A FEMINIZED CHURCH?

GERMAN CATHOLIC WOMEN, PIETY, AND DOMESTICITY, 1918-1938

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In the middle of an interview with an elderly member of a rural Kolping Association, I asked about the role of women in the Catholic Church during the 1930s. He smiled broadly and called to his wife in the kitchen: “The women are always more fervent, aren’t they?”

His comment typified both popular and scholarly attitudes about the religiosity of women in modern German Catholicism. As one well-respected scholar argues, the ‘feminization of religion’ has become a “frequently cited topos”.

While several essays engage the ‘feminization’ of German Catholicism during the nineteenth century, more empirical analysis of the theory is necessary for the first half of the twentieth century in order to shed light on the persistence of feminine domesticity and piety as a cultural trope.

American scholar Barbara Welter first argued that Christianity became feminized during the nineteenth century in the United States. Several academics, writing in the 1990s, found her conclusions applicable to the Catholic minority in Germany. Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen suggests that nineteenth-century gender norms helped mothers and wives form a majority among practicing Catholics. As the bourgeois ideal of female domesticity became dominant, religious piety and instruction for children became a responsibility for women in the private sphere. Post-enlightenment men with active professional lives had less time or desire to participate in religious life.

Norbert Busch and others have also argued that this feminization represented a conscious strategy by the Church to increase religious participation. Bishops and priests emphasized ‘emotional’ elements of Catholic piety, such as the cults of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart, which they believed would attract female congre-

1 Interview with M.O. in Bad Münstereifel on 17 March 2004.
gants and prevent their participation in the women’s movement.\textsuperscript{4} Michael Gross also illustrates how Protestant liberals rhetorically gendered Catholicism feminine in order to attain greater hegemony for their own values in the political sphere.\textsuperscript{5}

Few scholars of German Catholicism, however, concur with Welter’s notion that the feminization of Christianity provided women opportunities for emancipation. Von Olenhusen suggests that the existence of a Church-controlled Catholic milieu made the German context different from the United States. This so-called milieu contained a network of lay associations for men and women with varying degrees of autonomy from clerical oversight. For example, the People’s Association for Catholic Germany (\textit{Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland}) functioned freely as a political organ for the Centre Party, while the Catholic Workers’ Clubs endured careful supervision by representatives of the institutional Church. Von Olenhusen suggests that the clergy maintained strict control over female associations and used them to inhibit women’s engagement with movements for emancipation.\textsuperscript{6}

Relinde Meiwes’ study about nineteenth-century nuns is one of the only monographs to support this element of the Welter thesis. Meiwes demonstrates that over two-thirds of those taking religious vows during the nineteenth century were women religious. Their access to new professional opportunities in charities, health care, and education as well as the relatively egalitarian structure of convents provided emancipatory opportunities.\textsuperscript{7} David Blackbourn also analyses how nineteenth-century females seeing apparitions utilized Catholic piety for a limited amount of power. Women claiming to have seen the Virgin Mary ‘inverted’ the usual power relationship with men and priests in the village.\textsuperscript{8}

 Bernard Schneider raises significant questions about the extent to which the German Catholic Church actually underwent feminization. He emphasizes the masculine elements of nineteenth-century religious life, exemplified by the preservation of a patriarchal hierarchy led by male clergy. Furthermore, the associations and political organizations that most frequently represented the Church in the public sphere possessed overwhelmingly male members. Schneider reasons that if the public face and leadership structure of the Church remained masculine, it is unfeasible to generalize about Catholicism as a feminized religion.\textsuperscript{9} The vast literature about the Catholic milieu during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries supports this critique by analysing many of its two hundred associations and their 5.7 million members as well as the powerful Centre Party. These studies argue that male associations and youth groups, such as the People’s Association for Catholic Germany and the Kolping Associations, used modern organizational methods to delay contemporary secular impulses and uphold insular communities shaped by Catholic values until after 1945. Most milieu studies illustrate the continuing importance of activities by men in the public sphere,

\textsuperscript{4} Busch, “Die Feminisierung der Frömmigkeit”.
\textsuperscript{5} Gross, \textit{The War against Catholicism}.
\textsuperscript{7} Meiwes, ‘Arbeiterinnen des Herrn’.
\textsuperscript{8} Blackbourn, \textit{Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany}, 7-15, 30-31, 140-141, 261-263.
\textsuperscript{9} Schneider, “Feminisierung der Religion”.

despite the statistical trend toward a feminine Communion rail. Schneider suggests that future research might examine how specific elements of Catholicism became feminized, rather than a universally apply of the theory. In sum, specific forms of piety, ritual, and domestic prayer became more feminine, while the public side of Church life retained masculine hegemony.

Schneider’s ideas about the nineteenth century merit empirical analysis in the context of the twentieth century. It is important to understand the extent to which the partially feminized Roman Catholic community persevered and changed with the tumultuous events of the post-World War I era. Three case studies from Germany’s somewhat distinctive confessional associations during the Weimar years add complexity to the historiography of feminized Catholicism in interwar Germany.

First, the Mothers’ Associations, which merged in the late 1920s to become the second largest national umbrella organization for Catholic women, advocated an ideal form of feminine domesticity and piety. They encouraged mothers to care for religious practice and moral behavior in the home. An overview of their activities during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich reveals the areas of Church life where women remained prominent, gained power, and rejected increased professional opportunities. Second, the Marian Congregations (Jungfrau kongregationen) represented the mainstream organization for young Catholic women. This group’s traditional emphasis on ultramontane forms of piety illuminates the tensions involved with the younger generation’s acceptance of the Virgin Mother as their model for domesticity and religiosity. Finally, the Catholic Youth Movement exemplified masculine forms of Catholicism as well as the ways in which girls from the educated middle class diverged from Church ideals about women’s religious practice and domesticity. While Catholic boys used ideals of the youth movement to redefine how men dominated the public sphere of Church life, the girls who founded the Heliand-Bund, an organization for Catholic girls attending Gymnasium, transcended the rigid Catholic adherence to feminine domesticity with similar ideas.

Gender roles within German Catholicism reflected both clearly defined expectations and ambiguities in practice during the eras of Weimar democracy and Nazi dictatorship. Although domestic piety and religious morality remained areas of feminine hegemony, young women developed a public religious identity and reconciled professional opportunities with Catholic values. Furthermore, boys within the male youth movement used martial masculinity to lead public expressions of faith, but women and girls also joined the street demonstrations and sought opportunities for religious expression outside the confines of Church and home. The partially feminized German Catholic community possessed a female private sphere and a masculine public sphere, but the youth movement altered the lens through which girls viewed the domestic ideals of the late nineteenth century. Despite their restricted opportunities within the Catholic community, these young women leveraged religious organizations into empowerment in both religious and professional spheres.

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10 Kösters, Katholische Verbände; AKKZG, “Katholiken zwischen Tradition und Moderne”; Horstmann and Liedhegener, Konfession, Moderne und Milieu; Schank, ‘Kölsch-Katholisch’; Heilbrunner, Catholicism, Political Culture, and the Countryside; Blaschke and Kuhlemann, Religion im Kaiserreich.
CATHOLIC MOTHERS

The historiography of Catholic women’s organizations during the Weimar Republic indicates that they retained a dedication to patriarchal ideals and became even less flexible regarding gender norms as the Nazis rose to power, despite increased political participation after World War I. Most of this research has focused on the largest national women’s organization, the *Katholische Deutsche Frauenbund* (KDF), because of its linkages to the Centre Party. Other confessional clubs and professional organizations within the Catholic subculture, such as groups for female teachers and social workers, also stressed chastity outside of marriage and opposition to abortion. The Mothers’ Associations also became increasingly significant during this era. These previously parish-based associations formed a national organization under the auspices of Catholic Action in the late 1920s. Analysis of this association demonstrates how clergy and female laity advocated a traditional ideal of domesticity, piety, and feminine morality, but it also illustrates how an increased emphasis on lay leadership provided women with more avenues to power.

Mainstream Catholicism maintained a patriarchal approach toward women after World War I. According to the secondary literature on German politics, the vast majority of female Catholic voters willingly chose the ideals of domesticity promoted by the clergy and sparked a revived interest in essentialist understandings of femininity in Weimar society. In the early years of the Weimar Republic, the Centre Party actually tolerated some progressive ideas, particularly from younger women who resisted clerical authority and advocated pacifism and flexible rules on birth control. After the rise of future chancellor Heinrich Brüning in 1929, the Centre Party converged with the conservative position of the clergy on maternal values and most women supported this policy shift at the ballot box. In her book on women’s voting, Julia Sneeringer argues that the Catholic Centre Party was so successful with female voters that conservative parties imitated their platform. Women constituted 60 percent of the Catholic Centre Party’s electorate during the late 1920s. The party flourished with this majority because it stressed religious and maternal themes rather than rhetoric for emancipation. The KDF also articulated self-confidence in their ability to uphold and defend Christian values, viewing women as the religious community’s strongest asset. After the war, they argued that the family was the strongest ‘defence’ against the growing ‘moral decay’ in Germany and that the woman bore a special role in this effort as the “protector of popular morality”.

The clergy who led the *Müttervereine* fit into this larger context of normative gender values. For example, the association’s journal expressed concern during World War I that the increased responsibilities of women outside the home eroded family piety and domestic discipline, and it fretted that total war compromised moral...
purity. Searching for stability in an uncertain time, they promoted a return to ‘traditional’ gender roles.\(^5\) The association encouraged women to take the Virgin Mary as their model, serving as the ‘queen’ of the household, whose primary job was to bear children and take care of the home.\(^6\)

During the second half of the 1920s, the Church recognized the importance of the Mothers’ Associations and restructured them along the principles of Catholic Action, an initiative started by the Vatican in Italy.\(^7\) Prelate Hermann Klens centralized the parish-based and loosely affiliated Mothers’ Associations into a national organization in 1928. This group promoted active religious life among women, but also encouraged their role as missionaries to the rest of the Catholic community.\(^8\) Previously neglected Mothers’ Associations held one meeting and one communal mass a month. Under the reforms of Klens, these organizations now turned women into lay leaders charged with meeting the spiritual and maternal needs of others. They conducted seminars on how to counsel other congregants about family life and religious practice and hosted retreats for exhausted mothers. Female leaders also assembled members for ‘group nights’ to discuss contemporary issues.\(^9\)

While some scholars view Catholic Action in Germany as a benign program that offered the laity more leadership positions,\(^10\) several other historians criticize it as a repressive force that destroyed dynamic lay movements in order to strengthen the institutional power of the clergy. Both Dirk Müller and Joachim Köhler blame the hierarchy’s suspicion of lay autonomy for the rapid decline of the People’s Association for Catholic Germany and the Workers’ Clubs during the implementation of Catholic Action policies. According to these researchers, Catholic Action made Catholicism apolitical and created the necessary context for the Concordat with National Socialism in 1933.\(^11\) From the perspective of women’s history, Doris Kaufmann argues that Catholic Action attempted to return Catholic communities to natural gender hierarchies by strictly separating male and female lay activists under the strict supervision of clergy.\(^12\) The principles of Catholic Action undoubtedly restricted the agency of both men and women, especially in politically influential groups. The Mothers’ Associations, however, already included strict supervision by local priests. Therefore, these women received more opportunities for leadership and had little autonomy to lose in the first place. While Church leaders perpetuated patriarchal themes that confined women, mothers also used Catholic Action to increase their power within the boundaries of religious life.

\(^5\) “Selbstvergessene Liebe”; “Ich habe keine Zeit”; “Wie ich mit meinen Kindern spiele”; “Unsere Jugend: Der kleine Kriegsheld”; “Unsere Jugend: Fritz will nicht beten/ Prinzetschen”.
\(^6\) “Zur Einkehr”.
\(^7\) Catholic Action in Germany differed from the program in France. In Germany, it avoided secular activities. For French women, see Whitney, “Gender, Class, and Generation”, 487.
\(^8\) Klens, Anwalt der Frauen, 49, 88-89.
\(^10\) Klein, Der Volksverein, 218-240.
\(^11\) Müller, Arbeiter, Katholizismus, Staat; Köhler, “Ausbruch aus dem katholischen Milieu?”.
\(^12\) Kaufmann, Katholisches Milieu, 8.
The most effective tool for communicating with this massive organization of over 2,000 associations and 900,000 women was its monthly journal, *Die Mutter*, which enjoyed over 920,000 subscribers by 1938. Female editors, under the guidance of the clergy, articulated the primary aim of the association: to espouse Catholic feminine values against the challenge posed by the so-called ‘new woman’. In a speech about Catholic values in cities, lay leader Minna Schumacher-Köhl asked: “Is it our fault that the image of the pious, chaste, simple, and authentic motherly woman is being displaced by the haughty, smug and worldly woman, the shallow sportswoman and the thoughtless fashion puppets?” The associations championed maternal values of Catholicism in opposition to new images from 1920s popular culture and promoted a dichotomous perception of women as both deviously sexual and pillars of purity.

By reasserting maternal and family roles, lay leaders and the clergy charged women with saving Christian family life and protecting the ethical climate of the Catholic community. Encouraging increased moral authority in relation to their husbands, several articles called on Catholic women to “rescue the Christian family”. A fable in the journal depicts a boy crossing a clear stream of water after a May pilgrimage and throwing dirt in the water. His mother scolds: “If one clouds or dirlies pure water, then one dirlies the Virgin Mother.” In the minds of women, boys and men suffered most from sinful temptation and mothers guarded the moral order. This rhetoric frequently sparked political action. For example, in 1932 the National Women’s Caucus of the Centre Party led the religious backlash against 1927 reforms of prostitution laws by formally asking the Reich Minister of the Interior to criminalize prostitution. Although constrained by Catholic affirmation of patriarchy, women utilized their religious mobilization to influence German society and spread their values to men, whom they sometimes portrayed as morally unreliable.

Catholic mothers also continued their roles as religious authorities within the home. The journal instructed mothers:

> Help your child pray. Go with him in the morning to Holy Mass. Say the morning and evening prayers with him, and then say the rosary together at dusk. Speak with the child often about the honor and happiness of Sundays and try to fill his heart with awe before the holy sacrament. The child encounters heaven through his mother’s hands.

Another article exhibited the gendered roles in the religious education of a child. When describing the preparation for First Communion, the journal stressed that the mother had to lead morning and evening prayers and oversee regular Mass attend-

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24 M. Schmacher-Köhl, “Christusträgerinnen in der Großstadt”.
25 “Rettet die Familie”.
26 “Unsere Jugend: Maigang”.
27 “David Gathen: Dein Junge im Beruf!”.
28 Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights”, 76.
29 “Aus Kinderland: An der Mutter Hand”.

dance. After the First Communion, mothers ensured the enduring faith of their children by making them participate regularly.30

Evidence suggests that women acted on this rhetoric. Many members of the Catholic Youth Movement acknowledged the religious influence of their mothers. In his memoir, male youth leader and future author Gisbert Kranz remembers his mother as caretaker of religion in the household. She taught him morning and evening prayers and made certain the family celebrated religious holidays, emphasizing religious values during Advent, teaching charity during St Martin celebrations, making Marian altars in May, and praying to the Sacred Heart in June. Kranz asserts: “The faith that my mother developed in me during my earliest years survived all that threatened to destroy it in later years.”31

In congruence with the appeals of the Mothers’ Association, women acted as the standard-bearers of religious practice. They attended Mass at a greater rate than men. While visitation reports complained about the participation of men, they never grumbled about women. The reports from the diocese of Trier included a gendered breakdown of Easter statistics indicating that men rarely attended Mass and received communion with less frequency than women.32 At the pilgrimage site in Neviges, women constituted the majority of the participants. Women’s organizations, such as the Müttervereine, arranged many Sunday events and most of the workday pilgrims were female as well.33

Some evidence indicates cracks in the façade of Catholic feminine unity in support of Catholic values - individual women sometimes chafed under these expectations. Isolated examples exist where Catholic women opposed Church teaching on birth control. For example, from two to five percent of participants in a rare 1931 Church survey opposed Church teachings on sexuality and family planning.34 Although these numbers are small, any open defiance of Church teaching by devout mothers was exceptional and indicative of fissures beneath the surface of otherwise loyal congregations. In an era of dire economic need and improved access to birth control,35 it is possible that tension existed between priests and women. However, clergy edited the journals published by lay women and oversaw the leadership of women’s organizations. This patriarchal oversight limited the amount of public dissent over the probably contentious issue of family planning.

During the Third Reich, women eagerly rose to the challenges that Nazis posed to Catholicism. Mistrustful of institutional Christianity, the National Socialist state removed Catholic influence from the public sphere by dissolving most of its male associations, removing confessional influence from schools, cancelling outdoor events, and censoring the press. National Socialist leadership generally tolerated a greater degree of religious autonomy within the walls of churches and in the home. On the one hand, they preferred peace with the vocal Catholic minority after the antagonistic

30 “Weißer Sonntag”.
31 Kranz, Eine katholische Jugend im Dritten Reich, 31-40.
32 BAT Abt. 40, Nr. 362: “Dekanat Ottweiler” and “Dekanat Schweich”.
34 Liedhegener, “Gottessuche, Kirchenkritik und Glaubenstreue”, 348-351.
35 Roos, “Weimar’s Crisis through the Lens of Gender”, 86.
and public Church Struggles of 1934 to 1937. Furthermore, NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) leaders seemed to attack men retaining aspects of Catholic identity more virulently than women who perpetuated devotion despite their totalitarian designs on the private as well as the public sphere. In fact, they tolerated the publication of *Mutter und Frau* far longer than other Catholic journals because its contents converged with Nazi pro-natal policies for Aryan women. In this context, women became even more integral to the survival of Catholic traditions. Although emphasis on female domesticity persisted, women took advantage of their importance to the private sphere during the Nazi dictatorship to exercise even more power within the Church than they had during the 1920s. With a reduced role in schools and no youth groups, the clergy asked a loyal generation of Catholic mothers to preserve the spirituality of the Catholic population. In return, women became indispensable to the persistence of Catholicism and autonomous instructors of religious morality.

Priests aimed to make the family a micro-parish. On the eve of World War II, Hermann Klens declared that the “decisive task” of the Church was to “enable the woman and mother to organize the family as a small Church. ... She must be the focal point of all religious efforts.” Parish women instituted training sessions to prepare fellow mothers for this new task, previously undertaken by teachers and youth leaders. Parishes initiated special courses led by women on teaching Catechism and the Bible, while Mothers’ Associations formed “conversation circles” for women overseeing First Communion or marriage preparation. Women performed tasks in the home that were once accomplished in school. They now monitored attendance at workday masses as well. Before Nazi restrictions on the role of the Church in schools, religion instructors, Catholic schoolteachers, and clergy took children to morning Mass two or three times a week before the start of classes.

Although some women undoubtedly disliked the burden of these new religious responsibilities, many embraced them to assist the Church and increase their own authority. One report commented: “Many women show much courage and loyalty in their religious and moral sense, up to the point of heroism. ... And it is not only a small core of loyalists that we can count on.” Some examples indicate that the steadfastness of women to Catholicism even sparked conflict at home. Men or children regularly critiqued pastoral letters for their politics or dry delivery, but women defended the clergy. These examples suggest that Catholic mothers viewed a threat to the clergy as a challenge to their own power within the home. It is possible that they responded to the clergy’s call for a more active role, not merely out of passive obedience, but from concern for a religious sphere that formed the basis of their moral authority.

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36 O’Sullivan, “An Eroding Milieu?”.  
39 “Unsere Kinder in der Werktagsmesse”.  
As many historians have noted, few women of this era challenged clerical associational control or Church positions about maternity, birth control, and popular culture. Ursula Baumann argues that the period after 1918 represented a “shift toward a more reactionary position” by Christian women that matched the emphasis on domesticity and patriarchy by the clergy. Other work on German and Western European women suggests that economic and political volatility prevented the development of gender equality in many social and cultural spheres during the interwar years.

The analysis of the Catholic Mothers’ Associations supports this portrayal of the 1920s. However, these Christian mothers became active outside the home despite their affirmation of domestic femininity, and used maternal themes to create opportunities for greater equality. Through their mobilization in the Mothers’ Associations, they contributed to the political platforms of the Centre Party and increased their moral authority within the Church. As the Nazis restricted male associations, Catholicism became even more feminized. This process empowered Catholic women within their own cultural context by granting them authority in public matters of piety, spirituality, and morality.

CATHOLIC YOUTH

Many scholars credit the Catholic Youth Movement, which integrated the emphasis on nature, music, and critiques of bourgeois society by non-confessional youth into the practice of Catholicism, with revitalizing the Church for a brief time in the late Weimar Republic. This movement’s ideas spread from a few elite organizations, such as Quickborn and Bund Neudeutschland, to influence how young Catholics of all social classes understood their roles within religious communities. Young men in numerous German associations for Catholics expressed masculine forms of religious identity more forcefully in the public sphere. However, Catholic girls also used the ideas of the youth movement to acquire acceptance for their professional activities and public forms of feminine piety.

The cultural ‘feminization’ of Christianity starting in the nineteenth century caused some men to avoid religious rituals in the Weimar era. After World War I, the feminine image of the Church caused it great difficulty because of the competing masculine identities for young men that emerged. On the one hand, a new cult of masculinity arose after the camaraderie of the trench experience. George Mosse demonstrates that during the 1920s, films, memoirs, and monuments glorified the male war experience, creating a “new religion” where war volunteers represented the “saints and martyrs”. On the other hand, members of the labor, women’s, and

63 Roos, “Weimar’s Crisis Through the Lens of Gender”, 86; Bridenthal, Grossmann and Kaplan, When Biology Became Destiny; Hagemann, Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik; Grayzel, Women’s Identities at War.
64 For the theoretical stimulus of this interpretation, see Taylor Allen, Feminism.
66 Mosse, Fallen Soldiers.
peace movements viewed the war as a transition that would improve partnership in marriage. As a result of decades of ‘feminization’ in the eyes of non-Catholics and the strict hierarchy and moral codes of the Church, Catholicism struggled to define a youthful male image in accordance with these new forms of masculinity. For example, one author from Die Wacht complained that he often heard from men: “The rosary is only for old and fragile women.”

Men left Church-affiliated associations in droves. Membership in the People’s Association for Catholic Germany declined from 805,000 in 1914 to 308,000 in 1932 because the group retreated from its traditional emphasis on social justice and adhered more strictly to clerical doctrine. Furthermore, 800,000 men left Catholic workers’ clubs during the Weimar era in favor of socialism or communism because the Church privileged religious life over economic needs. Catholicism, moreover, lost many male believers in the early 1920s because of its failure to appeal to the competing visions of masculinity after the Great War.

During the second half of the Weimar period, however, the Catholic Youth Movement introduced a new image for young Catholic men. First, it emphasized hiking, nature, and athletics. A member of the Sturmschar, a section of the Katholischen Jungmännerverband inspired by the Youth Movement, wrote: “We steel ourselves and train our bodies. We live simply and honestly in close connection with nature.” Besides emphasizing physical activity and nature, the Catholic Youth Movement promoted strict morality. Youth members guarded their moral purity by abstaining from alcohol and sexual relationships. In fact, youth leaders encouraged a revival of ‘chivalry’. The calls for physical fitness and “a new chivalry” reawakened central themes of mainstream nineteenth-century masculinity in an era when bourgeois rhetoric encouraged men to remain physically healthy in order to maintain moral strength.

Toward the end of the 1920s, ‘martial’ or militarized masculinity became more hegemonic among the generation that had just missed fighting in the war. Reacting to this more aggressive male image, Catholic organizations also portrayed their men as militant fighters. In his recent article, Raymond C. Sun demonstrates how struggling workers’ associations courted men with militant rhetoric. While these appeals failed in the realm of adult workers, they achieved success with young men. In the second half of the decade, the Catholic Youth Movement couched its rhetoric in the language of war memory.

67 Hagemann, “Introduction”.
68 “Zur Einkehr: Der Rosenkranz, das Gebet der Männer”.
70 For men departing the Church because of its feminine image, see Schank, ‘Kölsch-Katholisch’, 133-134.
71 Kaufmann, Katholisches Milieu, 97-113.
72 Winandi, In seiner Spur bleiben für eine bessere Welt!, 49.
73 “Nochmals Jungmann und Mädchen”.
74 Sun, “‘Hammer Blows’”, 255.
76 Sun, “‘Hammer Blows’”.
77 Kaufmann, Katholisches Milieu, 97-113.
Sturmschar leadership called upon young men to defend the Catholic faith by “fighting for heaven” and “bringing the sword” to Godlessness. During a national meeting in Trier, Sturmschar leadership read a “Vow to Fight for Germany”. It called all pious young men to “arm themselves for a fight” with “discipline and order, devotion and brotherly love”. Unlike the masculine appeals to Catholic workers analysed by Sun, the new masculinity of the Catholic Youth Movement inspired religious revival. Mass demonstrations of Catholic youth became typical. Observing the national meeting in Trier, one reporter wrote, “Whoever saw the Katholischer Jungmännerverband at its meeting in Essen five years ago and first saw it again in Trier, would not recognize it. … What have changed are the masses of youth.” The dynamism of young Catholic men contrasted sharply with the decline of adult males affiliated with Church institutions and the Centre Party.

The emphasis on new forms of male piety created enthusiasm beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Youth Movement. Some adult men practiced Catholicism while simultaneously abandoning the Centre Party and its affiliated organizations, such as the People’s Association. The enthusiasm of young men generated stronger male participation in pilgrimages. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Marian shrine of Neviges boasted strong involvement from men and boys. One newspaper reported on the worship of working-class men: “What struck the Cologne participants were the large throngs of men; men of all ages. At the main mass, at the steps of the main altar, and at the prayers, one saw almost only men.” The attraction of Neviges resulted in part from the introduction in 1932 of “Sturmandachten”, a Mass where believers ‘stormed’ the heart of the Virgin Mary and took part in emotional prayer and fierce devotion. These rituals included assertive hymns of Catholic identity favored by the Catholic Youth Movement as well as organized chants and structured communal prayer. Although men became less prominent in political Catholicism, masculine worship increased in realms of piety usually gendered as feminine.

The revival of male youth receded as the Nazi campaign against public Catholicism intensified from 1935-1945. The NSDAP removed clerical oversight from schools, dissolved youth groups, restricted adult associations, and prohibited Catholic newspapers and journals. As the regime took a harder line about Church policy, however, the Church became more conciliatory. The hardship and uncertainty that fuelled the religious reawakening receded as Germans increasingly supported National Socialist rule and economic conditions appeared to improve. The core of the Catholic Youth Movement remained resistant to National Socialism and continued underground meetings. However, the Church and the majority of the youth movement, supportive of many aspects of Nazism, accepted the dissolutions of youth groups and associations in relative peace after 1935 in exchange for religious freedom within the privacy of church and home.

58 “Wir wollen! Wacht-Rufe”.
59 Clemens, Ruf von Trier, 192.
61 Haun, Die Wallfahrt nach Neviges.
62 Schellenberger, Katholische Jugend und Drittes Reich.
religious life, lapsed into growing spiritual indifference. The Church lost young men as a result of the dissolution of their organizations. While mothers persevered in their private religious roles, the nature of the Nazi dictatorship made public male piety more difficult.

Through both coercion and consent in the Hitler Youth (HJ), the Nazis constructed a hegemonic model of youthful masculinity that excluded Catholicism. Like the Catholic Youth of the 1920s, the HJ encouraged boys to be aggressive, physical, active, and loyal to their Volksgemeinschaft. They tied these ideals to membership in the Hitler Youth and National Socialist ideology and pressured children to reject confessional organization. Participation of young men in mandatory state programs during the Third Reich demonstrated the ways that the feminine image of Catholicism inhibited male devotion. Programs such as the Land Year, the Labor Service, and the Land Service forced young people to live away from home and parish under the direction of anti-Catholic youth leaders, who confiscated religious publications and encouraged the children to abandon their parents’ doctrines.

The clergy tried unsuccessfully to convince young people to maintain their faith despite National Socialist pressure. Despite pleas from the clergy for letters that they requested in pre-departure preparation, only 10 percent of the Catholic Land Year, Labor Service, and Land Service participants wrote back to their parishes by 1939. According to a study of religious practice in 1937, mass attendance also fell far below the usual rate of participation for these boys in their home parishes.

The primary cause of this male indifference was pressure from youth leaders and peers. For example, one Land Year participant wrote: “Yesterday night, six to seven of the strongest boys came and cut my hair like a priest. The group leaders laugh at me because I pray at the table.” The Nazis made institutional Catholicism less appealing to boys by perpetuating past stereotypes of the Catholic Church as feminine. Although a small devoted core of enthusiasts for the Catholic Youth Movement retained a prominent religious identity, most boys assimilated into the National Socialist state.

An examination of the male youth illustrates the fluidity of feminized Christianity. The cultural association of Catholicism with femininity aided Hitler Youth attempts to marginalize the Catholic Youth Movement. Both fear of persecution and enthusiasm for Nazism meant that only the most committed members remained loyal to their parish groups throughout the Third Reich. At the same time, the Catholic Youth Movement was a new attempt by young men to dominate the public life of the Catholic community. By seizing the most prominent position in public pilgrimages and demonstrations, they pushed the more numerous women further into the private sphere. Similar to men’s organizations, such as the Kolping Associations and the St

64 USHMM, RG-15.007M: Chaplain Hartel to Land Year children.
65 “Referat Kallers über die Wandernde Kirche, 22 August 1940”.
Sebastian Shooting Clubs, they developed a code of masculine behavior that resonated with men and refuted the stereotype of the ‘feminized Church.’

The Catholic Youth Movement also altered the relationship of girls to the Catholic gender values of the early twentieth century. In her examination of the KDF, female members of the Centre Party, and the Catholic association for female teachers, Birgit Sack argues that a generational conflict developed between young and adult women of the Catholic milieu over issues such as sexuality, birth control, abortion, and professional life in the late 1920s. In the relationship between the Mothers’ Associations, Marian Congregations, and the Heliand-Bund, no open generational conflict existed. Rather, subtle differences emerged where Catholic girls sought more maneuverability within the confines of Catholic patriarchy.

The Marian Congregations (Jungfrau Kongregationen), founded in the late nineteenth century, organized the activities of female parish youth around worship of the Virgin Mary. Mary was the “soul of their community” and girls regularly heard speeches from male clergy about “female chastity and Marian ideals”. This focus on Marian piety and sexual purity perpetuated the ultramontane gender values of the nineteenth century. Von Olenhusen views such organizations as part of the Catholic milieu’s attempt to thwart the values of the women’s movement and restrict emancipation.

The leadership, piety, and morality of the congregations during the 1920s illustrate their traditionally rigid approach. In existence at the parish level for decades, the congregations organized on a national level in the late 1920s under the leadership of Prelate Klens. While long-serving regional prelates and local priests maintained strict oversight of the Marian Congregations, older lay women led weekly activities. For example, the Prefect of a group in Essen-Steele, a member since 1878, celebrated her 25th anniversary in a leadership role in 1928. Such older leaders demanded adherence to the ideal of feminine domestic piety. In published responses to letters of inquiry from her 170,000 subscribers, Aenne Unterberg, editor of the organization’s journal, reminded girls of their duty to guard the piety of men. In 1932, she asked one congregation member to convince her brother not to convert to Protestantism, and she warned another girl to bring her fiancé back to Catholicism before marrying him. Finally, journal leaders expected strict chastity from their members before marriage. Typical speeches for individual groups included “Emergency and Danger for the Girl’s Soul in Modern Times” and “Catholic Female Youth and their Stance toward Marriage and Family in Opposition to Modern Morality”. These appeals mirrored the conservative turn of the Centre Party during the late 1920s. For example, associations for female schoolteachers also demanded chastity from their members so that they would set a good example for their students. Clergy feared that the

69 “Verbandsfamilie”; “Verbandsfamilie - St. Urbanus in Buer”.
71 “Verbandsfamilie”; “Verbandsfamilie - Diözesanverband Köln”; “Verbandsfamilie - Jungfrau Kongregation in St. Bonifaz in Duisburg”.
72 “Kranzbriefe”; Ibid., 84; KFD 675: Führer durch die Zeitschriften.
growing number of girls in the professions and the increased appeal of consumer culture would damage the sexual values of young women.

Much like the Mothers’ Associations, Marian Congregations asked women to care for the morality of men as well as themselves. When discussing the dangers of the workplace, Aenñe Unterberg wrote: “The danger is present that after hard, empty labor, the burning desire for pleasure in the evening will lead ... girls to boys who make the slightest mention of love.” However, she also believed that women in the workplace were responsible for guarding male purity as well as their own: “Girls have a sacred duty in the factory: they must convert men who no longer understand the chastity and honor of a woman because of their environment.”

In another example from 1928, a young man wrote to Der Kranz complaining about a female speaker who demanded more chivalry from men. He said that the more pressing need was for girls who could teach young men “authentic Christian manliness”. The female journal editors agreed with the young man, calling it the “duty” of young women to help boys find their “buried chivalry.” Finally, when the German bishops complained about the state of alcohol abuse, the girls’ congregations undertook a week of abstinence. They expected the girls to win over their men for this “week of sacrifice”, asking them to make the home so “comfortable” that the men would not seek pleasure in the “tavern”.

As in the Mothers’ Associations, public morality was a feminine area of responsibility.

It is not clear whether Catholic girls accepted the rhetoric on sexuality from Church leadership. Tension emerged between older and younger generations about sexuality, especially during the Third Reich. Catholic prelates expressed concern about the loosening of sexual mores among younger women. Hermann Klens argued that “sexual themes” offered the gravest concern for religious work among females. One report complained that teenagers displayed little regard for honor, and that too many young women attended “questionable” bars, cabarets, theatres, and movies in a “spirit of immorality”.

Frequently, the encouragement of sexual experimentation by elements of Nazi youth leadership exasperated Catholic women and clergy alike. Dagmar Herzog argues that several Nazi youth leaders advocated pre-marital sex. The Labor Service organized co-ed social events to find partners for young people while they were away from home. Catholic leadership clashed with the regime throughout the 1930s and 1940s about the Nazis’ inconsistent stances on sexuality. While NSDAP leaders made public pronouncements in support of marriage and maternal roles for women, radical elements within the party simultaneously promoted more open sexual attitudes.

Michael H. Kater’s recent book about the Hitler Youth confirms Herzog’s findings. According to his research, 900 young women from the League of German Girls (BDM) departed the Nuremberg Party Rally of 1936 pregnant and over half of them did not

76 “Wie wir das Leben sehen!”.
75 “Fragen wir uns einmal...”.
76 “Was geht uns die Alkoholfrage an?”.
79 Herzog, Sex after Fascism, 61-62.
know the identity of the father. Mothers shuddered at the thought of their youth under the tutelage of authority figures encouraging pre-marital sex. For example, the lay leader of the Mädchenschutzverein in Aachen held several lectures for mothers and girls condemning the sexual practices of the Land Year and Labor Service. Women perpetuated their moral values in opposition to those of Nazi men, while their daughters discovered an opportunity to escape their parents’ dogmas on sexuality in youth programs. It would seem that at least some members of the Marian Congregations utilized the Nazi youth programs to escape the inflexible teachings on sexuality by their Catholic associations.

Typically, members of the Girls’ Congregations attempted more subtle challenges to the ideal of feminine domesticity. The national journal, Der Kranz, maintained a more open attitude toward female employment than Die Mutter. On one hand, journal editors strongly encouraged female domesticity. They argued that a woman’s God-given role was in the home and encouraged women who had to work to seek domestic labor which would train them for their future roles as wives and mothers. On the other hand, they recognized the economic reality of 11 million working women during the Weimar Republic. They requested group members to write in about their work experiences and published several of these letters. Through their commentary and selection of letters, journal editors constructed a narrative of struggle and perseverance in the workplace.

Editors and readers depicted female professionalism as an albatross whether one worked in an office, the factory, or as a sales clerk. Work was ‘struggle’ because it contradicted a woman’s ‘natural’ role as mother and wife. Several letters complained about exposure to flexible sexual morality in the workplace and the toll that paid work took on their labor in the home. Young Catholic women were to overcome this ‘burden’ through faith in the aid of the Virgin Mary and ‘proper femininity’. Besides praying for intercession, they needed their feminine virtues to make the workplace morally pure. Adopting the rhetoric of “spiritual motherhood” (geistige Mütterlichkeit), congregation leaders asked young women to utilize their feminine values in order to improve the quality of the public sphere. Der Kranz advised young women: “In the cool social and professional setting, where there is little personal contact, bring love: affectionate, understanding, cooperative, and maternal love!”

In their published letters about professional employment, some girls departed slightly from the editors’ overarching narrative. A few took the notion of “spiritual motherhood” to the point that they viewed the workplace rather than the home as their “God-given role”. There were several examples of religious young women finding fulfillment through professional labor. One young textile worker wrote: “Textile work means more to me than just making enough money to live; it is also a life duty. … Through this work, I earn my bread, but I also serve God and other people … the results of my work will without doubt find their way to people and be useful.” A bank teller and an office assistant both found meaning in their labor through their feelings of power and accomplishment when they gained the trust of their superiors as well as increased responsibility. In sum, some young Catholic women viewed the workplace

80 Kater, Hitler Youth, 108.
81 HStAD, RW 35-9: Betrifft: Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein, 16 November 1942.
as fulfilling and natural for them as the home, despite their leaders’ wish that they understand it as an unnatural condition.83

The members of the Marian Congregations also joined the sphere of public piety dominated by the young men in the demonstrative culture of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Similar to young men, young women emphasized public displays of Catholic loyalty by wearing the Congregation’s symbol in public and by carrying their banners in street processions. They also marched in demonstrations of Catholic identity that had become trademarks of the ‘martial masculinity’. One article declared, “Enter the ... struggle for public life without fear and with clear goals. You want to demonstrate in public the will of the German Catholic Youth. Where things are great and worthwhile for the youth, girls and women have not failed! We are also participants!”83 Der Kranz tempered this approach somewhat in 1932:

We sisters are happy about our Catholic young men! If they shout and march through the streets carrying torches, then we must silently stand aside with the wish that there will always be worldly carriers of Christ’s message. ... The way they write ‘Sturm’ on their banners and march through the streets is something that we cannot and should not do. That is the nature of boys! ... And we must live within our nature as girls and women! It is quieter, contemplative and deeper.84

While some girls participated in the street culture of the late Weimar era, the leaders of the Congregations viewed such public piety as a violation of the domestic ideal supported by Church leadership.

Educated daughters of middle-class Catholic families founded the Heliand-Bund, an elite organization that offered more resistance to the ideals of domestic piety while remaining within the framework of Church teaching about women. The origins and structure of this group offered it more freedom from the institutional Church. Inspired by the fusion of the German Youth Movement with Catholic youth activities in Bund Neudeutschland, Catholic girls studying in the Gymnasium founded the Heliand-Bund in the mid-1920s. Women in their teens and early twenties assumed leadership as the group grew to 10,000 members by the end of World War II. They required a spiritual leader to receive official Church recognition, a role filled by the Jesuit Georg Kifinger. Father Kifinger rode a motorcycle and went by “Kif”, leaving most of the organization’s decisions to its young leaders.85 The youthfulness of their leadership and the autonomy granted to them by their spiritual advisor made this the most independent Catholic girls’ organization in Germany.

Independent male youth organizations, such as Quickborn and Bund Neudeutschland, stood at the forefront of the Catholic Youth Movement, but the young women who founded Heliand raised significant concerns from the Catholic commu-
nity. The very idea of an association with girls in roles usually deemed masculine caused dissonance with Catholic sensibilities. In the chronicle of a local branch of Heliand in southern Germany, a young leader asked: “A girl’s youth movement? Is this even possible?”86 Families and parish communities struggled with the idea of their daughters camping, meeting, praying, and organizing charity work without the direct supervision of adults. The group arranged “parent evenings” in order to assuage the fears of potential new members.87 A group leader from Neuhausen reported that her ‘strict’ father articulated reservations about an association that caused her to wait for a streetcar to take her home at 10:30 on weekday evenings.88 Although boys formed similar groups, the Heliand girls required more initiative and independence to participate in the same activities as Quickborn and Bund Neudeutschland boys.

Despite this freedom from institutional oversight, Heliand emphasized many of the same themes in the areas of Marian piety and morality as other confessional women’s organizations of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The Virgin Mary remained important, if not central, to the Heliand-Bund. The 1932 version of their “guiding principles” (Leitsätze) asserted: “Mary, the Virgin Mother, is the model of authentic femininity and maternal service.” These principles also demanded strict abstinence from sex or contact with boys. A Heliand speech from 1931 proclaimed: “A woman’s life must be an evolution toward motherhood. Therefore sexuality should never disturb this pure womanly honour.”89 “Young Man and Girl” was frequently the title of conversation evenings in branch meetings and they emphasized the imperative of feminine purity in midst of challenges from modern industrialization and consumer society. The girls were also trained to become role models of morality for the rest of society. One lecturer suggested: “In the business of public life, the woman is influential through her presence and example. Her pure nature as a woman has a universal meaning. The woman is a benchmark for the culture of a people, where one can measure moral values.”90 The founders of the Heliand-Bund remained devoted to the ideals of Marian piety and their role as moral guardians.

Although strict on issues of morality, the Heliand-Bund experimented with forms of piety not typical of ‘feminized’ Catholicism. The Virgin Mary was important to the Heliand Bund, but they placed worship of Jesus at the forefront of their prayer. In an attempt to tone down what they viewed as superstitious attachments to Mary, Heliand emphasized the importance of Jesus above all other religious figures.91 The three most common forms of worship in the Heliand-Bund differed radically from the passive practice of mainstream associations for female youth. Spiritual life centred on communal Mass, Christ discussion circles (Christuskreise), and the spiritual exercises of the Jesuits. In each of these expressions of faith, the organization encouraged intellectual study of the Bible and active participation by girls. This crossover into

87 Doerry, Mädch­en- und Frauenbildung, 10, 15; Rundbrief des Heliandbundes Sommer 1932.
89 LaS, T-84. 338: Referate/Aufsätze vor 1945, “Mütterlichkeit.”
90 Schaeffler-Laub, Der Heliandbund in seinen Gründungsjahren, 20, 42, 83, 85-86.
the ‘masculine’ piety of male youth formed part of a wider embrace of the Liturgical Movement in the 1920s and 1930s. The Liturgical Movement offered alternative rituals where the laity played a more active role in ‘communal masses’ and where participants recited prayers in German rather than Latin. Within the framework of these masses in the Heliand-Bund, members served as altar girls long before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

By adopting the religious practice of male Catholic youth, Heliand girls broke with the feminine religiosity associated with late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Catholicism. The devotion to the Liturgical Movement, as well as the principles of the Catholic Youth Movement, provided these middle-class girls with occasions to express their religious identities publicly. They sought opportunities at the National Catholic Congress of 1931 to openly display their devotion. The group’s journal declared: “Yes, finally we are allowed to demonstrate for the Catholic public. We observe that we girls can also march in step with a disciplined row, singing hiking songs.”

Some members of the Heliand-Bund, however, attempted to feminize this public piety. For example, Alice Schnee described the public behavior of a local celebration: “The Heliand youth chant through the streets! Honestly the marching in step and sharp turns are not completely successful. We are not men. We are girls – soon to be women. We want to serve the Fatherland with helpful love and a soldierly attitude does not belong.” In a speech, the fifteen-year-old Bertl Schudrowitz explained: “And we, the young Church have important tasks. … But not with fire and sword, but rather with the love of our God and master Jesus Christ.”

While girls used the Liturgical Movement to gain access to the previously restricted world of public piety, they also tried to define this entry into the public sphere as feminine. They distinguished between their public marches and the martial masculinity of male youth.

The non-religious activities of Heliand also provided subtle subversions of the Catholic ideal of feminine domesticity. The organization encouraged sports for girls. “Body Culture” was a frequently discussed theme among the local branches and hiking became a staple of the association. They also encouraged gymnastics, folk dancing, and other non-competitive forms of exercise. In providing opportunities for sport, Heliand demanded adherence to gender norms. In an essay about girls’ sports, one leader from Offenbach wrote: “We must leave the competitive sports to the boys. They are born to fight; it is natural law. We are only allowed to partake in sports in so far as it helps us maintain the health of our bodies and revive our spirit.”

Despite this separation of spheres within sports participation, Heliand girls viewed their secular activities as emancipatory. Isa Paulus recalled that hiking, folk dancing, travelling, and “sleeping on straw” in barns without supervision were “outrageous” endeavors.

92 Doerry, Mädchen- und Frauenbildung, 31; Schaeffler-Laub, Der Heliandbund in seinen Gründungsjahren, 34, 90.
93 Rundbrief des Heliandbundes, Christkönigsfest 1932, 11-12.
95 Doerry, Mädchen- und Frauenbildung, 35; Schaeffler-Laub, Der Heliandbund in seinen Gründungsjahre, 29.
for girls from well-regarded families. Participation in Heliand allowed them to “break out of the sheltered family circle”. Such examples indicate that despite the powerful Catholic rhetoric about feminine domesticity, religious girls used associational life as a release from household expectations.

Perhaps the most important element of the Heliand Bund was its approach to the future careers of young members. Like other groups, the association emphasized maternal responsibilities and values for women. Nonetheless, it aimed to prepare girls for professional careers. When founding a new branch of Heliand, one young woman wrote: “Girls should make themselves free and later do more than stand at the oven; rather they must be active in the professions, teaching, and education. This is a result of the emergency of our times.” This statement adhered in part to Catholic teaching about working women. It implied that women only should pursue careers because it was necessary during difficult economic periods. However, the association provided members with leadership roles, charitable opportunities, lectures, and discussion groups to enrich their education and prepare them for a life in the workforce. Heliand assumed educated girls would work in careers not usually reserved for women. For example, Maria Bauer wrote:

We must undertake self-education to strive for advancement. We must prepare ourselves to use our especially feminine traits to solve the difficult problems of the modern world. Our groups should produce practical and efficient girls for a public life. Recently someone asked me, 'Are there more girls like Dr. ... from Heliand? Such a marvelous woman and mother is rare.'

Maria's words indicate Heliand’s dedication to high academic achievement and professional advancement in the context of ‘spiritual motherhood.’ They encouraged women to use their specifically feminine traits as positive contributions to a society struggling with economic depression and political turmoil. This faith in ‘spiritual motherhood’ did not prevent girls from practicing professions usually reserved for men; several Heliand girls became doctors and lawyers as well as teachers, social workers, and nuns.

Like the Mothers’ Associations and the Marian Congregations, Heliand Bund members utilized opportunities from confessional associations to seize a greater role within the public sphere. While remaining within the framework of Catholic teachings about feminine domesticity, the youthful leaders of the Heliand-Bund undertook some of the most progressive steps toward prominent roles for women in rituals. Furthermore, they attempted a reconciliation of Christianity and careers for women. While they did not openly confront or dissent against Catholic patriarchy, they used the opportunities available to them within the Catholic Youth Movement to subtly challenge the ideals of feminine piety and domestic motherhood. Heliand added aspects of femininity to the otherwise masculine public sphere of the German Catholic community.

97 Schaeffler-Laub, Der Heliandbund in seinen Gründungsjahren, 21.
98 Doerry, Mädchen- und Frauenbildung, 18.
100 LaS, T-84. 057: Rundbriefe Bundesamt, 1927-1968, “Rundbrief 1931: Maria Bauer, Johannisgruppe
CONCLUSION

The interwar period was a time of both continuity and change for gender norms in German Catholicism. The Mothers’ Associations encouraged values other historians have associated with the feminization of Christianity during the nineteenth century. They advocated faith in the Virgin Mary, motherhood, domesticity, emotional piety, maternal religious instruction of children, and feminine oversight of the family’s morality. The reorganization of these associations under the guidelines of Catholic Action in the late 1920s, however, increased the public visibility of its members. Despite the intent of the clergy to limit the autonomy of the laity, women of the Mothers’ Associations benefited more from this reform movement than most other associations. After decades of using these associations to inhibit female entrance into the public sphere, this reform offered restricted opportunities for female agency. Mothers gained prominent positions within Church life and moral authority as the clergy encouraged their roles as disciplinarians in the home. With Catholic associational life severely damaged during the late Nazi years, mothers became even more important to the survival of Catholic traditions. While fighting for feminine domesticity, these women gained increased power in the family and greater access to politics and parish leadership roles.

The Catholic Youth Movement altered gender roles for both boys and girls. The male youth found new ways for men to dominate the public sphere of religious life. As women’s associations became more prominent, the new cult of martial masculinity became a centrepiece of public demonstrations of Catholic identity and even pilgrimages that had been previously dominated by women. The militarization of Catholic processions undermines any universal use of the feminization of religion thesis and illustrates how male associations exercised hegemony over public rituals, even if men were less prevalent than women at the communion rail and in the confessional.

Young women remained enthralled by the ideal of feminine domesticity but nevertheless utilized the youth movement to gain greater access to public ritual and the public sphere. The Marian Congregations, a mainstream organization of hundreds of thousands, remained under the careful scrutiny of parish priests and older women. It stressed emotional piety, maternal values, and spiritual motherhood in the workplace. At the same time some of its members sought to reconcile fulfilment at work with religious practice, and they marched in public demonstrations. The *Heliand-Bund* was much more progressive in its challenge to feminine domesticity. They remained within the framework of Catholic teaching but sought greater professional and religious flexibility in the Church’s approach to women. While a clear minority, Heliand represented an active attempt by young middle-class Catholic women to maneuver beyond the rigid ultramontane boundaries of the nineteenth century.

Analysis of these primarily female associations illustrates the difficulty with any general application of the feminization of religion thesis in context of interwar German Catholicism. Women represented the majority of participants, but the Catholic community encompassed a diverse mix of men and women from city and countryside. Moral teaching, First Communion preparation, Marian worship, and family prayers continued as spheres for urban and rural mothers. Men remained the public carriers of Catholic identity and they maintained central roles in street rituals despite the disin-
integration of the People’s Association and the Centre Party. Male youth provide one example of how men used values associated with the masculine areas of influence, such as work, sports, or military, to retain places of prominence in the patriarchal order of the Catholic community. Young Catholic women provide another example in their attempts, always tentative and subtle, to challenge this gender order. While remaining within the boundaries of Catholic rhetoric about gender, young women ambiguously sought active roles in public ritual; alternative expressions of faith; and long-term careers beyond Catholic motherhood and feminine domesticity. Partially feminized Christianity was limited and adapted to the everyday needs of each generation.