikentag of 1848/49 see Scheidgen, Der deutsche Katholizismus, 440-492.

\textsuperscript{117} See Verhandlungen, 36.
FIGURE 1
FOUNDATION OF NEW FEMALE CONGREGATIONS IN PRUSSIA

FIGURE 2
NUMBER OF NEW ESTABLISHMENTS OR FIRST ESTABLISHMENT IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING AREA
German Reich, while the number of male Vincent Conferences, which were founded almost at the same time, reached almost 700.\textsuperscript{118}

**FEMINIZATION OF CARITAS? AN INTERIM RESULT**

This article began with my critical thoughts on the feminization thesis and its overrating in parts of the literature. Without merely wanting to negate its value, it seemed and still seems appropriate to me to differentiate more thoroughly, for instance according to subject areas. In 2002, I suggested speaking of e.g. a ‘feminization of Caritas’ rather than of a ‘feminization of religion’ or just a ‘feminization of Catholicism’. The analysis in this article of the many sources concerning Catholic poor relief and health care in the first half of the nineteenth century and the assessment of the practice in the second half of the nineteenth century gives reason to even further delimit and differentiate a more modest thesis of a ‘feminization of Caritas’.

1. First of all, it needs to be noted that: “Initially, Catholic women did not contribute to the formalized process of poor relief”.\textsuperscript{119} This means that they did not take part in the communal poor councils, for instance, which were responsible for the public poor relief. Women could even be excluded from voluntary work as principals of a municipal poor district.\textsuperscript{120}

2. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the attribution of the female gender to sick and poor relief emerged in the Catholic domain, but, according to our sources, to a lesser degree than expected. The need remained to prove this on an argumentative level. That men were capable of nursing was not generally disputed, not least due to the existence of male nursing orders.

3. The constructed connection between Sisters of Charity and care turned out to be much closer. Although the Sisters of Charity represent the female gender in the many characterizations of them, they are at the same time transgressing and developing into almost genderless creatures or into beings who also bear ‘masculine’ attributes.

4. Furthermore, an observation made by Silke Köser regarding the Protestant institutions of deaconesses also recommends caution concerning the Catholic domain. Even although these had been unions of women, they were subject to a male administration and male sovereignty and there was little room for an independent organization of life.\textsuperscript{121} By contrast, the Catholic female congregations were subject to a female administration and it was women who, as founders, contributed with their own ideas. However, it should not be forgotten that men had an extensive influence on the congregations as confessors, spiritual principals or bishops to an extent that the foundation history could be formally rewritten. This also befell Margaretha

\textsuperscript{118} Cf. *Kirchlichen Handbuch*, vol. 2, 22-225.
\textsuperscript{119} Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, 274.
\textsuperscript{120} Concerning the development of poor relief and the poor legislation in Germany, cf. once more Schulz, “Armut und Armenpolitik”. Women in Münster were not allowed to participate in poor relief, not even in voluntary positions. Cf. Dethlefs, *Frauengeschichte*, 145 ff.
\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Köser, *Denn die Diakonisse*, 40.
Flesch (‘Mutter Rosa’), the foundress of the Franciscan Sisters of Waldbreitbach. This woman, from a poor background and beatified in 2008, only laboriously managed to establish a nursing congregation on the outskirts of the Trier diocese against a male-clerical resistance. Even in her lifetime she was deprived of the leadership at the instigation of the spiritual rector and for decades denigrated as the foundress of a downright *damnatio memoriae*, while rector Konrad Probst directed the congregation with the help of some submissive Sisters before her very eyes and against the original intentions.¹²²

5. The charitable associations also need to be differentiated. By no means did the Elisabethan Societies dominate the field of charitable associations, as the comparison to the parallel organization of the St Vincent Conferences already shows. However, in charitable mixed-gender associations the prevalence of women could be substantial, as revealed by a recently published study concerning the Seraphisches Liebeswerk, a Catholic association for child welfare, on a local level. Women were the most important key influencers on location, recruited members and handed out the association journal. More than two thirds of the members were women. When the powerful local division of this association in Krefeld went about recruiting Caritas helpers for the new community charity aid in 1911/12, 46 women came forward and not a single man.¹²³

Moreover, male clerical control still prevailed in all these associations. In the case of the Seraphisches Liebeswerk, this was not only due to the close relationship with the Capuchin order, as male laymen participated in the directive organs. In 1921, two women became members of the board for the first time. It seems almost absurd that a vigorous conflict erupted regarding the presence of women at board meetings, since they took place in the conclave area of the Capuchin order. Rejected at the door at first, the ladies later received a special permit.¹²⁴

6. From a chronological perspective the practice during the second half of the century can be considered a successful implementation of what was desired for the Sisters of Charity in the Catholic discourse of the first half of the century: Catholic Sisters were exceptionally present in the social field, far outside the internal realm of church facilities.

In terms of the analysed discourses on poor and sick relief and the charity practised it is impossible to claim in conclusion that God ‘changed gender’. However, given all the necessary restrictions, the fact that the Caritas in Germany displayed a strikingly frequent ‘female face’ should finally be acknowledged at this point.

¹²² Cf. the detailed reconstruction by Kracht, *Leidenschaft*.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 111, 314.
Ignaz von Döllinger was a leading Old Catholic figure and vehemently opposed to the infallibility (Unfehlbarkeit) of the Pope, represented in this caricature as an infant.

[Woodcut by Tomassichl from Klein, 1871; Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent]