“BITTER TIMES:” THE POOR SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME IN HITLER’S GERMANY, 1933 TO 1945

A Dissertation

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by

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Abstract

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This dissertation focuses on Catholic sisters in modern Germany, with a particular emphasis on Nazi Germany. In the 1930s, nearly one hundred thousand nuns lived in Germany; this figure compares to about 22,000 priests. I present a representative case study of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. With about 4,000 members, the institute of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame was one of the largest teaching congregations in Germany in the 1930s.

My work destabilizes common historical narratives that associate women’s progress in the modern era only with secularization. Catholic religious vocations in fact offered countless women an alternative to marriage, a higher education, and the chance to enter a profession at a time when opportunities for women contracted in the secular realm. But longstanding saccharine and mocking portrayals of nuns in popular culture, such as in films like The Sound of Music and Sister Act, have contributed to the dismissal of nuns in the modern era as serious historical actors. Clichés of nuns are in fact linked to the women’s contested status in patriarchal Western society that expressed common
anxieties about women foregoing marriage and childbearing in favor of a life of public service in all-female communities. These age-old tensions between the social and sexual demands placed on women and women’s continued insistence on religious vocations reached a zenith in Nazi Germany.

The history of Catholic sisters illuminates the contested position of the Catholic Church in Hitler’s Germany between privilege and oppression. The women worked to integrate into the Nazi state, and through their labor in schools, the Poor School Sisters both legitimized and subverted the regime. Although the sisters tried to assimilate, they remained on the fringes of Hitler’s “people’s community.” When the Nazis attempted to remove nuns from the public sphere, the women learned that they could not rely on the clergy to come to their aid and they formulated an independent response to National Socialism. The Poor School Sisters relied in part on popular support to preserve their privileged position in society, and my work therefore adds new insights to key debates on Nazi Germany as a dictatorship of consent. The history of nuns exposes the extent to which Hitler depended on ordinary Germans to participate in the persecution of outsiders. For instance, in 1935, the Nazis orchestrated a series of sensational criminal legal proceedings against nuns in order to persuade Germans to turn against the women and the church. Although the Nazis used many of the same measures against nuns as against Jews, most people refused to shun the women because in their case, crucial pre-conditions for persecution, in particular latent prejudices and opportunities for self-advancement, were absent.

I reject ubiquitous depictions of nuns in the scholarship as victims of Nazism. I argue instead that despite Catholic sisters’ dismissal from schools, their sphere of
influence in Germany actually increased in the latter 1930s, as they took up positions as social workers and pastoral assistants across the country. Nuns also occupied key positions during World War II, and their lives frequently intersected with Nazi criminal and ideological measures. My research adds fresh perspectives to central discussions on women and the church in war and the Holocaust. Catholic sisters’ participation in the war effort was extensive. I challenge common portrayals of women as mere helpmates to men, which contributed to postwar narratives of women as apolitical and powerless victims of war and Nazism. Women did not merely perform subservient work for absent men. The history of Catholic sisters shows that the women contributed their sophisticated organizational networks and real estate and their and skilled “feminine” labor to the German war effort. My research also highlights young Catholic women’s increased active political involvement in the National Socialist cause in the latter 1930s and 1940s. In particular during war, the Nazis successfully persuaded many young candidates for sisterhood to forego religious life in favor of working for the Nazi movement. The drastic decline in religious vocations in the 1940s was in part due to the unprecedented expansion of young, single women’s public roles in Hitler’s Germany and occupied Europe.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame emerged from the Third Reich with their communities intact, but they also lost a generation of sisters to National Socialism, and thus diminished, they struggled to meet the great demands placed on them in postwar West Germany.
For Michael
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on Catholic sisters in Nazi Germany. My work addresses a significant lacuna in the historiography of the Catholic Church and women in National Socialist Germany. No cohesive and critical history of a women religious teaching congregation in Hitler’s Germany has been published to date in German or English. I offer revisions of existing scholarship in which nuns usually only appear in the margins as mute and powerless victims of Nazism who depended on the episcopate and the clergy to speak and act on their behalf.

Examining this group of women adds to ongoing discussions about the contested position of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany as either privileged or oppressed. Debates about this topic have been fierce, and scholars have used extant evidence to support either stance. The history of Catholic sisters brings the inextricable link between the church’s privilege and oppression into sharp relief. My work offers fresh explanations as to why women religious occupied these often confounding liminal places in Nazi Germany.

The coercion of the Catholic Church and religious congregations in Hitler’s Germany was real. Nazi officials wished to remove women religious from the public sphere and thereby exclude them from the imagined “people’s community.” To achieve this goal, the Nazis used many of the same means against sisters that proved effective in
the 1930s against Jews, communists, homosexuals, and others. These methods included the criminalization and defamation of perceived enemies and economic violence.

Although the Nazis used some of the same measures against nuns as against other groups, the outcome was very different. The situation and oppression of Catholic sisters, and by extension that of the Catholic Church, differed sharply from that of other groups mainly because Germans refused to practice the exclusion of sisters. Instead, with each new attack, Germans’ support of the women remained firm, thereby tying the hands of Nazi officials. On account of popular support, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame continued to occupy a position of privilege in German society that enabled them to remain part of it even after the loss of their educational mission.

My work engages debates about why Germans supported Hitler’s criminal regime. Peter Fritzsche has argued that Germans shared the belief in a “national destiny” with the Nazi leadership and “subsequently came to accept the uncompromising terms of Nazi racism.”² Robert Gellately concluded that instrumental in convincing Germans to consent to the violence and persecution of Jews and others was in part the Nazis’ creation of the illusion of law and order that gentrified the punishment of perceived enemies.³ Götz Aly has argued that the material benefits and career advantages the Nazi regime offered ordinary non-Jewish Germans compelled the vast majority to acquiesce and participate first in the persecution and then in the murder of Jews.⁴ There is no doubt that

the reasons Fritzsche, Gellately, Aly, and other scholars have offered are correct and add to our understanding of how the complex Nazi dictatorship worked. There is also no monocausal explanation of why Germans committed genocide nor were all Germans violent antisemites eager to kill.

My work suggests that one of the most important reasons Germans participated in the discrimination of particular groups remains preexisting prejudices: antisemitism, anti-Communism, and homophobia. In a sense, I am making an argument about antisemitism without presenting any evidence of antisemitism. Instead I show a contrasting image that reveals a different outcome when certain preexisting prejudices were absent. In the case of Catholic sisters this crucial precondition was lacking. The Nazis therefore faced the formidable task of undoing the predominant positive views that Catholic and Protestant Germans held of these women as selfless, apolitical, and innocent. Most Germans could not be persuaded with charades of law and order, a utopian community, or material benefits to act out the exclusion of Catholic sisters, because the often small and even latent prejudices the regime relied on to bring about the social death of “the other” were absent in this case.

Women Religious in Popular Culture

Germans relied on Catholic sisters to care for their sick and educate their daughters. The lack of scholars’ interest in Catholic sisters seems inexplicable considering the importance of nuns in the modern Catholic Church and the German state. The number of nuns in Germany alone speaks to their significance. In 1937, nearly one hundred thousand women religious lived in Germany; this figure compares to about
22,000 priests. As educators, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame were at the center of disputes between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state over public and private Catholic schools. The women formulated their own effective response to National Socialism that highlights their agency and autonomy vis-à-vis the episcopate and clergy. My research also adds fresh perspectives to debates of the role of the episcopate and clergy in Nazi Germany, the meaning of the concordat, and the place of women in the Third Reich.

Paradoxically, the dearth of scholarship on women religious may in part be due to stereotypes of nuns similar to those in popular culture that afforded the women a measure of privilege in Nazi Germany. The often mocking or saccharine portrayals of nuns in the media and print as motherly, unworldly, and funny have contributed to the obscuring of the women’s important histories in the modern era. Popular images render them as one-dimensional curiosities rather than as whole persons worthy of serious consideration. Many readers may in fact associate my topic with the fictitious nuns in the 1965 Hollywood classic The Sound of Music starring Julie Andrews, who plays the beautiful and vivacious aspiring nun Maria. Clichés of nuns and the history of nuns are linked, and recognizing this connection is crucial to understanding the past of this important group of women.

The Sound of Music is set in a picturesque Austrian abbey in the late 1930s.\(^6\) When the reverend mother superior receives a request from the widowed Baron von Trapp for a governess for his seven children, she sends the lively postulant Maria to fill the post. The wise and kind mother superior, along with viewers of the film, realizes that Maria is not suited for religious life, and before long Maria marries von Trapp. Following Germany’s annexation of Austria in 1938, Baron von Trapp runs afoul of the Nazis and the family seeks refuge from persecution in the abbey. United in their opposition to Nazism and without a thought for their own safety, the nuns hide the von Trapps and help them escape in the abbey’s car. Afterward, in a childish display of humor, two nuns confess their “sin” to their mother superior of disabling the pursuers’ vehicle.

The elderly reverend mother superior in The Sound of Music corresponds to clichés of nuns as nurturing and selfless mother figures.\(^7\) The kind, motherly nun in the film competes with equally powerful clichés of nuns as funny and unworldly women or as rigid disciplinarians. Maria does not fit into this alien world. Her character articulates long-standing anxieties about the place of women religious in Western culture. She is too beautiful and vibrant to “waste” her sexuality and submit to the disciplined and chaste life of the nuns in her abbey. Her “natural” place is that of a wife and mother. Such representations were not new.


\(^7\) Mary Ann Janosik argued that the portrayal of nuns in the film reproduced a particular cliché of women religious she termed “earth mother Madonnas,” selfless, spiritual mothers who resemble the image of Mary. Janosik wrote that the reverend mother’s “primary purpose in The Sound of Music...is to offer simple words of comfort and guidance to confused postulant Maria.” Mary Ann Janosik, “Madonnas in our Midst: Representations of Women Religious in Hollywood Films,” U.S. Catholic Historian 15, no. 2 (1997): 83.
In Western culture the image of the “good, selfless nun” has long competed with that of the “bad, aberrant nun.” The fantastical abbess and nun in Giovanni Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century *Decameron* are grotesque in their pursuit of sexual pleasure and in their failings to exercise authority. In 1686, the author of ‘A Letter to a Virtuous Lady, to Disswade Her from Her Resolution of Being a Nun” asked: “Can Virgins find no trick/For Chastity, but to be Buried Quick?.../Not all your Walls, not Bars, can keep out Thought.” The ghostly nun in Charlotte Brontë’s 1853 novel *Villette* reinforced the message that chastity was unnatural and that all-female communities could turn innocent girls into depraved women. Stereotypes of comical and depraved nuns became potent symbols of femininity and patriarchy gone astray that have remained constant across centuries.

**Women Religious in History**

Clichés of nuns arose as a response to the radical Catholic teaching of celibacy that hails back to the early Christian church. The idea that women could reject male

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9 “A Letter to a Virtuous Lady, to Disswade Her from her Resolution of Being a Nun,” (London: Printed for John Harris, 1686).


control, marriage, and childbearing and publicly live among like-minded women (and men) threatened to undermine the prevailing patriarchal social order. At first, the early Christian cult of martyrs celebrated such defiant and chaste women like the third-century virgin saint Lucy of Syracuse, who refused her parents’ demands to marry. Lucy’s spurned suitor denounced her to the Roman governor, who imprisoned her in a brothel before tearing her eyes out and cutting her throat. Most consecrated virgins in late antiquity led less turbulent lives, however, and remained in their own homes or moved into the households of widows or priests. The women performed charitable works and liturgical duties alongside men. 

Nuns living in convents in accordance with the new Benedictine rule appeared in the seventh century. But nuns and convents did not replace many older and less formal

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12 Christian men also chose celibacy and their virginity posed a similar threat to society but not to the same degree as that of women whose choice seemed more dangerous and defiant in the context of the patriarchal social order. Peter Brown wrote that “to have withdrawn the body as a whole from society was to make a particularly concrete and intimate statement about the nature of one form of human solidarity,” namely the bonds of “family, offspring, kin. It was to assert instead, the right of the individual to seek for himself or herself different forms of solidarity, more consonant with the high destiny of free persons, [who are] able to enter into a freely chosen harmony of wills, which, so Christians of late antiquity believed, was the particular joy of the undivided life of the ‘angels of heaven.’” Peter Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church,” in Christian Spirituality, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorf, and John Leclercq, vol. 1, Origins to the Twelfth Century (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 436.


14 Many of these consecrated and chaste women performed public charitable works and formed an integral and important part of the early Christian Church. A number of these women are referenced in the New Testament. Franca Ela Consolino found, for instance, that the “Acts of the Apostles make reference to four virgin daughters of the deacon, Philip of Caesarea, who all possessed the gift of prophecy.” Franca Ela Consolino, “Female Asceticism and Monasticism in Italy from the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries,” in Women and Faith. Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9.


16 The Rule of St. Benedict that formalized and institutionalized monastic life was written by St. Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century to govern communities of monks. Some consecrated virgins began wearing religious habits and took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. An abbess presided over a
religious communities of women, and in 1274 the Franciscan monk Gilbert of Tournai exclaimed that “there are among us women whom we have no idea what to call, ordinary women or nuns because they live neither in the world nor out of it.” Katherine Gill identified many such groups of religious women in medieval Italy, like consecrated widows following a religious regime in their homes, laywomen in the service of monastic institutions, pious groups of women who managed hospitals, and women who followed wandering preachers. In the North of Europe, the Beguine movement spread in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Beguines were religious communities of women without formal vows devoted to a chaste and austere life of public charity.

All of these unmarried women living openly outside of male supervision alarmed medieval church leaders, who wanted to realign the church with prevailing social norms. They therefore attempted to return women to the private sphere under male supervision by imposing vows and claustration on all female religious communities. Pope Boniface community of nuns. But according to Giulia Barone, little is known about early female monasticism until the High Middle Ages due to lack of sources. Giulia Barone, “Society and Women’s Religiosity, 750-1450,” in Scaraffia and Zarri, 43. Caroline Walker Bynum wrote that although exact numbers are not available, before 1200, female religious vocations were restricted to women of the aristocracy and few convents for women existed. Monks still vastly outnumbered nuns in the early Middle Ages. Before 1100, even the great Cluny monastic reforms established only one convent for women whose husbands had joined monasteries. Caroline Walker Bynum, “Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Jill Raitt, vol 2, *High Middle Ages and Reformation*, (New York: Cross Roads, 1987), 122.


18 Ibid., 17.

19 Bynum, 124.

20 As the Catholic Church aligned itself with the state and evolved into an increasingly patriarchal and misogynistic institution, church leaders tried to conform to prevailing social norms and attempted to control communities of women. Jo Ann Kay McNamara wrote that church leaders demanded that in exchange for honoring “women who had freed themselves from the responsibility of their gender,” they had to “make themselves inconspicuous – quiet, modest, and veiled, McNamara, 41 ff.
VIII (1294-1303) in particular abhorred the unorthodox religious activities of women, and in 1298 he issued the decree *Periculoso* that forced strict enclosure on all women religious.\(^21\) *Periculoso* was part of wider reforms that enhanced the prestige of the male clergy at the expense of women’s public roles and authority in the Latin church.\(^22\) But church leaders did not succeed in cloistering women religious until the sixteenth century, when the Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed and strengthened strict enclosure of all women religious, including sisters belonging to beguine and tertiary communities.\(^23\) Despite the often marked resistance by women, the enclosed convent of nuns became the norm in early modern Europe.

According to canon law, only women religious living in enclosed convents can be called nuns. Nuns take what are known as solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and they live in accordance with strict papal enclosure in a religious order. Nuns can only leave the convent on rare occasions with permission of a bishop and each community of nuns is independent. Even Catholic orders that abide by the same rule have


\(^{22}\) The Catholic Church preached that women’s “natural” seductiveness linked them to the devil and threatened male honor. Controlling women’s sexuality by physically confining them was an important concern of church leaders in the seventeenth century as they imposed enclosure on all women religious. But Anne Winston-Allen warns that efforts to enclose women religious that began with *Periculoso* cannot be single-mindedly viewed as efforts by men to control and subordinate women. Winston-Allen argued instead that in the fifteenth-century Observant movement seeking to enclose women, “reform discourse merged on the one hand with the struggle of the increasingly powerful urban magistrate class for greater access and control of religious institutions, and, on the other, with the maneuvers of territorial rulers to consolidate their power at the expense of the lesser aristocracy.” Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles. Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 236. For a brief discussion on the impact of Gregorian reforms and *Periculoso* on women religious in medieval France, see Choudhury 15.

\(^{23}\) Silvia Evangelisti argued that after *Periculoso* enclosure was not strictly enforced, and women continued to live as sisters in so-called tertiary communities, or third orders. Tertiary communities such as the Beguines were not enclosed and focused on public charitable works. Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns. A History of Convent Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.
no formal ties to each other. The primary focus of a Catholic order is prayer and contemplation. Charitable works are secondary and limited by strict claustration.  

Catholic sisters became the norm in the nineteenth century. Sisters take simple vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Although some congregations observe a limited form of cloister, the women are not subject to strict papal enclosure and travel outside of their communities when necessary. Catholic sisters belong to religious congregations that allow them to combine charitable work with prayer and contemplation. Religious congregations usually consist of a network of communities led by a general superior.

Most scholars writing about women religious face the dilemma of the lax use of language. The terms “nun,” “sister,” “order,” and “congregation” are usually used interchangeably and even women religious themselves seem often unconcerned with the terms’ distinctions according to canon law. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame frequently described their congregation as an order and called their sisters nuns. I have not corrected the language the women used to define themselves and their congregation.

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25 A female general superior is not the norm in all women religious congregations. Many congregations devoted to the care of the sick such as the Sisters of Mercy are in fact headed by a male director. Ibid.

26 Elizabeth Kuhns captured this often vexing imprecision of language when she wrote in the introduction to her monograph about the clothing of women religious that she uses “the terms ‘nun,’ ‘sister,’ ‘consecrated woman,’ and ‘religious’…interchangeably, although there are differences according to church canonical law. I speak of convents, monasteries, and abbeys interchangeably as well, although there are juridical differences. Similarly, when I speak of a ‘community,’ it may mean ‘order,’ ‘congregation,’ ‘institute,’ or ‘association,’ although each has significant distinctions in canon law.” Elizabeth Kuhns, The Habit. A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 4.
In this dissertation, readers will therefore encounter the sometimes imprecise terminologies the historical actors themselves used to describe religious life.

Perhaps women religious’ common disregard for the finer linguistic points of canon law was symbolic of their resistance to church leaders’ efforts to narrow the role of women in the church. Since antiquity, women created important spaces for themselves within the Christian church even in light of often marked opposition by church leaders and in the face of popular derision. Scholars have long celebrated the medieval cloister as important places of learning for women until Gregorian and Tridentine reforms remade the Catholic Church into a much less hospitable place for women. Many historians of early modern Europe have stopped viewing the cloister thereafter as a valuable space for women and have dismissed early modern nuns as oppressed and unimportant. In the


28 In part of the historiography, the enclosed convent became a symbol of the subjugation of women in early modern Europe where the aristocracy disposed of their unmarried daughters. When dowries rose to exorbitant heights in early modern Italy, it was much cheaper to place daughters into convents. R. Burr Litchfield showed, for instance, that between 1500 and 1799, 46% of daughters in a sample of twenty-one Florentine aristocratic families took the veil. R. Burr Lichtfield, “Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” The Journal of Economic History 29 (1969), 197. Mary Laven showed that when this gender-discriminating practice became part of family strategies in early modern Venice, it could lead to forced vocations and scandals. Mary Laven, Virgins of Venice. Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent (New York: Viking, 2003). But scholars have also begun to rewrite the early modern nun’s story and challenge these ubiquitous images of victimhood. A number of historians have revealed, for instance, that despite the high walls surrounding them, nuns remained very much part of the world beyond their confinement. They conducted business affairs via correspondence and maintained close contacts with their families through letters or visits. The convent’s parlor where a grill separated the nuns from their visitors became an important window to the outside world. Dava Sobel showed that the illegitimate daughter of Galileo Galilei, Sister Maria Celeste, carried on a loving correspondence with her father and aided him in the administration of his estate after entering a cloistered convent at the age of thirteen. Dava Sobel, Galileo’s Daughter. A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love (New York: Walker & Co., 1999). Silvia Evangelisti argued that the boundaries between marriage and the cloister were often blurred, and women moved in and out of the cloister at different times of their lives, as young girls, wives, and widows, without ever taking the veil. Evangelisti also offers an excellent historiography on the topic. Silvia Evangelisti, “Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy,” The Historical Journal 43, no. 1 (2000): 233-247. Cloistered convents also remained important creative spaces for women. Anne Winston-Allen argued that whereas many women religious resisted enclosure, others actively supported the
historiographical narrative of the modern era women religious were further marginalized when scholars tended to equate secularization and modernity with women’s emancipation and religious engagement with backwardness. In the twentieth century, nuns became the quintessential victims during World War I and the Spanish Civil War. Atrocity stories of raped, mutilated, and murdered nuns came to symbolize the pinnacle of brutality and cultural degeneracy of Germans in Belgium in 1914. These images must not be rejected out of hand.

The notions of suffering, sacrifice, and even oppression formed important parts of modern sisters’ identities that complemented their selfless charitable work in the public sphere. After women religious reemerged from behind convent walls in the reform movement and thereby gained prestige and spiritual fulfillment. Winston-Allen also concluded that women did have a Renaissance inside some enclosed cloisters, where an “intense flowering of scribal, literary, and religious activity focused on the production of texts in Latin and especially the vernacular,” 169. On creative women in early modern convents, see also: Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, eds., *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).


30 Stories of the rape and even sexual mutilation of nuns were widespread during World War I, and according to historian Jeff Lipkes, as early as August 1914 “many women spoke of outrages against the sisters of the Aarschot convent” in Belgium. Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 2007), 164. The British and Irish used propaganda of the rape of nuns to communicate to their troops the absolute beastliness and depravity of Germans who did not “just” rape women but nuns. For instance, in 1917, *The Irish Times* quoted the Rev. W. B. O’Donnell who “spoke in high terms of the brave Irishmen…[many of whom] had laid down their lives – to fight against the most awful tyranny that ever cursed the earth…Let them [Irish soldiers] think of…the convents in Belgium torn down by the tyrant. Their altars have been leveled…and nuns outraged.” “German Crime and Outrage: Parish Priest’s Outspoken Denunciation,” *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1917. Also in 1917, a novel appeared by Lillith Hope titled *Behold and See!* that told the story of a young Belgian nun who found herself pregnant after being brutally raped by German soldiers. Scholar Susan R. Grayzel who analyzed the novel wrote that “Lillith Hope portrayed German brutality in a most heinous form. Not only did she emphasize Germans attacking young innocent women, but by making them nuns, she further called upon a sense of religious and moral indignation - striving for a story, as *The Times Literary Supplement* put it both ‘moving and poignant.’” Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War. Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 72.
nineteenth century, predominant stereotypes that expressed popular anxieties about illicit activities in cloisters hidden from the public gaze continued to exist but were significantly weakened by newer, favorable perceptions of benevolent Catholic sisters in the self-sacrificing service of society. It was this modern image of women religious, who dedicated their life to care for others, that the Nazis found impossible to overcome.

**Historiography**

On account of their perceived powerlessness, scholars of the modern era have mostly ignored Catholic sisters. Monochromatic images of women religious as mute and marginalized victims dominate the historiography on the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany. The following quote from Claudia Koonz’s *Mothers in the Fatherland* remains a common representation of Catholic sisters in the scholarship:

> Three quarters of all nuns were dismissed without pensions…convents were dissolved, and schools attacked. Catholics protested. Priests broke Nazi orders and read sermons condemning the action from the pulpit.\(^{31}\)

In Koonz’s discussion of the dismissal of women religious teachers from Bavarian public schools in 1937, the victimized sisters were invisible, passive, and powerless, whereas the Catholic laity and clergy took action and resisted on the women’s behalf. Questions about the women’s agency, their reaction to their dismissal, or how they adjusted to the new situation remain unasked.

\(^{31}\) The passage contains a significant error. The Nazis did not dissolve convents or congregations in 1937 (or ever) during the time period Koonz refers to in this excerpt. Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland. Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1987), 287.
Victimhood and resistance characterized the dominant narrative for the entire Catholic Church in Hitler’s Germany in the immediate postwar period. Starting in the 1950s, this interpretation underwent radical revisions as scholars exposed the Catholic Church’s cooperation with the Nazi regime. Questions about the meaning of the church’s relationship with the Nazi state continue to dominate the historiography. Scholars tend to focus on the episcopate and clergy, and the laity, including women religious, have remained all but invisible in the ongoing contentious academic debates.  

Representative of the initial victimhood/resistance account is Johann Neuhäusler’s 1946 document collection *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz*. Neuhäusler offered one of the first works of the Catholic Church under National Socialism, including a quite extensive but uncritical documentation about religious congregations. He portrayed the church as a victim and the clergy as uncompromising and persecuted resisters. Numerous hagiographical accounts that documented the church struggle appeared in the years following the end of the war and these also included a number of monographs on

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32 Heinz Hürten, whose seminal work on the Catholic laity in Germany is one of the few notable exceptions to this tendency, wrote that because church politics and with it the lives of the hierarchy are much better documented than the daily life of the laity, the historian is in danger of viewing the former as the exclusive and whole church. Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992), 271.

33 Johann Neuhäusler was a priest who spent several years in the concentration camps Dachau and Sachsenhausen for protesting the Nazi regime’s anti-church measures. In his section on Catholic congregations, Neuhäusler focused on pivotal moments in the history of religious congregations in Nazi Germany that have remained the primary focus in most subsequent accounts, such as the struggle over confessional schools, the removal of crucifixes from classrooms, the foreign exchange trials, the indecency trials, the prohibition of the admittance of novices, and the “storming of the cloister” during World War II. Although Neuhäusler focused on female and male congregations, his emphasis was on male congregations. Johann Neuhäusler, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz. Der Kampf des Nationalsozialismus gegen die katholische Kirche und der kirchliche Widerstand*, 2 vols. (Munich: Verlag Katholische Kirche Bayerns, 1946). For an excellent overview of the early historiography on the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany see Ulrich v. Hehl, “Kirche, Katholizismus und das Nationalsozialistische Deutschland. Ein Forschungsüberblick,” in *Katholische Kirche im Dritten Reich*, ed. Dieter Albrecht (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1976), 219-251.
Catholic women. The publication in 1948 of *Edith Stein: Benedicta a Cruce, Philosophin and Karmelitin* was among the first of many works that drew attention to the exceptional life and murder of the Carmelite nun and convert from Judaism Edith Stein.\(^{34}\)

Both Catholic and Protestant churches in post-war Germany stressed their suppression and suffering under Hitler. John Conway argued that historians’ positive portrayal of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany bolstered the institution’s key position in postwar West Germany. The church encouraged such publications through the *Kommission für Zeitgeschichte* established in 1962.\(^{35}\)

The two-year trial in the mid-1950s before the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany to determine the continued validity of the concordat of 1933 marked the beginning of more differentiated scholarly inquiries that soon gave rise to contentious

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\(^{35}\) The *Kommiss’s* first of many excellent publications was Dieter Albrecht, ed. *Der Notenwechsel zwischen dem Heiligen Stuhl und der deutschen Reichsregierung* (Mainz: Matthias Grünwald Verlag, 1965). John S. Conway argued that the Catholic Church in postwar Germany was now “playing a highly significant part in planning the political and educational future of the country, and now sought the aid of its historians to prove its respectability and reliability.” The (German Protestant) Evangelische Kirche established its own *Kommission für die Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes in der NS-Zeit* in 1955. John S. Conway, “Coming to Terms with the Past: Interpreting the German Church Struggle 1933-1990,” *German History* 16, no. 3 (1998), 378.
debates about the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany. Disputes about possible connections between the church’s collusion with the state, the successful conclusion of the concordat, and the dissolution of the Catholic Center Party dominated scholarly debates for years thereafter.

In 1961 Wolfgang Böckenförde pointed to the episcopate’s early support of Hitler and argued for Catholics’ inner “affinity” to National Socialism. But it was Rolf Hochhuth’s controversial and ahistorical 1963 play *The Deputy* that inflamed both popular and historical debates. Hochhuth portrayed Pope Pius XII’s silence during the Holocaust as cynical and cunning. Scholar Guenter Lewy supported many of Hochhuth’s assertions in his influential but one-sided monograph published in 1964. He argued that

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calculating and shrewd Catholic leaders ignored Christian principles and instead collaborated with the criminal regime and thereby preserved the privileged position of the institutional church in Nazi Germany.  

John Conway challenged Lewy’s undifferentiated account and argued in his 1968 landmark study that the Nazi challenge to the churches was real but “that neither the hierarchy nor the laity had the courage or the means to mobilize the church against the embattled might of Nazism.”

The Scholder-Repgen debate of the 1970s and 80s highlighted the rift among scholars over interpretations of the meaning of Catholics’ collaboration with and support of the Nazi regime. At issue was once again the concordat of 1933 between the Catholic Church and the German state. In 1977, Klaus Scholder argued in the first volume of his erudite study on the Christian churches in Nazi Germany that Hitler made the concordat contingent on the Center Party’s support for the Enabling Act. Konrad Repgen countered that there was no such connection and that the concordat was a “contractual

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form of nonconformity of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich.”

The most influential scholars of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany, Ludwig Volk, Heinz Hürten, and Rudolf Morsey, all shared Repgen’s views that the church remained steadfast in its resistance to National Socialism and instances of collaboration were acts of self-defense to ensure the continued pastoral care of German Catholics. Complicating debates about the comportment of the Catholic clergy and laity in Hitler’s Germany was a shifting attitude among scholars about what counted as resistance. But in his 2004 monograph on Catholic parish priests in Berlin, Kevin P. Spicer exposed the ahistoricity and impossibility of imposing contemporary ideas of human rights, interfaith cooperation, and resistance onto historical actors. He argued instead that “for most priests [in Nazi Germany], the concerns of the state encroached upon their lives only when political


affairs pertain directly to the rights of the church and their freedom to minister to the faithful.”

The revision of the history of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany that began in the 1960s and that continues through today left the image of both nuns and monks as blameless victims of Nazi terror first put forth by Neuhäusler largely undisturbed. The almost exclusive focus of scholars on the martyrdom of nuns and on specific events in the history of religious orders in Nazi Germany, such as the foreign exchange trials of 1935/36 and the “storming of the cloister” (Klostersturm) of the early 1940s, further reinforced one-dimensional images of the victimhood of male and female religious. Important earlier works include monographs by Ludwig Volk, Benedictina Maria Kempner, Petra Madeleine Rapp, and Hans Günter Hockerts.

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46 Benedictina Maria Kempner’s 1979 publication *Nonnen unter dem Hakenkreuz. Leiden – Heldentum – Tod. Die erste Dokumentation über das Schicksal der Nonnen im 3. Reich* (Würzburg: Naumann, 1979) was reminiscent of hagiographic accounts of the immediate post-war period and further perpetuated the narrative of nuns’ persecution and martyrdom under Hitler. Kempner chronicled the Nazis’ murder of nuns throughout Europe. Her main focus was on Polish nuns who indeed suffered disproportionately under National Socialism. Kempner’s monograph differs from other works mentioned herein in that she focused on nuns in German-occupied Europe and not just on Germany. The small historiography in the English language on women religious in German-occupied Europe further includes: Suzanne Vromen, *Hidden Children of the Holocaust. Belgian Nuns and their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Ewa Kurek, *Your Life is Worth Mine: How Polish Nuns in World War II Saved Hundreds of Jewish Lives in German-occupied Poland, 1939-1945* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997), and Michael Phayer and Eva Fleischner, *Cries in the Night: Women Who Challenged the Holocaust* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1997). The foreign exchange trials of 1935/36 against religious orders and the clergy were subject of two monographs that appeared in 1967 and 1981. E. Hoffmann and H. Janssen’s account is part narrative and part document collection. Though not without merit, the authors’ account lacks in objectivity at times as they chronicle the new Kulturkampf “Hitler waged against the Christian churches, and in particular against Catholic orders.” E. Hoffmann and H. Janssen, *Die Wahrheit über die Ordensdevisenprozesse 1935/36* (Bielefeld: Verlag Hausknecht, 1967), 4. Petra Madeleine Rapp’s dissertation is more objective but despite her extensive archival research, it often lacks context. Petra Madeleine Rapp, *Die Devisenprozesse gegen katholische Ordensangehörige und Geistliche im Dritten Reich* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität,
A small number of scholars have also challenged and revised images of the persecution and blameless suffering of Catholic sisters and brothers in Nazi Germany.

Already in 1986, Thomas Mengel took a more differentiated approach in his work on Silesian women religious congregations and orders under National Socialism. Although his primary emphasis was still on the “fate” and suffering of congregations, he makes the

1981). Hans Günter Hockerts’s excellent study of the indecency trials of 1936/37 against male religious orders and members of the clergy remains the only one of its kind. Hans Günter Hockerts, Die Sittlichkeitsprozesse gegen katholische Ordsangehörige und Priester 1936/37 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1971). Ludwig Volk and Roman Bleistein used the storming of the cloisters (Klostersturm) of the early 1940s to illustrate what they viewed as the unrelenting repression of the Catholic Church by the Nazi regime. Ludwig Volk, “Episkopat und Kirchenkampf im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in Kirche und Nationalsozialismus: Ausgewählte Aufsätze, ed. Dieter Albrecht (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1987), 83-97. Bleistein wrote that cloisters were “the first that suffered under a targeted church struggle in the Third Reich.” He further concluded that male religious were never passive in light of their persecution in Nazi Germany but were “the first line of resistance against National Socialist church policy.” Roman Bleistein, “Nationalsozialistische Kirchenpolitik und katholische Orden,” Stimmen der Zeit 203 (1985), 159-169, quote 159. Annette Mertens’s 2006 study of the Klostersturm stands out for its thoroughness and erudition. But Mertens’s stated focus was on the perpetrators of the Klostersturm, and the affected congregations and their members remain opaque in the monograph. She did not revise but reinforced the narrative of victimhood of Catholic cloisters in Hitler’s Germany. Annette Mertens, Himmler’s Klostersturm. Der Angriff auf katholische Einrichtungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedergutmachung nach 1945 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006). In the late 1990s, Alfred Rinnerthaler attempted a comprehensive overview of the Nazi regime’s measures against religious orders but his account also does not offer a differentiated assessment of congregations’ history in Nazi Germany. Alfred Rinnerthaler, “Die Orden als Feindbilder des NS-Staates,” in Staat und Kirche in der ‘Ostmark,’ ed. Maximilian Liebermann und Hans Paarhammer (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: P. Lang, 1998). It is important to add to this historiographical overview that nuns and Catholic sisters have always written their own histories as well. For a scholarly treatise of the concept of early modern nuns as historians, see Charlotte Woodford, Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany (New York: Oxford, 2002). The number of contemporary in-house publications by religious congregations and orders is too vast to capture in this dissertation, I only focus on works produced by and about the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Germany and the United States never depended on outsiders to write their history but can boast of a number of past and present excellent in-house scholars and archivists such as M. Liobgid Ziegler, M. Therese Barnikel, M. Consolata Neumann, M. Apollinaris Jörgens, and Sister Judith Best. The publications include, for instance: M. Liobgid Ziegler, Die Armen Schulschwestern von Unserer Lieben Frau: Ein Beitrag zur bayerischen Bildungsgeschichte (Munich: Benno Filser-Verlag, 1935), M. Liobgid Ziegler and M. Therese Barnikel, Die Armen Schulschwestern Von Unserer Lieben Frau. Ein Internationaler Schulorden Bayerischen Ursprungs (Munich: Druck Rudolf Weiss, 1985), and M. Apollinaris Jörgens, “Bedeutung der Brede für die Mädchenbildung in Brakel,” Brakeler Schriftreihe 12 (October 1996).
point that the women were not helpless victims of the Nazi regime but they also made
difficult compromises as they adjusted to life in Hitler’s Germany. 47 Marcel Albert
showed in a 2004 monograph about the Benedictine abbey Maria Laach under National
Socialism that whereas the abbey suffered its share of adversity under the regime, the
abbots and monks of Maria Laach also remained supporters of National Socialist
ideology and World War II well into the 1940s. 48

A small historiography on women religious nurses focuses on Catholic responses
to Nazi racial policies. Michael Phayer and Claudia Koonz already noted in the 1980s in
their studies of German lay women that within the Catholic Church, Nazi racial policies
mainly affected women, such as nurses, social workers, and marriage counselors. 49
Phayer and Koonz did not include women religious nurses in their analyses, but newer
studies on religious nursing congregations in Nazi Germany highlight the extent the
women’s lives intersected with National Socialist criminal measures. 50 Winfried Süß
coined the term “antagonistic cooperation” to describe women religious nursing

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47 Thomas Mengel, *Das Schicksal der schlesischen Frauenklöster während des Dritten Reiches
und 1945/46* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1986). In 1991, a work about Silesian male cloisters under Nazism
appeared: Sigmund Bulla, *Das Schicksal der schlesischen Männerklöster während des Dritten Reiches und

48 Marcel Albert, *Die Benediktinerabtei Maria Laach und der Nationalsozialismus* (Paderborn:
Schöningh, 2004). It is unclear how representative the history of Maria Laach is because the lack of similar
studies prevented the author from making comparisons. One exception he cites is: Johannes Düring, *Wir
weichen nur der Gewalt. Die Mönche von Münsterschwarzach im Dritten Reich* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier
Türme Verlag, 1997).

49 Michael Phayer, *Protestant and Catholic Women in Nazi Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State

50 Erwin Gatz, ed., *Geschichte des kirchlichen Lebens in den deutschsprachigen Ländern seit dem
(Freiburg: Herder, 2006). Anna Maria Balbach, *Die barmherzigen Schwestern zu Münster zur Zeit des
Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: Dialogverlag, 2007) and Alexa A. Becker, *Die Münchener Vinzentinerinnen
zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Dreesbach, 2009).
congregations’ participation in the war effort and the controversial choices some institutions made during the so-called euthanasia program, the Nazis’ murder of the handicapped.\textsuperscript{51} The research by Karl-Joseph Hummel and Christoph Kösters on Catholic institutions’ use of forced laborers drew further attention to of religious congregations’ cooperation with the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{52}

When considering the position of women religious in Nazi Germany, it is important to remember that not only were they members of the Catholic Church but as women, they occupied subordinate and seemingly powerless positions in both the church and the state. Questions of women’s participation and resistance, of their guilt and innocence, also dominate the scholarship on women and National Socialism.\textsuperscript{53} According to Sybille Steinbacher, the master narrative of female innocence served a useful purpose in the “post war German exoneration discourse” but does not reflect the reality of women in Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{54} After the majority of German women withdrew to the apolitical domestic realm after 1945, the knowledge that the Nazi state offered racially valuable and

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\textsuperscript{53} For an excellent, albeit somewhat dated, introduction to the scholarship on women and National Socialism that takes an in-depth look at the complicated issue of women’s participation and victimization, see Lerke Gravenhorst and Carmen Tatschmurat, eds., \textit{Töchter- Fragen. NS-Frauen-Geschichte} (Kore: Verlag Traute Hensch, 1990).
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\textsuperscript{54} Sybille Steinbacher, introduction to \textit{Volksgenossinnen. Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft}, ed. Sybille Steinbacher (Konstanz: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), 9, 10
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politically reliable women heretofore “unknown possibilities for participation” became a victim of collective amnesia until the emergence of women’s history in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{55}

The complicated issue of women in Hitler’s Germany was brought into sharp relief in the late 1980s with the dispute (\textit{Historikerinnenstreit}) between Gisela Bock and Claudia Koonz. In her work on forced sterilization, Gisela Bock exposed the link between Nazi racial and women’s policy. She argued that anti-natalism, not pro-natalism, drove National Socialist family policy and that women were the main targets of forced sterilization.\textsuperscript{56} Claudia Koonz accused Bock and other scholars of viewing women only as victims. She asserted instead that the “women among Hitler’s supporters have fallen through the historian’s sieve, unclaimed by feminists and unnoticed by men.”\textsuperscript{57} Koonz proposed a specific form of female complicity in Nazi crimes that was grounded in the emotional and invisible supportive work of women.\textsuperscript{58} What emerged most clearly from the scholarship of Bock, Koonz, and others was the fact that whereas gender mattered, it did not predetermine women’s roles as victims or perpetrators in Hitler’s Germany. Rather, as Dagmar Reese and Carola Sachse proposed,


\textsuperscript{57} Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 3.

\textsuperscript{58} Koonz argued that women’s emotional work and support roles put them at the very center of Nazi evil.” Koonz, \textit{Mothers in the Fatherland}, 6.
[gender] serves as an indispensible category of analysis of social and political power structures that assumes oppression based on gender as a given... It never supposes women free from guilt, but makes the degree of guilt contingent on women’s access to knowledge, political power, and social influence.\textsuperscript{59}

Women religious congregations’ oppression and participation in Nazi Germany were also linked. Determining Catholic sisters’ freedom to act as well as the constraints placed on them within the patriarchal Catholic Church and the National Socialist dictatorship is a main concern of my work.

Sources and Chapter Summaries

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame\textsuperscript{60} make an ideal case study of women religious. The congregation was among the largest women religious teaching congregations in Germany with communities in Bavaria, Westphalia, and Silesia. In 1937, it numbered 3,935 professed sisters and novices in Germany that lived in 261 communities, with the largest contingent of sisters residing in Bavaria.\textsuperscript{61} The congregation also maintained communities throughout Europe and the United States.

\textsuperscript{59} Dagmar Reese and Carola Sachse, “Frauenforschung zum Nationalsozialismus,” in Gravenhorst and Tatschmurat, 105.

\textsuperscript{60} In the United States, the congregation is called School Sisters of Notre Dame, but because this dissertation focuses on the German branch and the congregation’s name, in particular their designation as “poor,” formed an important part of the sisters’ identity, I translated the name Arme Schulschwestern von Unserer Lieben Frau literally as Poor School Sisters of Notre.

In addition to size, the congregation was perhaps the most diverse among teaching congregations in Germany and maintained a plethora of public and private educational institutions. Poor School Sisters taught in numerous public Volksschulen in Bavaria and owned and operated all types of private schools for girls. The women also ran many kindergartens and orphanages, and offered a number of secondary educational opportunities to women such as business and housekeeping courses.

The National Socialist state moved against different schools at different times. Because the Poor School Sisters were active at all levels of education for girls, they allow for a broad study of the Nazis’ policies and measures against Catholic schools and teaching congregations. The fact that a large contingent of Poor School Sisters lived and worked in Bavaria also proved an advantage. The Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, first under Hans Schemm and later under Adolf Wagner, distinguished itself in its anticipatory obedience toward Hitler, and the ministry’s measures against Catholic schools and religious teaching congregations often set the precedent for the rest of Germany.

Third, extensive extant sources made it possible to write the Poor School Sisters’ history in Nazi Germany in some detail from the perspective of the women. The main depositories I utilized for this dissertation were the congregation’s archives in Munich and Brakel, Westphalia. The sisters’ Silesian province was not a focus of my work because of the large loss of records during World War II. The collections in the

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62 The main archive of the congregation is located in in the sisters’ Bavarian motherhouse in Munich under the directorship of M. Consolata Neumann where I conducted much of my research.

63 The Silesian sisters were expelled from the region after World War II and settled in Berlin.
congregation’s archives are so extensive because the Poor School Sisters were free from clerical supervision and independently conducted all of their internal and external affairs. The scattering of the sisters across several hundred communities throughout Germany also meant that there were several hundred mother superiors managing an equal number of communities, schools and business affairs. They and many other sisters frequently corresponded with the motherhouse in Munich. Their letters and reports offer many different insights about the congregation and the sisters themselves.

I also conducted research in a number of federal, state, local, and diocesan archives during my stay in Germany. For instance, the collections found in the Archiv des Erzbistums München und Freising, the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, and state archives in Munich and Würzburg shed light on the interactions between the congregation and the state. My research in the city archives in Bad Tölz and Neumarkt revealed the importance of understanding the initiative on the local level of both the sisters and of Nazi officials.

No set of historical documents is ever complete, of course, and gaps always remain even in the best of archives. Reconstructing the interactions between the Poor School Sisters and Jewish Germans proved a particular challenge because archival documents offered hints but no broad insights. Oral histories of Jewish Holocaust survivors collected by the USC Shoah Foundation Institute yielded much better results, and I was able to reconstruct at least in part this important aspect of the history of women religious congregations in Nazi Germany. In this case and at certain other points in my work, I consider other Catholic congregation alongside the Poor School Sisters for the sake of comparison or to deepen our understanding of this particular group of women.
This dissertation is organized chronologically. The starting point of any historical narrative is somewhat arbitrary. I, like many historians, relied on what Helmut Walser Smith called vanishing points of modern German history to determine where to begin, 1933, and where to end, 1945. But most historical actors resist this kind of neat categorization that serves historians so well. To understand the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1933, it is necessary to understand the historical circumstances and forces that shaped the congregation in the first hundred years of its existence. Not to look back to the previous century could mean seeing the trauma of the twentieth century without the necessary perspective truly to comprehend it. This “long view” is crucial in order to understand how Germans’ perceptions of Catholic sisters changed and evolved in the nineteenth century based on the latter’s work and how these positive images shaped in part the women’s history in the twentieth century.

Chapter One begins in 1833 with the founding of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame by Karolina Gerhardinger in Stadtamhof, Bavaria. I first explore reasons for the sudden proliferation of women religious congregations in Germany and Europe that was part of the wider phenomenon of the “feminization of religion” in the nineteenth century. I explore why young women joined the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in such large numbers and what it meant to be a sister.

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64 According to Smith, “a vanishing point is a focus of research that structures the whole image, while a turning point is where history bends in one direction and not another...[M]odern Germany illustrates how vanishing points structure fields. Whether located in 1914, 1918, 1933, 1939, or 1989, the vanishing points of modern German history [dictate] the questions we ask and the issues we debate.” Helmut Walser Smith, “The Vanishing Point of German History: An Essay on Perspective,” History and Memory 17, no. 1-2, Special Issue: Histories and Memories of Twentieth-Century Germany (2005), 272.

65 Ibid., 289.
The congregation grew rapidly and its sisters came to occupy pivotal roles as educators in the modern nation state. Her roles as an agent of the modernizing state and as a “religious professional” were important aspects of a Poor School Sister’s identity. The women also developed important spheres of autonomy within the Catholic Church that allowed them to act with considerable independence from the episcopate and the clergy. The sisters gained in popularity but their place in the German state and in the institutional Catholic Church nonetheless remained one of subordination. At times, the women faced considerable adversity inside and outside of the church.

In response to their still precarious place in the state and the church, the Poor School Sisters developed flexible organizational structures that allowed them to adjust quickly to adversity and change. The sisters also appropriated beliefs and language of “natural” female weakness and suffering to give their situation meaning and to defend their congregation against the clergy and the state.

The Poor School Sisters’ organizational flexibility, faith, and pragmatism allowed them to adapt well to political and social change in the twentieth century. The sisters faced the upheavals of World War I, revolution, and the Weimar Republic before Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933 posed altogether new challenges to Catholics and the Catholic Church. In Chapter Two, I consider the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Germany from the turn of the century to 1935. The Poor School Sisters were confident they could overcome any challenges the Nazi regime presented. They carefully considered the changed political situation in 1933 and formulated a response based on past experience.
The situation of women religious teachers in Germany immediately became a volatile political issue and brings the conflict and cooperation between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state into sharp relief. Women religious teachers could not be confined to mere church matters. The state expected Catholic sisters instead to become agents of the Nazi state in the classroom. The concordat did not shield Catholic schools from rapid nazification and may in fact have boosted compliance with Nazi measures.

Most Nazi officials believed women religious teachers to be politically unreliable from the onset, and the Poor School Sisters became vulnerable in the classroom as more power shifted to students. I consider the question whether the Nazis’ suspicion of women religious was justified and to what extent the sisters’ schools became nazified in 1933. Whereas the Poor School Sisters, and other women religious congregations, complied with Nazi measures, the sisters may have managed to maintain certain free spaces in their schools after 1933. The experiences of Jewish children in Catholic schools reveal that after 1933 a number of Jewish parents sent their children to Catholic schools to safeguard them from the violent antisemitism in public schools.

The Nazi regime was a dictatorship of consent and in the early years, Hitler’s fortunes rose and fell with the precarious economy. To what extent Nazi measures against women religious congregations depended on Hitler’s own political position became evident during the foreign exchange trials against Catholic congregations that are the focus of Chapter Three. The foreign exchange trials and propaganda campaign of 1935/36 marked an initial high point in the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state.
During the foreign exchange trials, the regime convicted numerous members of the Catholic Church, including Catholic sisters, of violating Germany’s complex foreign exchange regulations. In 1935, Gestapo officials arrested, tried, and convicted the Poor School Sister Canisia Brüggemann for the illegal possession and transfer of foreign exchange. The regime accused the Poor School Sisters of having done irreparable harm to the economy and of imperiling the recovery. With the trials, the regime pursued two distinct aims. First, by portraying itself in a life-and-death struggle over the economy with nuns and the Catholic Church, the Nazis attempted to shift blame for the ongoing economic crisis to the former. Second, the Nazis attempted to create a rift between Catholics and the church, in particular between Catholics and nuns, in preparation for aggressive measures against Catholic schools. The Nazis needed the consent and participation of Germans to move against Catholic sisters.

The conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state escalated further in 1936. For the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, the year 1936 marked a decisive turning point as the state began to dismiss women religious teachers from public schools. The regime’s policies against Catholic schools from 1935 onward and the reaction of the Poor School Sisters are the subjects of Chapter Four.

Far from relying on the episcopate and clergy to speak on their behalf, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame coped with the crisis largely on their own. Although church leaders protested the measures against Catholic schools, such protests had no measureable effect, and it was left to the sisters to negotiate with town officials and to find alternate employment. In Chapter Five, I analyze the impact of the loss of their schools on the congregation and the women. The actions against private and public
confessional schools expose both the reach and the limits of the regime, as well as the extent to which the regime depended on Germans to “act out” its instructions. The sisters and the Catholic laity alike bargained with the state to alleviate the impact of the dismissals. Despite the increasing pressure the regime put on the sisters, they still had a number of options available to them to remain part of German society. Sisters moved deeper into the Catholic milieu and came into closer contact with the clergy, which caused tensions when the latter failed to recognize the professional training of sisters and expected them to perform “women’s work.”

Even after the loss of their schools, the sisters remained an integral part of Germany’s local spiritual economies. The congregation in fact managed to expand its sphere of influence in Protestant regions of Germany where women religious were heretofore mostly unknown. The outbreak of World War II further increased the women’s opportunities for reintegration into the “people’s community.”

Despite their successes, the considerable displacement and uncertainties the Poor School Sisters experienced from 1937 onward began to take a serious toll on the congregation and worsened substantially with the outbreak of war in 1939. During World War II, the congregation of the Poor School Sisters voluntarily and involuntary placed their considerable material and human resources at the disposal of the regime. Both Chapters Five and Six examine the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame during World War II.

The sisters’ motivations for participating in the war effort ranged from considerations of religious traditions, to patriotism, self-preservation, and compulsion. War did not lessen the conflict between the church and the state, and the final impact of
war and the escalating church struggle on the congregation proved severe and lasting, as it accelerated the loss of candidates for sisterhood that had begun in 1936. The professional prospects of candidates vanished along with the congregation’s infrastructures and its educational mission at a time when the state organized girls and women on a large scale and offered them unprecedented access to the public sphere. Total war accelerated this process, and many young women simply could no longer imagine becoming a Catholic Sister.
CHAPTER 1:
THE BUSINESS OF ANGELS: CATHOLIC SISTERS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

1.1 Argument and Historiography

On 10 March 1834, the thirty-six-year-old teacher Karolina Gerhardinger wrote to King Ludwig I of Bavaria to seek approval of her nascent Catholic religious congregation devoted to the education of poor girls. Karolina and two companions had moved to the town of Neunburg vorm Wald in the Bavarian Upper Palatinate the previous year to begin their religious lives together.  

Karolina hoped for the king’s support, because, as she wrote,

the proud, unbelieving free-thinking spirit (*Freigeist*) in its crude ignorance poses an equal danger to altar and throne…I dare to humbly present my petition before the throne of his royal majesty.

Karolina Gerhardinger and her companions were destitute. The sudden deaths of their supporters, the bishop-elect of Regensburg Georg Michael Wittmann and the Viennese

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66 The names of Karolina Gerhardinger’s companions were Maria Blaß and Barbara Weinzierl.

67 Gerhardinger to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, 10 March 1834, in Maria Theresia von Jesu Gerhardinger, *Briefe*, vol. 1 (Munich: Provinzialat der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr., 1979), 3-6. Karolina wrote the letter from Vienna, where she had travelled to seek release of funds promised to the women by their benefactor, the late chaplain at the royal court in Vienna, Franz Sebastian Job, and to petition the sister of Ludwig I, the Empress of Austria, Karoline Charlotte of Bavaria, for support. Maria Liobgid Ziegler, *Die Armen Schulschwestern von Unserer Lieben Frau: Ein Beitrag zur bayerischen Bildungsgeschichte* (Munich: Benno Filser-Verlag, 1935), 45 ff.
court chaplain Franz Sebastian Job had deprived the women of a substantial endowment and an annual income. Without employment or funds to complete the construction of a cloister and a school, Karolina lamented that she and her friends had become “poor orphans exposed to the derision of the enemy.”

King Ludwig I acted promptly.

Karolina Gerhardinger reported on 29 March 1834 that in Munich the King himself had handed her his approval for the proposed religious congregation along with a gift of 1,000 gulden. The Bishop of Regensburg, Bonifaz Kaspar von Urban, granted his ecclesiastical approval to the religious congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame that same month. Karolina Gerhardinger became the congregation’s first general superior, and, after taking permanent vows in November 1835, she adopted the title “reverend mother” and changed her name to Maria Theresia von Jesu Gerhardinger (M[aria] Theresia Gerhardinger).

Karolina Gerhardinger at first rejected the notion of becoming a Catholic sister. She was born on 20 June 1797 in Stadtamhof near Regensburg to a shipmaster and his wife and grew up without siblings in comfortable middle-class surroundings. Karolina attended the local school of the nuns of the Congregation de Notre Dame. In 1809, her

68 Karolina Gerhardinger did not ask the king for money directly. As she explained to King Ludwig, in addition to bequeathing the annual stipend to the women, Job had established a separate fund to benefit the women. Release of the fund was in part contingent on the approval of Carolina’s religious community by the king. Karolina assured the king that after the completion of the school building, her community could support itself through teaching. Gerhardinger to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, 10 March 1834, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 3-6.

69 Gerhardinger to Magistrate of Neunburg vorm Wald, Neunburg, 29 March 1834, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 6-7.


71 Ibid. All Poor School Sisters adopted the name Maria along with their congregational name. This custom is no longer observed today in the School Sisters’ communities in the United States.
teacher, the pedagogue and priest Georg Michael Wittmann, approached Karolina’s parents with the suggestion to educate their daughter as a teacher. Wittmann wished to prepare the girl and her companions for a religious vocation.\textsuperscript{72} The prospect of becoming a nun must have held little appeal for the young girl. The only model Karolina had of religious life was that of aging and cloistered nuns still living in accordance with the strict claustration imposed on all women religious two centuries earlier by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The nuns Karolina knew never left the confines of their convent, and the cloister was constructed so as to prevent them from viewing public spaces.

But Wittmann had a different way of life in mind for his protégé, namely that of a Catholic sister observing limited cloister and devoted to public charitable works. After suppressing active female religious vocations for over two hundred years, church leaders suddenly encouraged the establishment of new and uncloistered communities of women religious in the nineteenth century. The aftermath of the political and social upheaval of the Enlightenment, French Revolution, and Napoleonic conquests threatened to render the once powerful Catholic Church impotent. The clergy now looked to women to help restore the church’s influence by building Catholic institutions that became integral parts of the modern nation state.

Many women took advantage of the opportunities offered them. In the nineteenth century, during what became known as the monastic spring (\textit{Ordensfrühling}), thousands of young women joined new Catholic congregations and worked to ameliorate the pressing social problems of their age. The rapid growth of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame speaks to the enthusiasm of women for active religious devotion.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 14.
vocations. In 1847, fourteen years after establishing her congregation, M. Theresia Gerhardinger already presided over twenty-four religious communities and schools attended by over five thousand girls. The congregation also established its presence in Prussia, and in 1848, the first Poor School Sisters moved to the United States of America.

The focus of this chapter is the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in nineteenth-century Germany. I discuss the establishment and growth of the congregation as part of the nineteenth-century phenomenon of the “feminization of religion.” The questions I address continue to animate scholarly debates. What role did the hierarchy and clergy play in the revival of female religious life in nineteenth-century Germany? How much autonomy did women enjoy within the patriarchal Catholic Church? Why did women join religious communities in such large numbers, and what were the lives of Catholic sisters like? I also ask what roles women religious occupied in the modern nation state, and the obstacles the women faced as they entered the public sphere.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame created meaningful and autonomous spaces for themselves within the patriarchal church and the state. A religious vocation offered women an attractive alternative to marriage at a time when opportunities for women in the secular realm were contracting. The sisters combined high professional standards with a well-defined Catholic mission and came to occupy pivotal roles as educators in the modern German nation state. In their public and charitable roles, women religious obtained a high social status and gained the respect and admiration of Germans of all confessions. But the sisters’ position also remained precarious both within and

73 Gerhardinger to the Poor School Sisters, 30 May 1847, in Gerhardinger, vol. 4, 64-92.
outside of the church. The difficulties the women faced reflect the contest between intersecting trends of secularization and religious revival in the nineteenth century as well as the changing place of women in society. In response to repeated challenges that threatened their work and independence, the sisters developed organizational structures that allowed them to adjust quickly to adversity and change. To give their situation meaning, the Poor School Sisters also developed a particular congregational culture that valued righteous suffering and persecution and that recast “natural” female weakness and powerlessness as strengths. Adversity shaped the Poor School Sisters’ history and identity as much as their role as respected and admired “religious professionals” in modern Germany.

The monastic spring was part of a much larger phenomenon of increased female participation in organized religion in nineteenth-century Europe and North America. My work adds to discussions about the contested meaning of women’s activities in traditional religion in the nineteenth century. Barbara Welter first noted this trend in an article she published in the 1970s, in which she spoke of the “feminization of religion” in the context of nineteenth-century American Protestantism.74 Irmtraud Götz v. Olenhusen defined “feminization of religion” as the increased participation of women in organized Jewish and Christian religion that enabled them to develop their own feminine spirituality and opened a path for women into public spaces.75 The term also denoted a concurrent


75 Von Olenhusen also offers an overview of earlier scholarship on the feminization of religion, with a particular focus on Germany. Irmtraud Götz v. Olenhusen, “Die Feminisierung von Religion und
increased emphasis on feminine cults and feminine forms of worship such as the revival of the Marian cult in the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{76}

Many scholars struggled with the patriarchal nature of most religious institutions that seemed to oppress rather than liberate women. Confronting this paradox without discounting the importance of all religious activities of women, Gail Malmgreen concluded that “what is clear is that the dealings of organized religion with women have been richly laced with ironies and contradictions.\textsuperscript{77} Discomfort with the institutional

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\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. The revival of Marian cults and worship in nineteenth-century Europe was an important aspect of the revival of popular religiosity. Thomas Kselman wrote that Marian apparitions along with miracles and prophesies helped ordinary and often powerless people “to deal with the problems of individual illness and political and social disorder.” The church looked favorably upon popular Marian worship that arose in the nineteenth century and tried to structure and supervise local cults, the most famous of which was Our Lady of Lourdes in France. Thomas A. Kselman, “Our Lady of Necedah. Marian Piety and the Cold War” (working paper, Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, University of Notre Dame, 1982), 11. For a further discussion of Marian piety and popular religion in nineteenth-century Europe, see the excellent monographs by: Thomas A. Kselman, Miracles & Prophesies in Nineteenth-Century France (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), Ruth Harris, Lourdes. Body and Spirit in the Secular Age (New York: Penguin, 1999), and David Blackbourn, Marpingen. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany (New York: Knopf, 1993). The figure of Mary was central to the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, who like many congregations incorporated Mary in the very name of their congregation. Mary was a positive female role model for the sisters in a male-dominated church. The importance of Mary to the Poor School Sisters is further illustrated by the fact that each sister prefaced her religious name with “Maria” upon taking permanent vows.


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Protestant and Catholic churches led some historians to view with skepticism women’s involvement in traditional religion and instead they emphasized women’s roles within non-conforming churches and dissenting sects. Others described as emancipated and progressive only those women who had abandoned religion for secularism. Jonathan Sperber and Ann Taylor Allen argued that the narrative of secularization and the misapplication of Max Weber’s modernization theory led scholars of modern Germany to this conclusion, and Allen countered that “most of the period in which women made

sisterhoods “were important agents in the Victorian outpouring of philanthropy as well as the first wave of feminist practice.” Susan Mumm, Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers. Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), xiii. Although he emphasized the activities of dissenting sects, Hugh McLeod nonetheless acknowledged that the major Protestant and Catholic churches offered one of the few public spaces open to women, affording them “partial independence from male control.” McLeod, “Weibliche Frömmigkeit,” 149.

Based on the findings of Catherine Prelinger, McLeod argued that dissenting sects such as the Deutsch-Katholiken had the greatest potential for women, where questions of women’s rights were debated early on, and whose members “played...a path-breaking role in activities explicitly aimed at increasing women’s rights.” McLeod, “Weibliche Frömmigkeit,” 149. See also: Catherine Prelinger, Charity, Challenge and Change: Religious Dimensions of the Mid Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement in Germany (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), and Sylvia Paletschek, Frauen und Dissens: Frauen im Deutschkatholizismus und in den freien Gemeinden (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1990). Discounting traditional Catholic and Protestant religion as meaningful spaces for women’s participation in nineteenth-century Germany, Irmtraud Götz v. Olenhusen also emphasized the emancipatory agenda of the Deutsch-Katholiken. v. Olenhusen, “Feminisierung,” 14. On the other hand, Dagmar Herzog argued that emancipation of women was not necessarily on the agenda of Deutsch-Katholiken in Baden, “as men fought with one another over the legitimacy of sex and love, and over who should control marriage and family life.” Dagmar Herzog, Intimacy and Exclusion. Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 173.

For instance, Bonnie Smith concluded in her study of women of the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie that their religious beliefs trapped the women in a pre-industrial mindset centered on childrearing and homemaking, whereas their husbands had already crossed the threshold into the rational world of industrializing nineteenth-century France. Bonnie G. Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). In her work on the German women’s movement, Ute Gerhard argued that the history of women in the churches must be described as a “history of sorrow” (Trauergeschichte). Ute Gerhard, Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung (Reinbeck by Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 201. Ursula Baumann dismissed the religious activities of nineteenth-century Protestant women as reactionary. Ursula Baumann, Protestantismus und Frauen-Emancipation in Deutschland, 1850 bis 1920 (New York: Campus Verlag, 1992), and Jutta Schmidt concluded in 1998 that the organization of the Protestant Diakonissen in Kaiserswerth in the nineteenth century was patriarchal, hierarchical, and ultimately oppressive for women. Jutta Schmidt, Beruf: Schwester. Mutterhausdiakonie im 19. Jahrhundert (New York: Campus Verlag, 1998), 247. Ann Taylor Allen offers an excellent overview of scholarship on religion, women, and gender in Modern German history in “Religion and Gender.”
progress toward emancipation...was marked by a considerable increase in their activity and influence in both Christian and Jewish religious life." Histories of Catholic women religious bring the paradox of women and organized religion into sharp relief.

Debates about why the feminization of religion and the monastic spring occurred bring to the fore issues of women’s initiative and autonomy vis-à-vis clerical control and authority. Margaret Lavinia Anderson pointed to the powerful, politically active clergy and cautioned that despite the increase in women’s vocations, “one should not assume that German catholicism [sic] was being feminized” in the nineteenth century. At the same time, Anderson is wary of attributing too much power to churchmen that make Catholics “appear like putty in the clergy’s hands.” In her work on the congregation of the Schwestern vom Armen Kinde Jesu in nineteenth-century Aachen, Relinde Meiwes concluded that the Catholic Church had indeed been feminized. She argued that the monastic spring was part of the women’s movement and emancipation. Although few scholars have analyzed modern German female religious congregations, Meiwes’s work


81 Anderson wrote that “German catholicism, at least after 1871, was too intensely involved in the political struggle for catholic rights, for men to have abdicated their place in the church to women.” Margaret Lavinia Anderson, “The Limits of Secularization: On the Problem of the Catholic Revival in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” The Historical Journal 38, no. 3 (1995), 654.

82 Ibid., 651.

83 Joachim Schmiedl called Meiwes’s research “a pioneer work” that offers “a history of the social and cultural milieu of women communities.” He further wrote that “…It is her [Meiwes] special merit to have drawn attention to the fact that religious congregations made an important contribution to the emancipation of women and the professionalization of social and educational work.” Joachim Schmiedl, “An Assessment of the Histories of Religious Communities in Germany,” in Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Historiography, Research and Legal Position, ed. Jan DeMaeyer, Sofie Laplaer, and Joachim Schmiedl (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004).
does not stand alone. Meiwes reached similar conclusions as some of her English, Irish, French, and North American colleagues.

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Meiwes emphasized the initiative, autonomy, and agency of women who founded religious congregations in the nineteenth century. She attributed the attraction of religious vocations for women to a general religious revival, the social question, and the women’s question. The clergy receded into the background. Meiwes argued that the initiative of women religious caught church leaders by surprise, and not until 1900, when Pope Leo XIII issued the apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo,* did the Catholic Church institutionalize the new forms of religious life already practiced by tens of thousands of women religious. Mary Peckham Magray reached similar conclusions in the case of female religious communities in Ireland. Jonathan Sperber, however, called Meiwes’s assessment of women’s initiative “a bit naïve,” and criticized her for downplaying the important role of the clergy in the founding processes of congregations in nineteenth-century Germany.

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86 The priests that were involved in the founding process of the *Schwestern vom armen Kinde Jesu* were the confessor and brother of the foundress Clara Fey and the local bishop. The archbishop in charge, however, was not informed until one year later. Meiwes emphasized the importance of the combination of religion and charitable work, and argued that in the absence of social safety nets, Catholic sisters were driven to improve the plight of the poor. In regard to the women’s question, Meiwes asserted Catholic congregations were also the first organizations that offered women professional occupations long before similar opportunities were available in the secular realm. Relinde Meiwes, “…Die Äußeren Beziehungen fehlten fast ganz.’ Katholische Frauenbewegung und religiöses weibliches Genossenschaftswesen im wilhelminischen Deutschland,” in *Katholikinnen und Moderne. Katholische Frauenbewegung zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation,* ed. Gisela Muschoil (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2003), 15 and Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn,* 47, 310.


88 Mary Peckham Magray wrote that a “principal goal” of her book on nineteenth-century Irish female Catholic congregations “has been to challenge the notion that the male leaders of the nineteenth-century Catholic Church encouraged female religious orders in order to facilitate its change in direction toward an emphasis on education and social services.” Magray argued instead that women, on their own initiative, took advantage of the disarray the Irish Catholic Church was in and established religious congregations. 127, 129.

89 Sperber, “Kirchengeschichte”, 18.
1.2 Creating Autonomous Spaces for Women in the Catholic Church

Ignoring the important role of the clergy in the monastic spring overlooks an aspect of the history of women religious congregations that shaped their institutional and personal identities in decisive ways. In the case of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, influential clergymen guided M. Theresia Gerhardinger from a young age. When in 1809, the priest Georg Michael Wittmann contemplated a religious vocation for the then twelve-year-old M. Theresia, the Catholic Church had been reduced to a position of profound weakness. In the aftermath of revolution and conquests, Napoleon authorized German princes to seize church properties and dissolve cloisters in 1803. This deprived the Catholic Church of its temporal power and dealt a decisive blow to monastic life. In 1809, the state closed the private Catholic school of the Chorfrauen de Notre Dame,

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90 In 1809, Wittmann was pastor of the cathedral in Regensburg and a close friend of Johann Michael Sailer. Sailer’s Landshuter Kreis was an important intellectual center of Catholic renewal in early nineteenth-century Bavaria. The group became quite influential politically after Ludwig I ascended the Bavarian throne in 1825. Rudolf Lill, “Reichskirche – Säkularisation – Katholische Bewegung: Zur historischen Ausgangssituation des deutschen Katholizismus im 19. Jahrhundert,” in Der Soziale und politische Katholizismus: Entwicklungsrichten in Deutschland 1803-1964, ed. Anton Rauscher (Munich and Vienna: Günter Olzog Verlag, 1981), 26. In her discussion of the establishment of female Catholic congregations in nineteenth-century Münster, Meike Wagener-Esser also emphasized the involvement of influential churchmen such as the archbishop of Cologne, Clemens August Freiherr von Droste zu Vischering. 53. Although Susan O’Brien rejects that notion that the clergy controlled the timing of the monastic spring, she nonetheless acknowledged the important part the church hierarchy played in the founding of female religious congregations in England after Catholic emancipation in 1829, 121.

91 The Reichsdeputationshauptschluss of 1803 marked the end of the Holy Roman Empire. German princes ceded territories West of the Rhine to France in exchange for church properties. Bavaria had long agitated for the secularization of church properties and made substantial territorial gains. King Maximilian I of Bavaria and his statesman Maximilian Count von Montgelas together secularized and mediatized over three hundred Catholic cloisters, church territories, and smaller sovereignties, adding 843,000 new subjects to the state, including Protestants and Jews for the first time. In 1806, Napoleon also declared Bavaria a kingdom. Manfred Treml, “Königreich Bayern (1806-1818),” in Geschichte des Modernen Bayern: Königreich und Freistaat, ed. Peter März (Munich: Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, 1994), 24. See also: Karl Hausberger, Reichskirche, Staatskirche, “Papstkirche” (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2008), 84 ff.
where M. Theresia Gerhardinger was a student, and dissolved the convent. The impact of these political events forced the hierarchy to reconsider the position of women in the church. The clergy began to recognize the labor of women as a potential new source of influence and power that promised to return the Catholic Church to a pivotal position in the modern nation state. Although, as Rudolf Schlögl argued, this change of attitude did not come easy to church leaders, it was their explicit wish to revive active women religious vocations and it explains in part the timing of the monastic spring.

The example of Mary Ward further illustrates that women’s initiative alone was not sufficient to overcome clerical resistance and revive active religious vocations. Women challenged the claustration of nuns imposed by the Council of Trent from the beginning. In 1609, the twenty-four-year-old English gentlewoman Mary Ward and her companions established a religious congregation devoted to the education of girls, and, as


93 Both Jonathan Sperber and Rudolf Lill concluded that the Catholic Church benefitted from secularization, because it forced church leaders to modernize some of its structures and refocus its energy on the spiritual and social welfare of the laity. All of this enabled the church to remain relevant in the modern state. Sperber, 10 ff, and Lill, 26.

94 Rudolf Schlögl concluded that regarding the changed attitude toward women, the church “had to first condescend to this view. As an institution of the aristocracy and the powerful, the [Catholic Church] was so closely tied to the exclusively male political and social order, [the hierarchy] did not deem it necessary to pay any special attention to women.” Rudolf Schlögl, “Sünderin, Heilige, oder Hausfrau? Katholische Kirche und weibliche Frömmigkeit um 1800,” in v. Olenhusen, Wunderbare Erscheinungen, 16.
Bishop Jacques Blaes of Saint-Omer wrote in 1615, “because of their task, the women have abandoned enclosure.”95 Although a number of Mary’s contemporaries admired her person and her work, she became the target of scathing criticism and ridicule.96 In 1631, Pope Urban VIII dissolved Mary Ward’s religious communities, condemning her and her followers as women who carried out many works that were least suitable to their sex, its mental weakness as well as womanly modesty… [and that were unsuitable] in particular to the honor of virgins.97

Mary Ward was imprisoned and declared “a heretic, a schismatic, an obstinate rebel against the Holy Church…to be…thrown into the jaws of death.”98 She died in 1645 in England. No one can accuse Mary Ward of lack of vision, enthusiasm, and perseverance as she fought to establish her religious community. But her project had one major flaw: in

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96 Although Mary Ward counted among her supporters the Bishop of Saint-Omer Jacques Blaes, Cardinal Ottavio Bandini, Count Thomas Sackville, and the Infanta of Spain, Isabella Clara Eugenia, she also had many enemies. One of them, her countryman John Bennett wrote from Rome in March 1622 that the Mary Ward sisters had been received by the Congregation of Regulars in Rome, and that “this churte remeyneth much scandalized with there redicoulouse practes…They would have thee wandering institute confirmed without clausure…They are a fullie to this towne and I assure you have much impeached the opinion which was hold of the modesty and shamefastnesse of our country women. Finally without clausure they must dissolve…” John Bennett to Edward Bennett, 25 March 1622, in Dirmeier, vol. 1, 661-662.

97 Qtd. in Evangelisti, Nuns, 216.

98 Mary Ward’s schools of the “English Ladies” continued as a secular institute. In 1749, as political winds were changing and the Enlightenment began to threaten the primacy of religion, the Holy See finally recognized Mary Ward’s institute in its secular form via the papal bull Quamis iusto. Mary Ward was not recognized as the foundress of the institute and the Catholic Church waited to rehabilitate her person until the end of the twentieth century. Ibid, 216-218 (quote: 216).
the seventeenth century, the Catholic clergy did not yet need the labor of uncloistered women religious and was therefore not prepared to suffer them in their midst.\textsuperscript{99}

The clergy’s encouragement of female vocations in the aftermath of far-reaching political change in no way diminishes the initiative of women. The important question is not who authorized the founding of women religious congregations, but why women responded to the call and what kind of spaces they occupied within the Catholic Church. The rich sources from the congregational archives of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame allow for the reconstruction of much of the congregation’s history in the nineteenth century from the perspective of the women themselves.

There is no one simple answer why female religious vocations surged in the nineteenth century. But their biographies suggest that many sisters were compelled by the prospect of combining a religious calling with a meaningful profession and material security. The patriarchal Catholic Church offered women rare free spaces at a time when women’s social and legal position actually declined in the new German state. Isabel Hull revealed that women’s options contracted in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germany as the practitioners of civil society came to associate citizenship with maleness and the public sphere and women with “natural” motherhood and the private sphere under the authority of husbands and fathers.\textsuperscript{100} Ann Taylor Allen wrote that the conservative reaction following the 1848 Revolutions further strengthened patriarchy and traditional

\textsuperscript{99} Susan O’Brien argues, however, that women like Mary Ward and her congregation “gradually altered the popular church conception of a nun and by the 1850s the active apostolate had become the norm.” In other words, women themselves more so than political and social circumstances affected the change in the church leadership, 113.

\textsuperscript{100} Isabel Hull, \textit{Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 410. See also Dagmar Herzog’s outstanding work on the status of women in nineteenth-century Baden in Germany.
forms of male authority. A religious vocation offered women a meaningful alternative to marriage and a secure future in an age of widespread poverty.

The first paragraph of the Rule and Constitution of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame highlights the immense importance of the congregation’s professional and educational work:

The religious congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame was founded in the year 1833...for the purpose of the education and edification [Erziehung] of children.102

The sisters viewed teaching as an apostolic mission, and considered the “rescue of souls [in order] to lead them to God” a priority and “a true business of angels” (Engelsgeschäft).103 M. Theresia Gerhardinger stressed that education alone without instructions in the Catholic faith was useless, and that a school that restricted itself only to academic lessons was like a grave. No matter how prettily adorned, it “brought forth only corpses that soon poison the air around them with their foul breath of decay.”104 To fulfill this dual mission, Poor School Sisters had to exhibit both intelligence and religious fervor. Women like nineteen-year-old M. Seraphina D., who entered the congregation in


102 Regel und Konstitution der Armen Schulschwestern de Notre Dame, Part I (Munich: Ernst Stahl’sche Buchdruckerei [Joseph Zauber], 1924), 1. (Hereafter: Rule and Constitution).

103 The Rule further stipulated that the congregation had been founded for the education of Catholic children, and the sisters would therefore not open schools for children of various confessions. The sisters did however, routinely accept Protestant and Jewish students upon request of parents. Rule and Constitution, Part I, 57, 65.

1848 and yearned for both “virtue and scholarship,” were ideal.105 The 1863 obituary of M. Sidonie von M. points to the significance of spirituality and learning by praising her piety and scholarly achievements in music and French.106

The centrality of the Catholic faith to their work did not mean that the Poor School Sisters’ educational mission was backward-looking or lacking in rigor. On the contrary, the sisters insisted on high standards of teacher training and utilized modern pedagogical principles advanced by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who advocated the idea of the teacher-mother.107 The ideal Poor School Sister showed love, patience, and kindness toward children.108 M. Theresia Gerhardinger often called on her sisters “to be mothers to the dear little ones in the schools…[and] not paid servants (Lohnmägde).”109 It was the duty of a sister to learn and adopt new pedagogical principles and other advancements in education. The general superior wrote on the subject that “the School Sisters will only run schools and institutes for as long as their successes do not lag behind those of secular teachers.”110 Possessing sound pedagogical skills was so

105 M. Seraphina D., undated, OAAS M., Nekrologe.

106 M. Sidonie von M., 7 April 1863, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

107 On the pedagogy and philosophy of Pestalozzi, and how women used his model of the teacher-mother to enter the public sphere as educators, see the superb work by Ann Taylor Allen, Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

108 The Poor School Sisters’ Rule and Constitution charged sisters with “maintaining and encouraging the natural lightheartedness of children, and to grant them from their hearts their innocent play and fun.” This did not mean that the sisters did not insist on discipline. The women were permitted to feel “holy wrath” in certain situations, but they should never break out in unseemly screaming or verbally abuse or mock the children. Rule and Constitution, Part II, 61 - 63.

109 Gerhardinger to Poor School Sisters, 30 May 1847, in Gerhardinger, vol. 4, 75.

important because teaching poor, orphaned, and often neglected children was no easy
task. M. Caroline Friess, for instance, reported in 1850 about her efforts to teach
neglected immigrant children in the United States:

It was no small matter to introduce discipline to such children…All
I could do was to resort to storytelling, lead them in singing and
the like, in order to catch the birds and by degrees clip their wings.
Of course, we had to give merit tickets as an incentive to
cooperation and holy pictures as prizes; these worked like magnets
attracting eager girls.111

Although Karolina Gerhardinger often raised the concern of matching or
exceeding the accomplishments of secular teachers, the Poor School Sisters had little
competition in the first half of the nineteenth century and outdid their secular
counterparts with ease. As was the case in all German states at the time, there were few
public schools in Bavaria and their standards were low.112

Few schools existed because compulsory schooling became an important matter
of state only in nineteenth-century Europe.113 In December 1802, the Bavarian prince-

111 Mother Caroline Friess wrote about the children of German immigrants she was teaching upon
her arrival in the United States. “Winning the hearts” of children was of the utmost importance to Mother
Caroline Friess, because “then, even if at times she [the teaching sister] must seem strict and severe, they
will not resent it because they have become devoted to her.” Friess to Mueller, 18 June 1850, in The Letters

112 For a history of the evolution of public schooling in Bavaria and Prussia see Karl A. Schleunes,

113 According to Schleunes, in the eighteenth century, enlightened thinkers such as Rousseau
extended man’s capacity to reason to peasants and the poor, and “economic theories that saw in agriculture
the source of all wealth necessarily placed the peasant in a new light.” Schleunes wrote further that “the
elites began to occupy themselves with various pedagogical schemes on how to educate the lower orders,
and the ‘Erziehungsroman,’ or novel of education, flourished in this setting…Pedagogical theories and
schools in which they could be demonstrated sprang up by the dozens.” The eighteenth century also saw a
revival of higher and university education. In Prussia, Wilhelm von Humboldt led the effort that resulted in
the founding of a university in Berlin in 1809, and in Bavaria, the revival of higher education was led by
Johan Adam Ickstatt at the University of Würzburg, even though at the time, Würzburg was not yet part of
Bavaria, 9-11.
elector Maximilian IV Joseph, the later Bavarian King Maximilian I, and his enlightened minister Maximilian Count von Montgelas made schooling compulsory for all children aged six to twelve.\textsuperscript{114} Mass schooling was to halt widespread pauperization and create wealth for the state by raising loyal, God-fearing, productive citizens freed from superstition and ignorance.\textsuperscript{115} Religion remained an important tool to maintain the prevailing social order, and schools remained separated by gender and confession. At the same time, Montgelas sought to curb the influence of the Catholic Church in the new school system. But the contest over control of education between church and state remained mostly an intellectual exercise because few children actually attended school.\textsuperscript{116} Money was at the heart of the problem. The state lacked funds to train teachers and operate schools, and most parents were either too poor or unwilling to pay the mandated school fees for their children.\textsuperscript{117} M. Theresia Gerhardinger recognized that to ask poor

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{115} Maximilian IV Joseph and Montgelas hoped that compulsory schooling would not only combat widespread social ills such as pauperization and crime, but also help to create a uniform and modern nation state and loyal subjects out of myriad territories and diverse populations that for the first time included Protestants and Jews. Ibid, 23 ff.

\textsuperscript{116} Montgelas followed the lead of Friedrich Niethammer, a Protestant professor at the University of Würzburg, who believed that schools should impress upon pupils “the eternal truths of religion and virtue and make them receptive to the further teachings of the church.” Due to lack of funds, the state also engaged Catholic priests as school inspectors and school districts coincided with parish districts. With the conclusion of a concordat between the church and the Bavarian state in 1817, the church also regained some ground it had lost in education during the secularization. Ibid., 32 ff.

\textsuperscript{117} The mandatory fee for school attendance starting in 1806 was “2 kreuzer per child per week,” and few parents were willing or able to pay this fee. Protokoll, 13 October 1805, BayHStA MK 23227. Author’s note: 1 kreuzer equaled four pfennige (pennies)
people to pay school fees for their children would be too harsh, and the Poor School Sisters made it their mission to teach for free.\textsuperscript{118}

Granting the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, along with other religious congregations, permission to operate primary and secondary schools eased the financial burden of both the state and parents. But despite their fiscal difficulties, Maximilian I and Montgelas were loath to undo their efforts to curb the influence of the church by delegating the education of their youngest subjects to Catholic sisters. It was not until King Ludwig I ascended the Bavarian throne in 1825 that Karolina Gerhardinger was able to establish her congregation. Ludwig I, a romantic and devout Catholic, believed that the church and religion played key roles in public order and morality and in stabilizing his kingdom.\textsuperscript{119} The king was especially keen on restoring religious communities to Bavaria, and he offered his patronage as well as funds to realize this goal. When considering the history and success of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, it is important to consider their crucial partnership with the Bavarian state. This alliance

\textsuperscript{118} Gerhardinger to King Ludwig I, Neunburg, 29 March 1834, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 5. Many parents were also reluctant to send their children to school because their labor was required on the farm. In 1849, the major of Rainau wrote a letter of inquiry to the mayor of Bad Tölz regarding the Poor School Sisters. Many citizens of Rainau believed that the sisters’ institute was not suitable for a town consisting mostly of day laborers and small holdings. The major asked how many hours the children spent daily with the sisters, because “here the children are already needed to labor in the field at age nine because we are a town of small holding farms.” Weigl to Niggl, 29 June 1849, StdBT, A Vd 8. To persuade reluctant parents and children to come to school and to alleviate some of the poverty, the sisters often operated a soup kitchen, which proved a great incentive for girls to attend school. In 1854, Karolina Gerhardinger reported about the soup kitchen for girls in the Bavarian town of Karlskrone, which had significantly reduced absenteeism. For the school year, the school of the sisters recorded 800 cases of absenteeism versus 2,484 in the school for boys. Gerhardinger wrote: “The hungry birds are drawn to us with this bait (Lockspeisen)...and are thus caught without their noticing.” Gerhardinger to Pfarrer von Karlskrone, 27 February 1854, in Gerhardinger, vol. 10, 72.

allowed the sisters to build a strong base in Bavaria from which they withstood the Kulturkampf and expanded to other German states, Europe, and the United States.

The great need for schools for girls in Bavaria and Prussia led to the congregation’s rapid growth in the nineteenth century. The Poor School Sisters managed their large networks of communities and schools in Europe and the United States without clerical interference. The congregation therefore offered women rare professional opportunities. Some Poor School Sisters held leadership positions at a very young age. For instance, M. Fortunata B. devoted herself to teaching with such “fire and duty” that congregational leaders selected the merely nineteen-year-old sister in 1859 to lead the new community in Klingenberg.\(^{120}\) This was not unusual. In 1853, M. Juliana S. was also nineteen when she became superior of the Poor School Sisters in Freistadt.\(^{121}\)

M. Telesphora M.’s long career as a Poor School Sister was most impressive. Born in 1865 as one of sixteen children to a teacher in Lower Franconia, she entered the institute of the Poor School Sisters as a student at the age of fourteen. M. Telesphora thrived as a Poor School Sister, and over the years filled the offices of teacher, mother superior, novice mistress, and general secretary. In her capacity as general secretary, she oversaw all of the congregation’s business affairs and visited hundreds of communities in Europe and the United States.\(^{122}\)

Many women embraced sisterhood by choice, not out of need. It was not unusual for well-off women to choose an active religious vocation over marriage. M. Alcantara G.

\(^{120}\) M. Fortunata B., 21 May 1892, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

\(^{121}\) M. Juliana S., 17 September 1894, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

\(^{122}\) Emma Dorothea M. Telesphora M., 7 March 1952, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
and her biological sister M. Petronilla G. were the daughters of “respectable and wealthy parents” from Würzburg, who “enjoyed every conceivable prospect and had many opportunities to be provided for in the world, but [they] rejected them all.” In the 1840s both became Poor School Sisters. Women from all social classes joined the congregation of the Poor School Sisters, and privileged aristocratic women like M. Magdalena von F. donned the same habit as the former servants of aristocrats like M. Ildephonsa E.

Many women had to fight for their religious vocation against the fierce resistance of parents and relatives. M. Emmanula S. became a Poor School Sister only at the advanced age of thirty in 1847, after “a long and bitter struggle due to the opposition of her family and important relatives.” As a sister, she combined her talent as a musician with her “Christian love and good will.” M. Herlinde E. was an only-child, and “all the pleading and tears” of her parents could not dissuade her from entering the congregation in 1856. M. Wolfganga P. from Hungary too fought fierce struggles with her parents over her vocation until they let her join the congregation but without providing a dowry.

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123 M. Alcantara G., 2 September 1852, and M. Petronilla G., 21 March 1861, OAAS M, Nekrologe. It was not unusual for biological sisters to join the congregation together. M. Zita B., for example, joined the congregation along with three sisters in the nineteenth century. A fifth sister joined the nursing congregation of the Sisters of Mercy and her only brother joined a Franciscan order. M. Zita B., 21 October 1894, OAAS M, Nekrologe.


125 M. Emmanuela S., 28 September 1879, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

126 Ibid.

127 M. Wolfganga P., 1863, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
Not all young women overcame the opposition of their families. In the 1840s at the age of fourteen, M. Fotina G., the daughter of a merchant, entered the Poor School Sisters’ institute in Amberg as a student and soon desired to become a sister herself. Hearing of her wish, her horrified parents removed M. Fotina from the school after two years. M. Fotina waited for fifteen years before she could join the congregation in 1860 after the death of her parents. She passed away three years later. In 1884, M. Caroline Friess, the general commissioner of the Poor School Sisters in North America, wondered whether she should dismiss the boarder Frances Morgenthal, who wanted to become a sister against the wishes of her father, because she reasoned that “the scolding and swearing of this man [her father] can be good for neither the child nor for us.”128 Mrs. Morgenthal eventually forced her daughter to come home with her.129

The orphan M. Ludmilla W. had no family to consult about her choice to become a Catholic sister. She spent her childhood in the orphanage of the Poor School Sisters in Augsburg. When she came of age in the 1850s, she directly entered the congregation’s candidature in Munich and became a sister.130 Nothing suggests that M. Ludmilla did not feel called to sisterhood, but as a poor woman without family her prospects were bleak, and a religious vocation offered her the means to secure her future.

Worsening poverty further limited women’s already narrow options in the nineteenth century. Frequent harvest failures, rising food prices, population growth, unemployment, and the breakdown of traditional social structures caused widespread and

128 Friess to Director of the Louis Mission Society, Milwaukee, April 1858, in Friess, 80-89.
129 Ibid.
130 M. Ludmilla W., 28 July 1866, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
increasing pauperization in Bavaria and Prussia. In the early 1800s in Bavaria, a quarter of the population was either poor or teetered on the brink of poverty. 131

In this volatile era, religious congregations offered rare opportunities for both improvement and security. The uncle of the orphan M. Aquila M., for example, viewed a religious vocation as an explicit means “to secure the child’s future” and had her “educated in the institute of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame.” 132 M. Aquila became a sister at the age of twenty in 1861 but she passed away from tuberculosis in 1864. 133 In 1852, Egid Schmiedbauer appealed to King Maximilian II for a scholarship, so that his daughter Mathilde could train as a teacher and join the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. Schmiedbauer lacked the means to finance his daughter’s education. He explained that he was the father of ten children who are all unprovided for, and whose keep and schooling has become a great concern due to the complete lack of funds and an [annual] income of only 600 gulden, which, in light of the high food prices, forces [me] to make bitter sacrifices. 134

131 This poor class was comprised of day laborers, widows, old people, and families whose land could not support them. Although rapid population growth was less of a problem in Bavaria than in Prussia, poor harvests and frequent crop failures led to fewer employment opportunities for landless laborers and also led to sharp increases in food prices in the nineteenth century. Speculators who horded scarce grain drove food prices to exorbitant heights. Angelika Baumann, ‘‘Armut muß verächtlich bleiben…’ Verwaltete Armut und Lebenssituationen verarmter Unterschichten um 1800 in Bayern, in Kultur der einfachen Leute, ed. Richard van Dülmen (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1983), 156-157. On poverty in nineteenth-century Germany, see also Günther Schulz, “Armut und Armenpolitik in Deutschland im Frühen 19. Jahrhundert,” Historisches Jahrbuch 115, no. 2 (1995), 389-410.


133 Ibid.

134 Schmiedbauer to Maximilian II, 10 January 1852, BayHStA, MK 22105.
He added that knowing at least one of his children was well provided for would be a great relief.¹³⁵

Large families and poverty remained a concern well into the twentieth century. Caroline L., who was born in 1917 was one of fifteen children, and her poor farmer parents hired her out as a farm hand at the age of nine.¹³⁶ Training as a woman religious teacher improved Caroline’s harsh circumstances so common to rural farming families in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and enriched her life. Although many women escaped poverty and had access to a higher education by becoming Catholic sisters, not all religious congregations offered the same opportunities to women. Drudgery and hardships remained part of the lives of many sisters. Women religious dedicated to nursing of the sick and the handicapped in particular often performed long hours of hard labor under difficult circumstances. For instance, the Franciscan sisters at Schönbrunn near Munich operated a home for handicapped children and a large farm. The women wrote in 1873:

That these past ten years have demanded work, toil, and depravations cannot be denied, and it is therefore understandable why so many who have asked to be admitted were scared off and

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ S. Bernarde L., interview in Wiethaler, 29. Many rural children in the nineteenth and twentieth century were acquainted with hard farm labor and hunger. Oskar Maria Graf wrote about the farm of his grandfather in nineteenth-century Bavaria: “He [the grandfather], the farmer’s wife, the servants, and the children once they were eight or nine years old – all rose at two in the morning every day. Prayers were said before a flour soup was served. Then some went into the stables and some into the fields. Besides the regular very simple meals there was no more rest until deep into the night.” Oskar Maria Graf, Das Leben meiner Mutter (Munich: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1947), 24. In his memoir, Friedrich Paulsen, born in 1846 in rural Schleswig-Holstein wrote about his playmates, five siblings from the neighboring farmstead, who were “always hungry and needy mouths. The farmstead was small, actually too small to be considered a real farmstead…the parents were overburdened with work…The butter was spread thinly on the bread, and dumplings were rationed.” Friedrich Paulsen. Aus meinem Leben. Jugenderinnerungen (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1910), 73.
left us again. Of the 5 sisters, who were here at the beginning in 1863 only one remains.\textsuperscript{137}

Although the life of a Franciscan sister in Schönbrunn was much harsher than that of most Poor School Sisters neither had it easy. M. Theresia Gerhardinger actually preferred applicants from poorer backgrounds who were familiar with a measure of hardship. She believed that “grown maidens and children, who are used to a comfortable domestic life can only very seldom be bent under the yoke of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{138} At the same time, she maintained, the desire for material security should not be the main reason why a woman sought to enter a religious congregation.

1.3 The Path to Sisterhood

The Poor School Sisters’ Rule and Constitution warns that unsuitable applicants should never be admitted out of “misguided pity.”\textsuperscript{139} Congregational leaders denied the teenaged orphan M. Electa W.’s request for admission numerous times on account of her bad health before finally relenting in 1860.\textsuperscript{140} The commitment women made to the congregation was to last a lifetime, and superiors exercised much caution in their selection of applicants. In 1863, M. Theresia Gerhardinger wrote to M. Caroline Friess in the United States to be cautious in the admittance of candidates, because she preferred

\textsuperscript{137} In addition to taking care of handicapped children, the Franciscan sisters at Schönbrunn also operated a large estate that was burdened by debt. Aside from their myriad tasks on the estate and at the home for the handicapped, the sisters also took in washing and mending that kept them awake late into the night to make ends meet. Chronik der Franziskanerinnen zu Schönbrunn, 1873, AEM, Franziskanerinnen Schönbrunn, 13123.

\textsuperscript{138} Gerhardinger to King Ludwig I, Munich, 8 January 1846, in Gerhardinger, vol. 4, 13.

\textsuperscript{139} Rule and Constitution, Part II, 5.

\textsuperscript{140} M. Electa W., 8 May 1899, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
“one dove above one hundred snakes.” The congregation’s Rule and Constitution regulated admission to the community. Girls and young women of legitimate birth and good reputation between the ages of thirteen and twenty seven and who were in possession of a cheerful disposition and good health could become Poor School Sisters.

M. Theresia Gerhardinger always tested the motives of applicants. She once wrote to a young woman:

You seek to be admitted to our poor cloister…but it is not easy what you ask…Will your heart know how to persevere until the end, in poverty, chastity, and in complete denial of your own will?

The demands on a sister were great, and neither the congregation nor the applicants were well served by admitting those unsure of their vocation. The Poor School Sister M. Cleta S. followed the advice of her confessor and entered the congregation “without personal conviction.” In 1864, she asked the archbishop to be released from her vows, because, “I have not been able to perform my tasks with joy; on the contrary, I always feel out of place and in a forced situation.” M. Cleta left the congregation that year.

M. Lioba S. also could not adjust to religious life. She was excluded from the congregation in 1864 because she was “a vain and spoiled mother’s child

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141 Gerhardinger to Friess, 10 December 1863, in Gerhardinger, vol. 12, 33-35.

142 Illegitimacy, which was common in nineteenth-century Germany, did not prevent a girl from joining the congregation. The congregation was free to seek a dispensation from the church when a suitable but illegitimately born candidate applied for admission. Rule and Constitution, Part II, 6,7

143 Gerhardinger to Dallinger, ca. 1836, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 20.

144 Schumacher to Erzbischof von München und Freising, 15 December 1864, AEM, Erzbischöfe 1821 bis 1917, Kasten 15 Nr. 2.

145 Ibid.
(Mutterkind)...who never had a real calling for religious life.” A vocation was not for everyone, and to test a woman’s suitability and commitment to the congregation, the process of becoming a sister took several years.

The age when a girl or women committed to religious life varied. It was not unusual for girls to enter the institute as a Präparantin, an aspiring sister and teacher in training, at the age of twelve or thirteen. For instance, in the 1840s, M. Innozentia F. and M. Josefa Hermanna S. both entered the congregation at the age of twelve. Entering as a Präparantin with the explicit goal to take vows differed from being a regular student at the institute. Many Poor School Sisters started as regular students or boarders at even younger ages before deciding on a religious vocation. M. Borromäa R. was a pupil at the congregational boarding school in Munich in the 1840s, and “even before her first communion the desire awakened in her to become a Poor School Sister.” This statement recorded at the sister’s death in 1859 may sound suspect, but early vocations should not be dismissed out of hand.

M. Burkarda K. was born in 1863, and the Poor School Sisters educated her from the age of nine. At her first communion, M. Burkarda vowed to become a Poor School Sister. Her mother objected and removed her from the school in 1877 to prevent her daughter from joining the congregation and to ensure she made an eligible match.

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146 Protokoll. Entlassung zweier Schulschwestern de N.D., 15 November 1864, AEM, Erzbischöfe 1821 bis 1917, Kasten: 15 Nr. 2.

147 M. Innozentia F., 20 January 1856 and M. Josefa Hermanna S., 6 November 1855, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

148 M. Borromäa R., 8 May 1859, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

149 M. Burkarda K., undated, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
Although M. Burkarda did receive marriage proposals, she remained true to her childhood promise and took the veil twelve years later upon her mother’s death.\textsuperscript{150} M. Valentina B. faced a similar situation. She was born in 1860 and decided at the age of eleven that she wanted to become a Poor School Sister. Her parents refused their consent, and M. Valentina did not begin her candidature until she was twenty-four.\textsuperscript{151}

The beginning of the candidature marked the young woman’s formal admission to the congregation on a trial basis. The common ages for an aspiring Poor School Sister to start her candidature were between sixteen and twenty-two, but it was not unusual for women in their late twenties and early thirties to seek admission to the congregation. Women who prepared for a teaching career could commence their candidature only after graduating from the congregation’s seminary for teachers.\textsuperscript{152} During her candidature, a young woman started teaching and was trained in a “healthy religious life.”\textsuperscript{153} Later on, when requirements for teacher training changed, candidates usually completed the mandatory student teaching between the first and second state examinations. A candidate for lay sisterhood began working in her assigned post as a cook or housekeeper.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{151} M. Valentina B., undated, OAAS M, Nekrolog.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Author’s note: Lay sisters were subject to no such requirement. Also, once women could matriculate at university, aspiring sisters who prepared for a career as a secondary school teacher that required a university education only had to complete their abitur (German high school) before commencing their candidature.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Like most congregations, the Poor School Sisters had two types of sisters divided according to their professions as teachers (Lehrschwestern) or housekeepers (Laienschwestern). Laienschwestern or lay sisters were trained in a novitiate separate from the teaching sisters. Rule and Constitution, Part II, 10 – 12, 26-27.
\end{itemize}
Candidates lived and worked alongside professed sisters, so both parties could decide whether or not a young woman was suited for religious life. When the community in Neumarkt (Obf.) was established in 1852, it consisted of three professed sisters, two candidates, and one servant. In March 1853, the superiors released one of the candidates, Kunigunde L., “because she was not suited for religious life.” Candidates were also known as “bonnet sisters” because of the modified habit they wore that consisted of a white bonnet and black dress. The young women could also wear secular clothing when needed. M. Theresia Gerhardinger sometimes preferred to send candidates to staff schools in towns whose magistrates and citizens showed a particular enmity toward sisters in religious habits. In 1850, for instance, Gerhardinger decided only to send candidates in worldly clothing to the town of Rain in Bavaria in the hopes of gradually overcoming the town’s opposition to women religious teachers.

The length of the candidature varied. In the beginning it often lasted only one year. For instance, M. Hieronyma W. was born in 1818 and already trained as a teacher before applying for admission to the congregation of the Poor School Sisters. She joined the congregation in 1841 at the age of twenty-two as a candidate. In 1842, she entered the novitiate and took her initial vows in 1843. Candidatures for women religious teachers became longer at the end of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, as candidates now had to complete required student teaching and prepare for new and more

154 Chronik der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr. in Neumarkt (Obf.), 1 July, 1852.
155 Ibid., 19 March 1853.
156 Gerhardinger to Königliche Regierung von Oberbayern (Kammer des Innern), Munich, 12 February 1850, Briefe vol. VI, 83.
157 Nekrolog, M. Hieronyma Wittmann, 5 December 1852, OA.
rigorous state examinations. Berta M. Clementina F. completed her seminary training in 1894. Her candidature lasted five years from 1894 to 1899 while she worked as an assistant teacher and prepared for the final state examination. Congregational leaders could also extend the candidature at their discretion if a woman experienced difficulties. For instance, M. Berwarda S. started her candidature at the age of sixteen in 1854, but her “impetuous character caused her many struggles that necessitated a four-year candidature” before she was admitted to the novitiate.

The novitiate marked the final step before a woman took her initial vows. A candidate’s novitiate began with a formal ceremony that included the clothing of the young woman in the congregation’s religious habit. The novitiate lasted at least one year. Under the guidance of the novice mistress, the young women spent the year training in religious life. Novices lived separately from the congregation and had no contact with the outside world. The emphasis was on quiet contemplation and prayer. After the successful completion of the novitiate, the general superior decided if a young woman would be permitted to take temporary vows. The initial vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty were valid for three years. After expiration of her temporary vows, the sister could apply to take perpetual vows, usually after six years.

158 In the twentieth century, the candidature could last as long as four years, the time period between the first and second state examination for public school teachers.

159 Berta M. Clementina F., OA, undated, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

160 M. Berwarda, 5 March 1871, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

161 Prior to professing perpetual vows, the sister had to undergo careful examination by the general superior. Rule and Constitution, Part II, 30 ff.
With the profession of her temporary vows, the novice became a sister and full member of the religious community; she was committed to all rules and observances. Religious and communal life required organization and discipline, and the sisters (and candidates) therefore followed a set routine. All Poor School Sisters belonging to the same province rose at the same time after at least seven hours of rest and recited certain prescribed prayers. The women’s days were filled with work, communal prayer, mass, meal times, and rest periods.

The Rule and Constitution was most concerned with the spiritual and physical well-being of the sisters and with ensuring that the women could optimally fulfill their teaching obligations. Labor was divided between lay and teaching sisters to free the latter to pursue their professional obligations without distraction. The congregation’s Rule and Constitution and a sister’s vows governed her behavior. The vow of obedience was perhaps the most difficult to observe. Obedience required that “out of love for God, a sister bows to the will of her superiors in all allowed things.” Recognizing that “her will is a human being’s most precious good,” the authors of the Rule and Constitution acknowledged that its denial was a great sacrifice. In order to be meaningful, a sister’s

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162 The rule required the provincial leader to approve the daily routine for each house. Sisters were admonished to carefully follow the schedule, because the contentment of the sister and the peaceful functioning of the community largely depended on it. Ibid., 79.

163 Ibid., 79, 80.

164 The sisters attended mass daily, and in the morning and evening they prayed together. In the morning and evening each sister also spent periods of time in private prayer and meditation. Unless they were otherwise engaged, the women spent the remainder of their time together in the community room where they completed various assigned tasks. No sister was allowed to absent herself without approval from the community room to work in her cell. Ibid., 79-82, 98.

165 Ibid., 6.

166 Ibid.
obedience had to be voluntary and blind, but if she disagreed with an order on moral
grounds she could voice her concerns.\textsuperscript{167} Sisters should also not begrudge their superiors’
roles as keepers of discipline.\textsuperscript{168}

Sisters understandably struggled with communal life. The death notice of M.
Lidwina S. from February 1861 reads that the sister regretted on her death bed that she
“often compromised sisterly love through her impatience, disobedience, and
judgments.”\textsuperscript{169} In 1850, an exacerbated M. Theresia Gerhardinger wrote a long letter
addressed to the entire community, in which she asked sisters:

What, dear sisters, must God and the World think of us…when two
like-minded sisters ….maliciously gossip about a third [sister], or
even a superior sister, and use the latter’s failings as a pretext to no
longer obey…when for weeks or months on end, sisters carry
grudges in their hearts, avoid each other, don’t look at each other,
and…think themselves better than their superiors – when sisters
rise, keep gifts, share amongst themselves, eat, work etc. when,
what, how, and as much as they want…?\textsuperscript{170}

The general superior no doubt exaggerated somewhat in the description of sisters’
behavior, but the case of M. Agatia W. serves to illustrate of how destructive certain
behaviors could be to a harmonious communal life. In May 1891, the Poor School Sister

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{168} To further aid sisters in keeping their vows, M. Theresia Gerhardinger insisted on limited
cloister for her congregation. Cloister prohibited outsiders from entering certain rooms within the religious
community, prohibited sisters from leaving the cloister without authorization, and more generally curtailed
interaction with the outside world. It is important to emphasize that the Poor School Sisters were not
subject to strict claustration and the women were free to leave their communities to fulfill their professional
duties such as attending conferences or accompany students on excursions. Sisters also traveled quite often
between communities for various reasons, although they did so only in company of another sister,
candidate, or other designated person. Ibid., 43 ff.

\textsuperscript{169} M. Lidwina S., 9 February 1861, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

\textsuperscript{170} Gerhardinger to Poor School Sisters, ca. 1850, in Gerhardinger, vol. 12, 42.
M. Agatia W. wrote to the archbishop of Munich and Freising, complaining that she had been deprived of her profession (*Beruf*), and that

as punishment I have to remain alone in my room, and [because my] wicked fellow-sisters here always unite against me, I have often asked the reverend Mother General Superior for a transfer, but am always told to remain alone in my room.  

Sister Agatia W. was born in 1838 and professed her final religious vows in 1858. She performed her duties as a teacher to the satisfaction of her superiors, but caused the latter and her fellows-sisters much grief with her belligerent and intractable nature.  

Over three decades, congregational leaders placed her in five different houses with little effect. In December 1891, Sister Agatia fled from the motherhouse in Munich, and unsuccessfully sought admittance to a different congregation. Early in 1892, the Poor School Sisters asked the church to release M. Agatia from her vows and excluded her from the congregation.  

The case of Agatia W. appears to be an exception. The evidence shows that the Poor School Sisters practiced good leadership and gave sisters ample opportunity to voice their concerns. M. Telesphora M. was remembered for her excellent leadership skills as a mother superior, whose “door and heart” were always open to hear sisters’ problems or to reconcile their differences. The congregation’s leaders also took the opinions of sisters

171 Walz to Erzbischof von München und Freising, 22 May 1891, AEM, Erzbischöfe 1821-1917, Kasten 15 Nr. 2.

172 Protokoll über die Entlassung der M. Agatia Walz, undated, AEM, Erzbischöfe 1821-1917, Kasten 15 Nr. 2.

173 Ibid.

into account before appointing a superior to a community. In 1852, M. Theresia Gerhardinger refrained from installing M. Rosa F. to the post of mother superior in Rottenburg, because “none of the other sisters viewed Sister Rosa as suited for the office.”

Sisters who approached communal life with a certain flexibility, pragmatism, and equanimity usually thrived, and congregational leaders stressed the importance of levity and happiness and warned against melancholy.

The congregation was never interested in excessive self-deprivation or martyrdom. On the contrary, in an age of poverty, epidemics, and primitive medicine, sickness and premature death remained a constant concern. On the subject of health, M. Theresia Gerhardinger once wrote that

> even if Christian compassion did not demand it of me, it is in my own best interest to maintain the health of my people, because nothing gets accomplished in a sick ward.

If a sister therefore required additional hours of nightly rest, nourishment, or exercise to maintain her health, the Rule and Constitution stipulated that her mother superior was to force these improvements upon her and not heed protestations to the contrary.

Even a cursory survey of the Poor School Sisters’ death notices from the nineteenth century illustrates the prevalence and constant threat of infectious diseases to


176 Karolina Gerhardinger wrote these lines in a letter to the priest of the community of Spalt, in which she rejected the priest’s accusation that she had only sent invalids to serve in that town. Gerhardinger wrote that “the sisters Monika, Petra, Anna, Ignatia, and even Cajetana…were completely healthy when they moved to Spalt from the mother house,” and only became ill after the move. Gerhardinger to Pfarrer von Spalt, 11 December 1854, in Gerhardinger, vol. 11, 30. That same year, in 1854, the Poor School Sisters also lamented the death of the fourth sister in Breslau. Gerhardinger wrote on the occasion that “the Lord truly demands many heavy sacrifices from us in dear Silesia; already 4 sisters rest in the depth of the earth.” Gerhardinger to Prelate of Breslau, Munich, 18 May 1854, in Gerhardinger, vol. 10, 87.

177 *Rule and Constitution*, Part II, 81.
the women’s health. Many young sisters succumbed to cholera, typhus, and tuberculosis.

After M. Philothea N. died on 23 August 1854 during a cholera epidemic in Breslau, the writer of her obituary asked:

How many of us will follow in her footsteps over these next few days…? [What an] extraordinary time we live in as we stand with one foot in the grave.\(^{178}\)

That same year an epidemic of “black nerve fever,” or typhus, broke out on the Brede, the Poor School Sisters’ community in Brakel, Westphalia. Twenty-six people were struck by the disease, including all but one sister.\(^ {179}\)

Of all health concerns it appears that tuberculosis posed the most serious threat to the women. An examination of sisters’ obituaries in 1873 reveals the prevalence of the disease. Out of fifteen deaths, seven sisters died at a young age from tuberculosis, which the authors of the obituaries described either as a lung malady, consumption, or a bloody cough. Five of the seven women passed away in their twenties and early thirties within ten years of taking vows. For instance, M. Eventia B. took her temporary vows in August 1867 and passed away from tuberculosis in 1873.\(^ {180}\) Two other women, also in their twenties, died that year of unidentified causes.\(^ {181}\) One of them, M. Liboria S., fell ill during her candidature and took her vows on her death bed before passing away in January 1873.\(^ {182}\) Illness and death were ever-present in the nineteenth century, and the

\(^{178}\) M. Philothea N., 23 August 1854, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

\(^{179}\) M. Gisela H., 1863, OAAS M, Nekrologe.

\(^{180}\) M. Eventia B., 28 August 1867, OAAS M., Nekrologe.

\(^{181}\) M. Liboria S., 24 January 1873 and Johanna M. Alphonsa B., 10 September 1873. OAAS M, Nekrologe.
death notices of sisters are notable for their often lengthy descriptions of sisters’ final days and the equanimity with which they appeared to bear their fate.\textsuperscript{183}

\section*{1.4 Responding to Adversity}

Good practices and discipline not only protected the health of sisters and fostered a productive communal life, they also kept scandal at bay. The Poor School Sisters were always concerned about public perception of the congregation. When in December 1852, a sister left the community in Neumarkt following a dispute over a teaching assignment, the local superior M. Willibalda D. acted immediately “to at least keep the scorn of the outside world in check.”\textsuperscript{184} The sisters had good reason to be alarmed about public opinion, and in her correspondence, Karolina Gerhardinger made frequent references to enemies who were “always laying in wait and vilifying [us].”\textsuperscript{185} The old prejudices that still haunted the Poor School Sisters in the nineteenth century expressed people’s continued unease with communities of chaste women living in their midst.

As it had for many centuries, the all-female community of nuns hidden from public gaze also animated male fantasies in the nineteenth century, and so-called “convent atrocity stories” captured the imagination of Germans. Readers of daily

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{183} For example, the death notice for M. Ulrica B. who died still in her twenties on 29 July 1854, reads: “Her last days were very uplifting for all…Amidst the greatest pain she encouraged herself and the sisters surrounding her with the words: ‘Everything for the love to God, the highest good!…The pain is great but I gladly suffer it with joy for the love for God.’” M. Ulrica B., 29 July 1854, OAAS M, Nekrologe.
\item \textsuperscript{184} The public never learned of the incident. The mother superior followed the sister in question, Sister Hilda, and caught up with her in Nuremberg where she was able to persuade her to travel to the motherhouse in Munich with her. Chronik Neumarkt, 3 December 1852, Arme Schulschwestern v. U. L. F., Neumarkt (Obf.)
\item \textsuperscript{185} Gerhardinger to Ludwig I, 4 September 1833, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 4.
\end{itemize}
newspapers and the illustrated magazine *Kladderadatsch* were treated to lurid stories and drawings of scantily clad young women who suffered rape, starvation, and imprisonment in cloister dungeons under the cruel gaze of elderly mother superiors before their dramatic rescue by benevolent men.\(^{186}\) In one popular story the motherhouse of the Poor School Sisters in Munich was the place of the imprisonment of Magdalena Paumann in the 1720s. Magdalena’s tragic tale of rape by a priest during mass and imprisonment in the convent was recounted in a number of popular pamphlets in the nineteenth century.\(^{187}\)

These stories expressed long-standing anxieties of unchecked female authority and sexuality. The tales further implied that women living outside of male supervision led to depravity and suffering.\(^{188}\) Apparently believing such tales to be true, some men physically and verbally accosted Poor School Sisters by pushing against the women in public, lifting their veils, and whispering lewd language into their ears.\(^{189}\) Although historians have analyzed these popular perceptions of nuns, little is known about how such prejudices manifested themselves in the lives of women religious and how they responded.\(^{190}\)

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\(^{186}\) For an excellent discussion of so-called “convent atrocity stories” and their role in German liberals’ imagination see Michael B. Gross, *The War Against Catholicism*.

\(^{187}\) *Magdalena Paumann oder die eingekerkerte Nonne im Angerkloster in München* (Munich: Verlage der J. J. Lentner’schen Buchhandlung [G. Stabl], 1870).

\(^{188}\) Michael Gross showed in his excellent analysis of convent atrocity stories that in the nineteenth century these tales also expressed popular fears among German liberals about women’s emancipation, 128 ff.

\(^{189}\) Ibid.

\(^{190}\) See Gross, Ford, and Choudhury.
Popular prejudices and opposition shaped the Poor School Sisters’ organizational structures and the women’s identities in decisive ways. The sisters relied on their professionalism and impeccable work to win over opponents, and when they failed in this quest, they looked to powerful patrons such as the Bavarian king or the dowager empress Carolina Augusta of Bavaria for protection. From their subordinated position, the Poor School Sisters also appropriated traditional language of female suffering and powerlessness to give their situation meaning and to guard against male interference from inside and outside the Catholic Church.

The most vicious and persistent rumors the Poor School Sisters encountered were over issues of female and male authority. Women religious were often accused of luring unsuspecting, innocent girls into the cloister and thereby removing them from male supervision. Even the ardent and early supporter of the Poor School Sisters, Friederike von Ringseis, the wife of the influential court physician of Ludwig I, voiced concerns in the 1830s that the congregation educated girls only for religious life instead of preparing them for motherhood.¹⁹¹ M. Theresia Gerhardinger denied such rumors and assured her benefactor that she would like to raise more pupils to become “religious housewives,” but “in light of such wrong views,” recruiting bourgeois parents and children was difficult.¹⁹² Girls did indeed decide to join the congregation once they attended a school of the Poor School Sisters, often against the will of their parents, but such prejudices lessened over time.

¹⁹¹ Gerhardinger to von Ringseis, 4 August 1836, in Gerhardinger, vol. 1, 34-35.
¹⁹² Ibid.
Numerous officials also remained wary of the sisters’ influence. In 1872, an official representing the district government of Germersheim wrote that the Poor School Sisters within the district’s jurisdiction “use…their overwrought ideas to seek supporters among families and raise ‘praying sisters’ (Betschwestern), who cause much mischief within the community.” The official did, however, acknowledge that the sisters’ teaching was above reproach. Stories about the corruption of virgins admitted to cloisters at times threatened to check the expansion of the congregation. In 1843 M. Theresia Gerhardinger complained about such untruths circulating in the Bavarian town of Bad Tölz. At the time, the sisters were involved in a protracted dispute with the town magistrates over the introduction of the Poor School Sisters. Rumors circulated that countless virgins had escaped the harsh congregational life imposed by Gerhardinger that included long nightly prayer vigils, confinement, and prolonged periods of fasting. It was only through the powerful patronage of the Bavarian state that the sisters persevered in Bad Tölz.

The introduction of the Poor School Sisters to Bad Tölz shows how crucial the support of the state could be to the process. In March 1837, the Royal District Court of Bavaria in Bad Tölz wrote to Bad Tölz’s magistrate to consider the introduction of “the Poor School Sisters…who are dedicated to teaching and raising girls...[and] who also

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193 Königliches Bezirksamt Germersheim to Königliche Bayerische Regierung der Pfalz, 14 April 1872, BHStA, MK 22102.

194 Ibid.

195 The accusations were brought by a certain Dr. Sepp, a citizen of Bad Tölz. Dr. Sepp complained that conditions in the congregations were so strict, many young women fell ill or left the institute after only a few years. He also accused the sisters of dismissing sisters who had fallen ill. In a lengthy letter, Karolina Gerhardinger rejected Dr. Sepp’s accusations as unfounded. Gerhardinger to Archbishop of Munich, 29 August 1843, in Gerhardinger, vol. 2, 36 ff.
accept poor children, or even orphans in exchange for very little payment.”

Town officials were not impressed, and citing lack of funds and the inability to find suitable housing for the sisters, they did not pass a resolution to introduce the Poor School Sisters until September 1841. The royal district court had to pressure the magistrate for years to come to a resolution and to bring the tiring negotiations finally to a close. In the end, the Poor School Sisters purchased a suitable house in Bad Tölz with their own funds.

Whereas some citizens in Bad Tölz feared the sisters were too backward-looking, a number of people in the town of Neumarkt (Opf.) believed the opposite. To them the sisters were a dangerous manifestation of women’s emancipation. The introduction of the sisters to Neumarkt also took years. After the state recommended the Poor School Sisters to the town magistrate in 1839, the latter replied that the town was neither in possession of funds nor of a suitable building to accommodate the sisters.

196 Königliches Landgericht Tölz to Magistrat Tölz, 17 February 1837, StdBT, A Vd 8. Note: The Poor School Sisters did not charge school fees. The discussion of payment in this context refers to boarding fees for orphans.

197 Regierungsentschliessung vom 13. September 1841, die Gründung eines Institutes der armen Schulschwestern in Tölz betreffffen, No 26 537. StdBT, A Vd 8 Because conditions for the introduction of the Poor School Sisters were so unfavorable, the Landgericht decided to shelf the matter in 1839 but resurrected the issue in 1840, after the death of the teacher Weikl which created a vacancy in the primary school in Bad Tölz. Königliches Landgericht Tölz to Magistrat Tölz, 17 February 1837, StdBT, A Vd 8.

198 The cost of the Poor School Sister was the official reason the magistrate was so reluctant to introduce the sisters, but concerns about cost seemed to stand in for the above-mentioned prejudices against the sisters. These rumors persisted after the women’s introduction to Bad Tölz, and in 1844 the royal district court in Bad Tölz wrote to the magistrate of the town that “still there are some that spread slander and voice suspicions about the Institute of the Poor Sisters [sic] in Tölz…They cite lack of money as the reason for their complaint but this is only a pretext.” To counter such rumors, the Landgericht ordered the magistrate to make the actual cost of maintaining the Poor School Sisters’ school available to citizens in the town hall. Landgericht Tölz to Magistrat Tölz, 13 January 1844, StdBT, A Vd 8.

199 Protokoll des Magistrats der königlichen Stadt Neumarkt (Obf.), 6 December 1839, StdNM, Arme Schulschwestern.
In 1844, a fierce public debate about the matter erupted in the local newspaper.\textsuperscript{200} The main issue was women entering the workforce and occupying a profession traditionally reserved for men. In an anonymous letter published in April 1844, the writer rejected the advantages of teaching sisters as well as the popular notion of associating teaching with motherhood:

I readily concede that I myself am an admirer of women…but when we are speaking about giving women suddenly precedence over men in an area where the latter have dominated tranquilly and uncontested for centuries, then I get very jealous…and enter the battlefield against them [women] as a decided enemy of the advancing emancipation of the fairer sex.\textsuperscript{201}

The writer wondered from whence women teachers acquired the “magic” to imbue girls with “inner piety, modest steadfastness, and diligent domesticity.”\textsuperscript{202} He believed such traits could not be taught by women or men but were already part of a girl’s nature like a propensity toward scientific study was natural to boys.\textsuperscript{203} The writer also rejected the notion that Catholic sisters, who were not mothers themselves, could impart “true domesticity” to girls. He advocated leaving the raising to girls in the hands of their biological mothers, who would “continue to raise obedient and good housekeepers and wives as they have done all along.”\textsuperscript{204} The writer closed with the argument that the

\textsuperscript{200} In January 1844, the magistrate decided that it was impossible to bring sisters to Neumarkt because of the expense associated with purchasing and renovating a schoolhouse. Beschluss, 19 January 1844, Protokoll des Magistrats der königlichen Stadt Neumarkt 1843/44,StdNM, Arme Schulschwestern.

\textsuperscript{201} K, “Freundschaftliche Antwort auf den Brief über weibliche Erziehung und Unterricht,” Wochenblatt für die K. Stadt Neumarkt und die königlichen Landgerichtsbezirke Neumarkt, Hilpoltstein, Kastel, und Parsberg, 21 April 1844, 91.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
qualifications of women as teachers lagged behind those of men and were a further reason to disqualify them.\textsuperscript{205}

The discussion about women religious teachers flared up again in 1849. This time the local newspaper published a statement authored by the male teachers of Neumarkt who insisted that “the supposed advantage ….of a teaching sister over a male teacher has long been shown to be a delusion.”\textsuperscript{206} Negotiations and public discussions about the sisters continued until July 1852, when at last M. Theresia Gerhardinger accompanied three sisters and two candidates to Neumarkt to establish their new community and school.\textsuperscript{207}

Over time, and with the continued support of the state, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame encountered less resistance. As women religious started to live in communities across the country, Germans usually became attached to “their” sisters. For instance, in August 1873, the population of Neumarkt (Obf.), a community that had vehemently resisted the introduction of the sisters just twenty years earlier, now protested the women’s possible removal during the Kulturkampf. The “women of Neumarkt” petitioned King Ludwig II to protect the sisters.\textsuperscript{208} The writers assured the Bavarian king

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{206} Lehrer von Neumarkt, “Erwiederung,” Wochenblatt für die K. Stadt Neumarkt und die königlichen Landgerichtsbezirke Neumarkt, Hilpolstein, Kastel, und Parsberg, 3 February 1850, Beilage.

\textsuperscript{207} Chronik der Armen Schulschwestern in Neumarkt, 1 July 1852, OAAS M.

\textsuperscript{208} The letter was signed “women of the city of Neumarkt.” The women urged the king to preserve the congregation in their town and the entire kingdom. Frauen der Stadt Neumarkt (Obf.) to King Ludwig II, 18 August 1873, StaNM, A 2.6 (Schulschwestern).
that the sisters’ patience and excellence in the classroom had “earned them the gratitude of all Catholic parents and children” and they would be most difficult to replace.  

Bavaria became an important stronghold for the congregation. With the continued support of Ludwig I’s successor Maximilian II, M. Theresia Gerhardinger was able to establish numerous houses in Germany and abroad. After sending sisters to the United States in 1848 in the wake of revolutionary unrest in Europe, the Poor School Sisters opened communities in Westphalia, Silesia, Austria-Hungary, and the Grand Duchy of Baden.

1.5 Contested Spaces: The Poor School Sisters’ Struggle for a Permanent Rule

As the congregation expanded, some churchmen became alarmed about the growing power of women in the church. As a result, the Poor School Sisters became embroiled in a protracted struggle with the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Karl August von Reisach, in the 1850s. At issue was approval of the congregation’s permanent Rule and Constitution. The conflict reveals that women were indeed able to claim autonomous spaces for themselves within the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century.

209 Ibid.

210 Ludwig I abdicated in 1848. In 1852, Maximilian II issued an edict that called on magistrates and district governments in Bavaria to aid in the expansion of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters, because he believed the sisters’ work was important in alleviating the increasing impoverishment of the Bavarian people. Gerhardinger to Maximilian II, February 1854, in Gerhardinger, vol. 10, 67.

211 Under the patronage of Count Werner von Bocholtz-Asseburg, Poor School Sisters established themselves in Westphalia in their House on the Brede, near Brakel. In 1860, the Brede became the motherhouse of the Westphalian province and by 1870, the province consisted of eight communities, including the motherhouse. Following a typhoid epidemic that left many children orphans, M. Theresia Gerhardinger left with six sisters for Breslau in Silesia where they established an orphanage and school. Breslau eventually became the seat of the motherhouse of the new Silesian province, and by 1872, the province consisted of thirty one communities, some located as far away as Prague. Beginning in 1850, the Poor School Sisters also established houses in Linz, Vienna, Hirschau (Bohemia), and Temesvar (Hungary). Ziegler and Barnikel, 77 – 79, 81-82, 100-102, 119.
But the events also brings into sharp relief the fact that the sisters’ autonomy within the church depended wholly on the sufferance of the clergy.

In the first decades of their existence, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame operated under a temporary Constitution and Rule based on the Congregation de Notre Dame. Karolina Gerhardinger explained in a letter to Pope Pius IX that because the rule was written for a single house and contains several points that, considering the changed circumstances of our times, have to be changed, it was the opinion of our benefactors that we should ...change the old rule according to our lived experiences....

It was the norm for any religious community to live under a temporary rule for at least fifteen to twenty years before applying for approbation to the Holy See. The process of approbation itself was a complicated procedure that took years. Prior to papal approval, the congregation existed under the authority of the local bishop.

The absence of a permanent rule approbated by the Pope made the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame vulnerable to the clergy’s interference. The general lack of church laws in the nineteenth century that governed women religious congregations added to the latter’s insecurity. Prior to the passage of Conditate a Christo that defined the rights of female general superiors and limited bishops’ authority over Catholic sisters, these boundaries were ill defined. Relinde Meiwes argued that the late passage of Conditate a Christo in 1901 was a testament to the initiative of women religious. But viewed from a different angle, perhaps the clergy was not eager to implement rules that circumscribed

\[212\] Gerhardinger to Pope Pius IX, 21 March 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 12.

their own authority and secured the rights of general superiors. It was only after mounting
difficulties between the episcopate and Catholic sisters that Pope Leo XIII decided in 1900 that “there must be limits placed on the authority of the bishops” over
congregations.\textsuperscript{214} Prior to 1901, hostile bishops could interfere almost with impunity in the affairs of female congregations.

The ultramontane archbishop of Munich and Freising, Karl-August von Reisach, viewed the rapid expansion of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame with alarm. In 1851, he escalated a conflict at the Poor School Sisters’ community in Rottenburg in Württemberg. Von Reisach intended to check the power of M. Theresia Gerhardinger by imposing male leadership onto her sisters and by splintering the congregation. In 1851, Dr. Mast, the confessor of the Poor School Sisters in Rottenburg, began to interfere in the internal affairs of the community and agitated to replace the reigning mother superior with M. Rosa F. With von Reisach’s encouragement, Dr. Mast attempted to appoint himself director of the community in Rottenburg and tried to administer the sisters’ internal affairs. M. Rosa apparently admired Dr. Mast and supported his plan. Von Reisach ordered Gerhardinger to install M. Rosa as superior but she refused.\textsuperscript{215}

Aware of her subordinate position, M. Theresia Gerhardinger sought to avoid the conflict with the archbishop. Retreat rather than protracted conflict was a proven strategy that worked well for the sisters in most situations. The general superior therefore recalled


\\textsuperscript{215} Gerhardinger noted that M. Rosa was unsuited for the office of superior. Gerhardinger to von Reisach, 15 January 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 7, 77.
all of her personnel from Rottenburg to make room for a different congregation.\textsuperscript{216} The congregation’s network was large and could absorb dismissed sisters with ease. The sisters also did not own real estate in most towns and could retreat quickly without accruing notable losses.

But von Reisach forbade Gerhardinger to recall her sisters, and ordered her to comply with his orders.\textsuperscript{217} The general superior consented only to take back her obedience the same day. The archbishop then threatened her with excommunication and gave her one hour to retract her decision. Karolina Gerhardinger complied.\textsuperscript{218} Von Reisach set up the house in Rottenburg as the independent province of Württemberg. He forbade M. Theresia Gerhardinger to interfere in any way in the discipline or governance of the community in Rottenburg and confirmed Mast as director of the house. He advised sisters that they owed their new director obedience.\textsuperscript{219}

Until then, the confessors of the Poor School Sisters attended only to their spiritual needs, and M. Theresia was adamant that priests should remain ignorant of the congregation’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{220} The archbishop also ordered all candidates and novices hailing from Württemberg to leave the motherhouse in Munich and return to

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 80

\textsuperscript{217} Gerhardinger to von Reisach, undated, in Gerhardinger, vol. 7, 85.

\textsuperscript{218} Gerhardinger to von Reisach, 21 March 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 9.

\textsuperscript{219} Gerhardinger to Pope, 21 March 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 13.

\textsuperscript{220} In 1850, Gerhardinger chastised sisters, among other things, for clinging to priests: “Ein ebenso grosses Leiden für meine Seele ist, dass sich nicht wenige Schwestern ganz an die Geistlichen hängen – zum grossen Ärgernis für alle übrigen Schwestern, Zöglinge,…Man lädt sie nicht blos zum Besuchen ein, fragt sie wo sie hingehen, so lange gewesen sind…Man lässt sie alles wissen, auch Briefe vom Mutterhaus, jede Begebenheit im Kloster usw. Schwestern, das ist die gefährlichste Liebe und Klippe.” Gerhardinger to Poor School Sisters, 1850, in Gerhardinger, vol. 7, 35, 36.
Rottenburg. Von Reisach then drafted a new rule for the congregation without the sisters’ input and sent it to Rome for approval.

By 1852, Karl-August von Reisach had curbed the power of M. Theresia Gerhardinger. He forbade her to continue in the office of general superior and only acknowledged her as the local superior of Munich. The actions of von Reisach threatened to destroy the congregation because it depended on central leadership and flexible, interconnected networks of communities. Without the protection of canon law, other churchmen soon took their cue from von Reisach and also encroached on the authority of the sisters. In August 1852, a priest from Bohemia appeared in Munich and ordered novices and candidates from his province to return with him to Bohemia, where he set up an independent province of the congregation.

At stake in the conflict was the role of women in the church and the spaces available to them outside of supervision of the clergy. Von Reisach accused Gerhardinger of pride, of acting arbitrarily without guidance, and of trying to raise herself above bishops. Women like Gerhardinger amassed too much power in his opinion and he believed it was unseemly for them to travel from community to community. He was...

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221 Ibid., 14. Sister Rosa’s reign as superior of Rottenburg was of short duration. She apparently was unfit to hold the office, and on 30 August 1853, she petitioned Karolina Gerhardinger for readmission to the motherhouse in Munich. Despite the grief Sister Rosa had caused the congregation, Gerhardinger agreed to readmit her, albeit as a simple aspirant. Gerhardinger to von Reisach, 30 August 1853, in Gerhardinger, vol. 10, 17.

222 Gerhardinger to Pope, 22 April 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 44.

223 M. Petra Foreria to Pope, 21 April 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 26.

224 M. Petra Foreria to von Hohenlohe, 31 August 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8 67.

225 Gerhardinger to Schels, 20 October 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 72, 75.
further convinced that women could not maintain such a large and complex
organization.\textsuperscript{226}

The Poor School Sisters’ only hope was that the Pope would side with them,
approve their version of the rule, and appoint a cardinal protector. To this end, the women
campaigned to save their congregation.\textsuperscript{227} The Poor School Sisters were adamant that they
could not accept male leadership, arguing that

in here, a man is an impossibility…A man is neither familiar nor
does he understand the needs of women; it could actually be
dangerous if a man were to know these needs.\textsuperscript{228}

Regarding the accusation by von Reisach that women could not maintain such a complex
organization like theirs, the sisters asked how it was then that they were able to start such
an enterprise in the first place, and maintain it all this time?\textsuperscript{229} In defense of female
leadership and the independent administration of their internal affairs, M. Theresia
Gerhardinger used images of motherhood and family, and pointed to the delicacies and
particularities of her sex. She explained that the general superior was like a mother to the
daughters of Mary.\textsuperscript{230} Gerhardinger also pointed to the extensive male supervision they
already enjoyed in the form of school inspectors, local priests, confessors, and bishops,

\textsuperscript{226} M. Petra Foreria to Pope, 21 April 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 8, 34.

\textsuperscript{227} They drafted numerous letters to the pope and hired an advocate to argue the congregation’s
case before the Holy See. The sisters also visited numerous bishops and asked for statements of support,
which most of them granted.

\textsuperscript{228} M. Petra Foreria, memorandum, 21 April 1852, \textit{Briefe} vol. 8, 34.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{230} Gerhardinger to von Temesvar, Munich, 28/30 November 1852, in Gerhardinger, vol. 9, 16.
which she cited as more than sufficient. Not only did Gerhardinger indicate that male directors posed great dangers to the sisters’ virginity, she argued that

the wise and shy maidens recoil from such male leadership. Especially the most pious and industrious sisters of our institute have stated with childish honesty and in no uncertain terms that they would rather leave [the congregation] than be placed under the male leadership of directors.

The women appropriated essentialist language of female weakness and used it to defend against male interference.

With the decision pending in Rome, conducting business for the Poor School Sisters became difficult. Von Reisach forbade novices to take vows and did not permit candidates from outside the diocese to enter the congregation. At that point, the novitiate of some women was in its third year. The archbishop was well aware that years could go by before papal approval arrived, which was equivalent to dissolving the congregation.

The process dragged on, and in 1856 von Reisach was raised to cardinal and moved to Rome. From there he worked tirelessly to prevent approval of the sisters’ rule, citing once again in 1858 that Karolina Gerhardinger was trying to place herself above bishops. It was not until the end of 1865 that the issue was finally settled and the Holy See approbated the Rule and Constitution of the Poor School Sisters that invested the

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231 Ibid., 20.
232 Ibid., 22.
233 Gerhardinger to Schels, 29 March 1853, in Gerhardinger, vol. 9, 60.
234 Gerhardinger to von Reisach, 1 April 1853, in Gerhardinger, vol. 9, 68.
235 Gerhardinger to Schwester Margarita, 1858, in Gerhardinger, vol. 11, 71.
female general superior with all the rights and responsibilities she required to administer and lead her congregation.\footnote{Gerhardinger to Pope, 26 December 1865, in Gerhardinger, vol 12, 43.} Bishops did, however, retain some power over women religious congregations.\footnote{Local bishops retained considerable power over congregations in that they could approve or veto the settlement of any religious communities and schools in their diocese. Bishops also appointed the confessor of sisters, visited the congregation, and presided over the Generalkapital. Rule and Constitution, Part III, 79 ff.} The struggle over the Poor School Sisters’ permanent Rule and Constitution shows that despite their accomplishments, women religious remained subordinate in the church and continued to depend on the benevolence of the church hierarchy.

### 1.6 The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame during the Kulturkampf

After emerging victorious from the struggle over their rule, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame faced their second greatest challenge in the nineteenth century, the Kulturkampf. The Kulturkampf is at times presented as an event so dramatic, it shaped Catholics’ behavior in National Socialist Germany.\footnote{See, for instance: Beth Griech-Polelle, \textit{Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).} The impact of the Kulturkampf on the congregation and the psyche of the Poor School Sisters was significant but must also not be overstated. It is true that in their chronicle and letters, the sisters associated the Kulturkampf with “great danger,” “persecution,” “expulsion,” and “loss.”\footnote{See for instance: “Kulturkampf,” XII. Kapitel, Chronik Kloster Brede; Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 27 July 1873, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 35; Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 14 April 1874, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 41.} They feared
the worst at times but they were also used to encountering obstacles and the events of the
1870s and 80s did not paralyze them.240

In the course of the Kulturkampf in 1872, the state placed new restrictions on
Catholic schools. M. Theresia Gerhardinger feared outright persecution, but in a circular
letter addressed to the congregation, she wrote that, “we are far from terrified at the
prospect and we will place our entire faith in God…”241 The general superior instructed
all sisters to remain in their houses as long as feasible, but to “avoid violence and flee”
when necessary.242 The Kulturkampf reveals to what extent the congregation’s size,
geographic spread, and organizational flexibility enabled the sisters’ to successfully cope
with the states’ measures in the 1870s.

Bavaria proved a safe haven for the sisters during the Kulturkampf. In July 1873,
M. Theresia Gerhardinger informed the congregation’s cardinal protector in Rome that
“the persecution of female orders has started in Bavaria as well.”243 She went on to write
that measures against the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame were more severe than that
against other congregations because the state wanted to end their educational mission.
City officials in Munich indeed succeeded in closing the public primary school for girls
(Volksschule) in the city and the sisters’ encountered other difficulties as well. But in
protests addressed to their king, Bavarian citizens demanded that he refuse his royal

240 In November 1872, Theresia Gerhardinger sent an inquiry to the Vatican for instructions in the
case of complete dissolution of the congregation. Was it permissible for sisters to continue teaching as
civilians in secular clothing and to return to their parents’ homes? Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 6


242 Ibid.

243 Gerhardinger to Kardinalprotektor, 27 July 1873, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 35.
approval of such actions and offer protection to the sisters.\textsuperscript{244} The Bavarian royal house did not abandon the congregation and the latter enjoyed its continued patronage.\textsuperscript{245}

Strict enforcement of the Kulturkampf laws in Bavaria would have proved devastating to the congregation. That was not the case and the Kulturkampf in Bavaria manifested itself mainly in the heightening of ongoing conflicts between local and state officials and the church. In 1875 and in 1877, M. Theresia Gerhardinger reported that the Kulturkampf in Bavaria was evident mostly in “grumbling” on the part of the state, and that “we continue more or less undisturbed.”\textsuperscript{246} Their continued strong position in that state allowed the Poor School Sisters to take in sisters and candidates from dissolved communities in Westphalia, Silesia, and Baden.\textsuperscript{247} The congregation could also send sisters to other European houses or the United States. In 1872, M. Theresia Gerhardinger

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 35. In 1873, citizens of Neumarkt sent the aforementioned petition to King Ludwig II on behalf of the Poor School Sisters. Frauen der Stadt Neumarkt (Obf.) to King Ludwig II, 18 August 1873, StaNM, A 2.6: Schulschwestern.
\item \textsuperscript{245} For instance, in 1872, the congregation even established two new communities in Bavaria, and the Queen Dowager of Bavaria, Marie, expressed her support with a royal visit of the congregation in 1875. Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 6 November 1872, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 21; Gerhardinger to Marie of Bavaria, 7 April 1875, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 16 February 1877, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 65; and Gerhardinger to Cardinal Protector, 20 February 1875, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Other difficulties the sisters encountered in Bavaria included attempts to interfere in the dispatch and recall of teaching sisters to individual towns without the approval of town officials. This was indeed a significant infringement on the authority of the mother superior since the freedom to staff vacant teaching posts was one reason why the congregation was so flexible. Gerhardinger to Kardinalprotektor, 14 April 1874, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 42. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame lost its three houses in Baden, which were never re-established. By 1879, all houses in Silesia were closed, with the exception of those located in Austria-Hungary. In Westphalia, only a small contingency of sisters remained in the motherhouse on the Brede under the protection of the Count von Bocholtz-Asseburg. The remaining seven Westphalian communities were closed. Ziegler and Barnikel, 78, 82.
\end{itemize}
identified communities in Austria-Hungary and in the United States where all sisters would be welcomed should they have to leave Germany.\textsuperscript{248}

During the Kulturkampf, congregational leaders gave their situation meaning by reminding sisters of the nobility of righteous suffering. M. Theresia Gerhardinger often prompted sisters to trust in God’s guidance and endure all trials stoically and faithfully. In 1877, the congregation’s leaders wrote to their fellow-sisters:

\begin{center}
Let us prepare for suffering in God’s name! ... The Lord means to keep us alert and in him alone we shall trust...Let us continue our work in our schools in peace and with love, each sister in her position – for as long as the Lord wills it....And when God is with us, we have nothing to fear, come what may.\textsuperscript{249}
\end{center}

The women came to view their sorrows and difficulties as an imitation of the suffering of Christ, who himself had singled out the sisters to suffer in his name and thereby bring about their salvation. M. Theresia Gerhardinger told sisters

\begin{center}
not to retreat before the dear cross…because wherever the cross is, Christ is nearby. We will \textbf{rather be joyful} that the Lord found us worthy to suffer persecution in his name; because those \textbf{[who suffer]} he promised great rewards in heaven.”\textsuperscript{250}
\end{center}

The general superior admonished the sisters not to be so sensitive about rumors and offensive language directed at them, because how would they endure the “dungeon, shackles, and a martyr’s death,” if they recoiled from mere words?\textsuperscript{251} The women persevered and recovered relatively quickly from the effects of the Kulturkampf.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{249} Gerhardinger, memorandum, 1877, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 79.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{250} Karolina Gerhardinger, Rundbrief, 1872, in Gerhardinger, vol. 13, 26.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame returned to Prussia as soon as they were able. With their customary pragmatism and faith in their mission, they rebuilt what they had lost. In 1888, the sisters’ benefactor, Count Dietrich von Bocholtz-Asseburg, along with prominent citizens of Brakel (Westphalia) successfully petitioned the Prussian state for permission to reopen the Poor School Sisters’ local schools. Within one year, the Poor School Sisters also returned to the town Hardenberg-Neviges and opened a school in Arnsberg, an important administrative center in Westphalia. Both Germany and the Catholic Church had undergone changes since the sisters first settled in Prussia in the 1850s. The Prussian state no longer permitted women religious to teach in public schools (Volksschulen), which affected the Poor School Sisters in Silesia more severely than the Westphalian sisters. But the Silesian sisters too returned in the late 1880s from their exile in Austria-Hungary, and in 1896, the Poor School Sisters’ Silesian motherhouse reopened in Breslau. Despite new restrictions the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame

252 In April 1887, Prussia lifted part of the May Laws, and once again permitted religious communities dedicated to teaching to establish communities in its realm.

253 In 1877, the Prussian state closed most schools of the Poor School Sisters in Westphalia, and sisters left without employment moved to communities in Bavaria. As a precaution, the Poor School Sisters transferred ownership of their Westphalian properties to their benefactor Count Dietrich von Bocholtz-Asseburg. Seven sisters remained in the former Westphalian motherhouse, because the state still permitted the sisters to care for the orphans in their charge. Chronik Kloster Brede, 1850-1970, AKB, 15 and 16.

254 The Poor School Sisters in Westphalia operated few Volksschulen alongside their orphanage in Brakel and their private secondary schools for girls, and they adapted to the new circumstances without too many hardships. The application of the May Laws had also been uneven. The state never expelled the Westphalian sisters from the Volksschule in the small Hessian town of Allendorf, where a Poor School Sister taught until her death in 1890. Thereafter, the sisters sent candidates still in civilian clothing to fill the vacated teaching post in Allendorf. In Silesia, the situation was somewhat different. In 1872, 146 Poor School Sisters lived dispersed in a total of thirty two communities and taught primarily in Volksschulen. Although their expulsion from Prussia in the late 1870s caused the sisters hardships, the women regrouped quickly, and reestablished their community across the Silesian border in the Austria-Hungarian town of Weisswasser. During their exile, the Poor School Sisters founded a number of religious communities and schools in Austria-Hungary, including Austerlitz, which later became the motherhouse of the sisters’ Czechoslovakian province. Chronik Kloster Brede, 1870-1970, AKB.
thrived upon their return to Prussia, and their private Catholic schools became integral parts of the state’s educational infrastructure.

After centuries of suppressing uncloistered women religious, in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church found itself in a position of profound weakness and once again encouraged active female vocations. Thousands of women like Karolina Gerhardinger took up the challenge and built vast congregations that sought to ameliorate some of the most pressing social problems of their time. In the nineteenth century, women were able to create autonomous spaces within traditional religious institutions at a time when women’s legal and social status contracted. A woman who chose a religious vocation in the nineteenth century had many opportunities to advance her education, enter a profession, and manage the complex business affairs of her congregation. Her roles as an agent of the modernizing state and as a “religious professional” were important aspects of a Poor School Sister’s identity, and the education girls received from the sisters was notable for its commitment to academic excellence and Catholic principles.

The modern nun’s story challenges scholars not to impose their own ideas of women’s emancipation and progress onto historical actors. Contemporary ideas of individualism, materialism, and sexual liberation make it difficult to imagine the choices of nineteenth-century women, and too often scholars have dismissed nuns as unworthy of historical inquiry. It is true that a higher education and a meaningful occupation came at a high price. The lives of nuns were difficult, and not all women remained true to their vocation. Nineteenth-century Catholic congregations also were never havens of feminism, and sisters insisted that they raised God-fearing mothers and wives. But
women religious did advance the cause of women by modeling an alternative to traditional womanhood and marriage, an alternative that entailed high degrees of competence and independence. Contemporaries were correct to fear the influence of women religious, as many girls chose a religious vocation after being taught by sisters.

In their new public roles, Catholic sisters gradually overcame age-old prejudices against nuns. But this process took decades and the Poor School Sisters therefore still encountered resistance as they expanded and a sense of latent oppression and righteous suffering became an integral part of congregational culture and the sisters’ identities long before the Kulturkampf. Old prejudices were also joined by new ones as a more secular state attempted to curb the influence of the Catholic Church. The women came to view their sorrows and difficulties as an imitation of the suffering of Christ, who himself had singled out the sisters to suffer in his name and thereby bring about their salvation.

In their dealings with the church and the state, Catholic sisters learned to be prudent, flexible, and assertive. Both inside and outside of the church, the women were never free from their dependence on the benevolence of men, but this does not mean the women were not independent. M. Theresia Gerhardinger defended female leadership of her congregation by using essentialist language of female weakness, and she skillfully cultivated patrons, bishops, and first and foremost the monarchs of Bavaria in order to establish, expand, and preserve her congregation.

Although the Kulturkampf marked a decisive setback in the history of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, it did not define their future or mission. As soon as they were able in the 1890s, the sisters began to reestablish their presence in Prussia. Their numbers continued to grow in Germany and abroad, and the
congregation reached its peak in the 1930s. The sisters had every reason to look with confidence to their future. Their central place in German society seemed secure.
CHAPTER 2:
THE DARKENING HORIZON: FROM IMPERIAL TO EARLY NAZI GERMANY.

2.1 Argument and Historiography

Sister M. Hiltraud Weinschenk claimed she “would have rather gone to her death than deny her Germanness (Deutschtum) to the French in 1914.” Born at the turn of the century in Alsace-Lorraine, Sister Hiltraud and her family experienced the French occupation of her hometown weeks after the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. The French harassed her mother and sisters because they were “la famille boche,” a German family. When Alsace-Lorraine once again became French in 1918, Sister Hiltraud, who had since joined a religious congregation, worked as a teacher in Schlettstadt, today’s Sélestat in France. She agitated to return to Germany. When her superior warned her that there “was nothing to eat in Germany,” the young sister replied: “I would rather starve in Germany than eat white bread in France.” She returned to Germany soon thereafter.

255 Weinschenk to Ritter von Epp, 4 November 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

256 Ibid.

257 Ibid.
Sister Hiltraud’s letter speaks to her self-identification as both a German patriot and a woman religious. Most Catholic sisters viewed this dual identity as unproblematic. The integration and place of the sisters in modern German is an overarching theme in this chapter as well. It examines the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Germany from about 1890 to 1936. The discussion continues with the Poor School Sisters in Westphalia from the end of the Kulturkampf to 1933. The example of Westphalia reveals how rapidly the women reintegrated into Imperial Germany following the Kulturkampf. They also made the transition to Weimar Germany with relative ease. The congregation partnered with the Prussian state in the improvement of the education of girls and women in both Imperial and Weimar Germany. Religious teaching congregations remained important places for women in the twentieth century as they continued to offer them important professional opportunities and filled the large gap left by the state in secondary education for girls.

The level of integration of Catholics in modern Germany is contested. My work adds to debates on the anti-modern or modern mentality of Catholics and the Catholic Church between 1870 and 1933. Based on their particular view, historians draw conclusions about Catholics’ attitude toward the nation, democracy, and National Socialism. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame were progressive, and I agree with Heinz Hürten, Thomas Nipperdey, and Michael Phayer who argued that the German Catholic milieu became integrated into the modern nation state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nipperdey described the German Catholic sub-culture with its many lay organizations as isolationist but forward-looking and he concluded that Catholics too
made the “great leap into the twentieth century, into a new modernity.” Michael Phayer asserted that Catholic lay women, not their Protestant counterparts, were more open to the Weimar Republic, and the Catholic German Woman’s League “was eager to involve itself in the democratic process.”

The image of a progressive Catholic mentality contrasts sharply with the conclusions of scholars who linked a reactionary Catholic milieu in modern Germany to the rise of National Socialism and genocide. For instance, Olaf Blaschke argued that a virulent antinational, antidemocratic, and antisemitic Catholic mentality fostered the rise

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259 But Phayer also argued for a certain attraction or affinity between Catholic (and Protestant) women and National Socialism around social welfare issues. Phayer, *Protestant and Catholic Women*, 30-38.

260 Some scholars argued that Catholics isolated themselves within a dense and ultramontane Catholic milieu. The analytical framework of the “social milieu” hails from the social sciences, and M. Rainer Lepsius first described the German Catholic milieu in his 1966 study of the collapse of the party system in Germany in 1933. See M. Rainer Lepsius, “Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft,” in *Deutsche Parteien vor 1918*, ed. G. A. Ritter (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1973), 56-80. According to Karl Rohe, a social milieu consists of a cultural and a social component. The cultural aspect includes a shared mentality of ideas and norms, underpinned by canonical texts such as the Bible. The social aspect describes a particular way of life, adherence to certain behavioral norms and participation in milieu-specific activities and programs. Olaf Blaschke and Frank-Michael Kuhlemann described the Catholic milieu in Germany as an “ideal type.” Catholics lived within an almost impenetrable milieu and the German Catholic mentality was quite incompatible with a national mentality. Catholics had an almost pathological fear of modernity that manifested itself in antiquated and ultramontane forms of worship and rituals. Olaf Blaschke und Frank-Michael Kuhlemann, “Religion in Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sozialhistorische Perspektiven für die vergleichende Erforschung religiöser Mentalitäten und Milieus,” in *Religion im Kaiserreich. Milieus – Mentalitäten – Krisen*, ed. Olaf Blaschke und Frank-Michael Kuhlemann (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1996), 7-56. Norbert Busch argued that the dominant mentality (*Lebensgefühl*) of German Catholics was one of “Depressivität, Defensivität...und Antimodernität” (depression, defensiveness, and anti-modernism) that found expression in the widespread “cult of the Heart of Jesus” (“*Kult zum Herzen Jesu*”). Norbert Busch, “Frömmigkeit als Faktor des katholischen Milieus. Der Kult zum Herzen Jesu,” in Blaschke und Kuhlemann, 136-165 (quote: 154). On the other hand, few scholars question the compatibility of Protestantism, political participation, and bourgeois culture. According to Gangolf Hübinger, for instance, the majority of Protestants became part of a “Bürgerkirche” (bourgeois church), and subscribed to progressive worldviews that allowed for full participation in the nation state. The Protestant bourgeoisie reaped the rewards in the form of power and affluence. Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik. Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1994).
of National Socialism and stifled resistance to the persecution of Jews.\footnote{Olaf Blaschke, \textit{Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).} Scholars must ask questions about the real link between Christianity and racial antisemitism and the failure of the church to resist Nazism, but sweeping conclusions about a homogenous, anti-modern Catholic mentality may not hold all the answers. They may instead reinforce false dichotomies of secular/progressive and religious/reactionary that are not true in the case of women. Rather, as Birgit Sack and Reinhard Richter have argued, the reactionary and progressive aspects within the Catholic milieu are linked and must be analyzed together. In her monograph on the Catholic women’s movement in the Weimar Republic, Birgit Sack concluded that the Catholic milieu became more heterogeneous in the twentieth century and the potential for conflict within this increasingly pluralistic environment became greater. The rise of authoritarian and antisemitic Catholic views in the twentieth century must therefore be viewed as a response to, or at least be analyzed in concurrence with progressive Catholicism that embraced the Weimar constitution and advocated for participation in the democratic process.\footnote{Birgit Sack, \textit{Zwischen religiöser Bildung und moderner Gesellschaft. Katholische Frauenbewegung und politische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik 1918/19-1933} (Münster: Waxmann, 1998). Reinhard Richter reached similar conclusions in his analysis of Catholics in Imperial Germany. He argued that it was Catholics’ new openness to modernity and to the state that in some segments of the church and milieu gave rise to new \textit{Feindbilder} (images of enemies), namely antisocialism and antisemitism. He further argued that when Catholics embarked on their journey into modernity, “they carried in their luggage universal images that manifested themselves in the romantic yearning for an idealist Reich of medieval kingship, in the \textit{grosseutsche} orientation” and in ultramontanism. Reinhard Richter, \textit{Nationales Denken im Katholizismus der Weimarer Republik} (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000), 26-28 (quote: 28). See also: Detlef J. K. Peukert, \textit{Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne} (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1987). My work adds to the understanding of the pluralism of Catholicism in Modern Germany and recognizes the
co-existence of reactionary and progressive tendencies within the milieu, in particular as Catholics and the Catholic Church encountered National Socialism.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1936 are the focus of the second part of this chapter. Catholic congregations continued to thrive during the initial years of the regime although the Nazis contested women religious teachers’ place in the “people’s community” from the onset. I examine how the Poor School Sisters responded to the new political realities, and ask whether the Nazis were correct that women religious teachers were not politically reliable and could not become agents of the state.

In the historiography on Catholic schools in Nazi Germany, scholars’ main focus has been on the conflict between the Catholic clergy and the regime, rather than on both compliance and conflict. In Catholic schools, the lines between Catholic and National Socialist worldviews became blurred. The labor of women religious helped to legitimize the regime and freed Catholic students to integrate into the people’s community and commit to National Socialism. But women religious’ refusal to act out the most

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pernicious aspect of Nazi ideology, namely racial antisemitism, may also have succeeded in preserving certain free spaces in their Catholic schools. These unexpected free spaces enabled some Jewish students to escape the violent antisemitism in public school, at least for a time.

The continued existence of Catholic schools in 1933 also raises important questions about the meaning and effectiveness of the concordat. Ludwig Volk, Heinz Hürten, and Konrad Repgen are some of the most prominent scholars who have viewed the concordat as a contractual form of noncompliance that eased the Catholic Church’s defense against the regime. Matthias Stickler and Alfred Rinnerthaler in particular focused on the meaning of the concordat for Catholic schools and argued that in spite of all its flaws, the concordat preserved Catholic schools and congregations for years to come in Nazi Germany. Stickler and Rinnerthaler cited the counter-case of Austria as proof. Rinnerthaler asserted that because Austria was without a concordat, the Nazis conducted the church struggle in Austria in 1938 much more aggressively, and Catholic schools and congregations were among the main victims of the “concordatless situation.” Stickler wrote that “for Austria the non-recognition of the concordat had grave consequences,” because within months of the Anschluss in 1938 the Nazis closed 1,417 Austria Catholic schools. Michael Kißener implied that the Catholic Church was willing to pay a very high price to secure the place of the Catholic faith and

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264 Rinnerthaler, 372.

265 Stickler, 97.
institutions, including religious orders, in Nazi Germany, namely the complete
depoliticization of the church.\textsuperscript{266}

These arguments accord a central role to the hierarchy in preserving Catholic
schools and congregations in Nazi Germany, whereas women religious fade into the
background. Stickler and Rinnerthaler’s conclusions that rest on the comparison to
Austria are not entirely convincing because both ignore chronology. The Nazis
aggressively moved against Catholic schools in 1938 in both Austria and Germany, not
because of the absence or existence of a concordat, but because they believed they had
accumulated sufficient political capital and the economic means to do so. The Nazi
regime’s policies against Catholic schools and congregations were driven by political and
practical considerations, not by contractual obligations.\textsuperscript{267} During the initial years of their
rule, the Nazis’ position was politically and economically too precarious to risk losing the
support of Catholics with decisive measures against Catholic institutions. Neither the
concordat nor the subsequent petitions by the episcopate altered the Nazis’ aim in any
way to remove women religious congregations from the German school system.

\textbf{2.2 The Poor School Sisters before 1933}

There is no doubt that the Nazi period posed grave challenges to the congregation
of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. At the same time, the women had faced
numerous serious difficulties throughout their one-hundred-year history that threatened

\textsuperscript{266} Michael Kißener, “Katholiken im Dritten Reich,” in Hummel and Kißener, 20.

\textsuperscript{267} For a discussion of Hitler’s opportunism in all matters of foreign policy, see: Gerhard L.
Weinberg, \textit{The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936}
their existence. Many times before 1933, the women relied on their organizational flexibility and pragmatism to overcome obstacles. One such episode was of course the Kulturkampf. Following the Kulturkampf, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame did not seek refuge within a reactionary mentality but quickly rebuilt what they had lost. They once again entered into close partnerships with the state, as the example of the Westphalian province shows.

Upon their return to Prussia in 1888, the Westphalian sisters had little time to ponder past injustices or lament their exclusion from public education. Within a decade, the congregation was hard pressed to meet the demands of parents seeking to enroll their daughters in their schools and kindergartens. The old cloister in Brakel was now too small to accommodate the growing congregation and schools. The most pressing concern the sisters faced was how to finance the new facilities that their rapid expansion necessitated.

The early twentieth century was also an era of significant reforms of girls’ secondary and higher education. Women now pressed for equal educational opportunities and began to matriculate in universities. Women religious participated in the reforms, and in 1908, new laws in Prussia improved the secondary education of girls (Neuordnung des höheren Mädchenschulwesens) by reforming teacher training, school curricula, and facilities. The reforms required among other things that the Poor School Sisters in Brakel outfit a gymnasium and provide new spaces dedicated to the instruction of music and

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268 By 1902, thirty-seven professed sisters resided on the Brede. The women taught in the sisters’ own teachers’ college (Lehrerinnenseminar), the secondary school for girls (Höhere Töchterschule), the Haushaltungsschule, the kindergarten, or the orphanage and the attached free school (Freischule). In addition, seventeen candidates were among the eighty-two students attending the Höhere Töchterschule. The orphanage housed thirty-eight girls, and forty children attended the sisters’ kindergarten. Ibid.
The sisters worked hard to institute the new requirements and invested 90,000 Reichsmark to fund a new building with modern classrooms facilities that were completed in 1910. An advocate of technology, the mother superior M. Immakulata S. also had telephones installed in their various buildings for easier and faster communication. A forced-air heating system was installed in 1914 in the cloister’s kitchen.

Meeting the new demands for academically trained teachers proved more difficult. Only a small number of Poor School Sisters had completed the advanced academic education beyond the usual teacher seminary, and the women wrote in 1908 that “there is such an acute shortage of academically trained female teachers, it is impossible to get a hold of any.” But in time, the sisters overcame this obstacle as well.

The reforms marked a decisive step in the improvement of girls’ education. Since the late nineteenth century, advocates urged the reform of girls’ higher education to make it more equal to boys’ schools, in particular since women agitated to matriculate at universities. In 1908, Prussia opened universities to women, and long overdue reforms to grant girls the equivalent to the boys’ Abitur had to be instituted. The reforms of 1908 replaced the “Höhere Töchterschule” (higher school for daughters) by instituting what was first called Höhere Mädchenschule (higher school for girls) and later Lyzeum, a type of middle school for girls up to grade ten, and the Oberlyzeum, grades eleven to thirteen. The Lyzeum still focused on a specific “womanly” education, and the Oberlyzeum did not convey the Abitur, the certificate required to matriculate at university, but was a seminaries for teachers. To obtain the Abitur, girls had to transfer after the seventh or eighth grade to a “Studienanstalt.” Before then, girls had to attend a boys’ school to obtain the Abitur. Bavaria implemented similar reforms in 1911. Eva Matthes, “Kampfzeiten”: Der Weg der Mädchen zur gymnasialen Bildung,” in Das Gymnasium. Alltag, Reform, Geschichte, Theorie, ed. Eckart Liebau, Wolfgang Mack, and Christoph Scheilk (Weinheim and Munich: Juventa Verlag, 1997), 207. See also: James C. Albisetti, Secondary School Reform in Imperial Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

This was only the latest in a number of major investments the sisters made since their return to Westphalia to modernize their facilities. For instance, in 1892 and 1905, the sisters invested 60,000 and 20,000 RM respectively to remodel the middle wing of the cloister. Chronik Kloster Brede, 1850-1970, AKB, 27.

A few years earlier, the sisters ordered indoor plumbing installed in their cloister. Ibid., 31 ff.

Ibid.

Ibid., 24.
and in 1914, they recorded “with great joy” that they had fulfilled all requirements stipulated by the laws of 1908.\textsuperscript{274}

The 1908 reforms improved education for girls but also emphasized the still narrow professional options available to women beyond the teaching profession. This reality was not lost on the Poor School Sisters who recorded in 1912 that

\begin{quote}
the courses and the institute continue to be well attended, although there is by far not the same demand as before. This decline in demand is easily explained by the overcrowding of the teaching profession so that many no longer pursue these studies.\textsuperscript{275}
\end{quote}

These real concerns about women’s professional opportunities were soon overshadowed by the outbreak of war when women were drawn into the workforce in large numbers.

In 1914 the sisters noted with horror the outbreak of a war that “set the world aflame.”\textsuperscript{276} For the next four years, as was the case for most people, the grim realities of World War I dominated the lives of the Poor School Sisters. Many German Catholics welcomed Emperor Wilhelm’s \textit{Burgfrieden} that hailed a Germany without factions. The Poor School Sisters did not question that the war was the will of God but expressed hopes for a quick end to the conflict.\textsuperscript{277} Encouraged by their bishops, Catholics supported the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{274} Since 1913, the Poor School Sisters’ “higher school for girls” was renamed \textit{Lyzeum}, and the three-year teaching seminary for girls was renamed \textit{Oberlyzeum}. The \textit{Lyzeum} and \textit{Oberlyzeum} offered women few options, as a higher education for girls in the \textit{Oberlyzeum} was equivalent to a teaching certificate. Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{277} The Chronik of 1914 reads: “May the fatherly hand of God that at the moment justifiably chastises the people, bring us soon the so longed for peace.” 34. This statement expressed the accepted Catholic theology based on St. Augustine that wars were ordered by God and were thereby justified because God was never unjust. Wilhelm Damberg, “Krieg, Theologie und Kriegserfahrung,” in \textit{Kirchen im Krieg 1939-1945}, ed. Karl-Joseph Hummel and Christoph Kösters (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 203 ff.
\end{flushright}
war effort with energy and enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{278} The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame and their students prayed, signed war bonds, and “used every free minute” to create “gifts (\textit{Liebesgaben}) for warriors in the field.”\textsuperscript{279} Catholic religious orders had a long tradition of providing charity in times of need and war. Although the sisters in Brakel decided against opening a field hospital in their gymnasium, the Poor School Sisters in Oppeln provided fifty-eight beds for wounded soldiers and their caretakers.\textsuperscript{280} For two weeks, the Poor School Sisters in Munich fed troops marching through the city a total of 4,200 meals, and sewed a total of 700 shirts and other pieces of clothing for the soldiers.\textsuperscript{281}

The optimism of the early days of war soon gave way to the realities of total, industrialized war. In September 1914, the Westphalian sisters’ longtime benefactor Count Hermann von Bocholtz-Asseburg fell in battle.\textsuperscript{282} The year 1915 brought food shortages that prompted the women to exercise “prudent caution and wise frugality in their household and in their manner of living.”\textsuperscript{283} The Poor School Sisters’ contributions

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{278} Heinz Hürten wrote that “the words …of Michael v. Faulhaber expressed the absolute identification of Catholics with their nation, when he stated that this war ‘was a schoolbook example of a just war.’ A more critical observer commented that ‘unfortunately in some places Catholics had to endure sermons that would have been just as suited for a patriotic assembly …’” Heinz Hürten, \textit{Deutsche Katholiken 1918-1945} (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992), 31.

\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{280} W. Liese, “Die katholischen Orden Deutschlands und der Völkerkrieg 1914/15,” AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 5501.

\textsuperscript{281} This number pales when compared with the 3,380 woolen items and linen things that the Poor School Sisters and their students in Breslau prepared for the front. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{282} Chronik Kloster Brede, 1850-1970, AKB, 34.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
to the war effort could not disguise how weary they became as the conflict wore on and how much they wished it to end as food became even scarcer.\textsuperscript{284}

The unexpected end of World War I nonetheless came as a shock to the sisters that was compounded by the ensuing political chaos and upheaval throughout Germany. In November 1918, Paul von Hindenburg’s calculated revolution from above gave way to a socialist revolution after sailors mutinied in Kiel in October 1918. Taken aback by the sudden turn of events, the Poor School Sisters in Brakel recorded in 1918 that

\begin{quote}
the loss of hope for an honorable and advantageous peace weighs heavily upon us, and we can barely comprehend what each new day brings: Abdication of our dear emperor, [the] hard armistice imposed by our enemies, [and] the toppling of the government, and ever-changing new forms of the latter.\textsuperscript{285}
\end{quote}

Like most Germans, the sisters had imagined a victorious end to the war sealed by an advantageous peace treaty. When the German delegation accepted the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the sisters admitted

\begin{quote}
how very differently we had imagined this day, full of victorious jubilation (\textit{Siegesjubel}) and tolling of bells, full of festive songs and joyous celebrations. And now we are a poor [and] feeble people, without standing in the outside world and without unity on the inside.\textsuperscript{286}
\end{quote}

But the sisters’ flights into sentimentality as they reflected on the state of post-World War I Germany were rare and brief, as more immediate domestic and political concerns occupied their time in 1918 and 1919.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 37 and 39.

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 40

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 45, 46
The proclamation of the republic on 9 November 1918 marked a renaissance as well as a crisis for the Catholic Church in Germany. The Poor School Sisters’ attitude toward the Weimar Republic too was both apprehensive and optimistic. The women trusted in God once again to give them “the inner strength…and with it the ability…to work…on the rebuilding of our so gravely afflicted fatherland.” 287 The sisters were in an excellent position to participate in the new state, because as an institution of the Catholic Church, their legal standing improved significantly in the Weimar Republic. The constitution guaranteed positive religious freedom (positive Religionsfreiheit) to Germans. It meant that the state protected churches in the exercise of their mission and worship, and Catholics occupied key positions in the Weimar Republic. 288 But it is important not to use positive aspects like the participation of Catholics in the democratic processes in the Weimar Republic to cover up the concurrent increase of authoritarian, anti-democratic, and antisemitic tendencies within segments of Catholicism. 289

Early conflicts over the separation of church and state also did much to obscure the significant gains both churches made in the Weimar Republic. Catholics’ distrust of social democracy increased when the Prussian government attempted to abolish the confessional character of Prussian schools within days after the revolution in November

287 Ibid.


289 Feldkamp, for instance, stresses the Catholics’ integration and participation in the democratic process in the Weimar Republic. Aside from pointing to the improved legal status of the Catholic Church, he points to the key position of the Center Party in the republic. Feldkamp acknowledges but downplays the anti-republican sentiments of Catholics such as Cardinal Faulhaber and argued that leaders of Catholic lay organizations and the political Catholicism “stood behind the constitution and called repeatedly for loyalty to the constitution,” 17 ff. See also the aforementioned works by Sack, Richter, and Peukert.
1918. The Poor School Sisters too harbored long-standing suspicions of social
democracy. When the cloister in Brakel hosted a workers’ and soldiers’ council on 18
November 1918, the sisters observed events with much interest, and left no doubt of their
preference of the Catholic Center Party over social democracy. The sisters’ attitude
toward social democracy is also reflected in their account of the elections for the Prussian
and national assemblies in January 1919. For the first time women voted in Germany.
The significance of events was not lost on the sisters in Brakel who wrote that “alongside
numerous German women, the sisters too went to the voting booth, in order to fulfill our
duty to church and fatherland.” The sisters added that with voting they also “defended
their sacred possessions,” presumably from the grasp of social democrats and
communists. The sisters were pleased with the outcome, and in the national elections of

290 The government reversed its decision in response to mass protests that temporarily united
Protestants and Catholics against Social Democrats. Heinz Hürten concluded that the incident burdened the
new republic from the beginning in that “the church-going public of both confessions did not recognize the
preservation…[and] the improvement of the situation of the churches as a consequence of the revolution,
but as the result of resistance against the men that the 9th of November brought to power.” Heinz Hürten,
Katholiken, Kirche und Staat als Problem der Historie. Ausgewählte Aufsätze, ed. Hubert Gruber
(Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), 89. The Weimar Constitution actually stipulated that schools were no longer
to be separated according to confession and that confessional schools were to be replaced with what were
known as Simultanschulen (community schools) attended by children of all confessions. But the framers of
the constitution deferred implementation of Simultanschulen until the passing of comprehensive education
laws for all of Germany (Reichsschulgesetz). The latter never came about. Attempts during the Weimar
Republic to centralize certain aspects of education were unsuccessful, and states retained jurisdiction over
education, and confessional schools also remained the norm. Rolf Eilers, Die nationalsozialistische
Schulpolitik (Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), 51 ff.

291 The sisters recorded that during the council meeting, “a social democratic speaker sought to
win adherents. But the following meeting of the Center showed that our people in Brakel still contained a

292 Ibid., 42.

293 Ibid.
1919, the Center Party made the second strongest showing behind the social democrats with nearly twenty percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{294}

The sisters’ fears of socialism receded into the background as they faced the many challenges associated with rebuilding after the war. The state struggled to reintegrate millions of soldiers into society, ameliorate acute food shortages, and provide services for countless disabled veterans, war widows, and orphans. Countering serious economic problems such as rising inflation and switching from wartime to peacetime production also posed enormous challenges. The sisters took note in 1919 of continuing inflation and the increasing scarcity of food and other items that made life difficult.\textsuperscript{295}

Despite ongoing economic hardships, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame worked successfully alongside the Weimar state to improve the education of girls. The women also took evident pride in their roles.\textsuperscript{296} Even during these hard economic times, the sisters in Westphalia were able to grow their congregation, and in 1919 they reopened their school and community in Warburg, which they had lost in the 1870s. After World War I, secondary schools for girls were in high demand, as young women aspired to new ideals that included a better education. The Weimar Republic was the era of the much

\textsuperscript{294} The Center Party participated in nine coalition governments and four chancellors were members of the Center. For the first time and on the initiative of Social Democratic President Friedrich Ebert, a nuncio was appointed for all of Germany. Formerly, only Bavaria had a nuncio. Eugenio Pacelli, then the nuncio of Bavaria, was appointed nuncio of Germany in 1920. Feldkamp, 17.

\textsuperscript{295} Chronik Koster Brede, 1850-1970, AKB, 42.

\textsuperscript{296} For instance, the sisters also noted with pride that on 3 March 1920, two sisters, S. Maria Foreria Schlucking and S. Maria Sonzaga Sauer received the Verdienstkreuz “for her tireless work for the fatherland...” On 11 June 1920, the ReichschULKONFERENZ (Reich school conference) opened in Berlin to which the government called women religious as well, one from Prussia and two from Bavaria. One of the Bavarian sisters was a Poor School Sister, Sister M. Theapista. Ibid, 48, 49. At the Reichschulkonference, the Poor School Sisters joined over six hundred other experts to discuss the restructuring of the country’s school system, but the conference yielded few real results and the status quo remained largely unchallenged. See: Zentralinstitut, Die Reichschulkonferenz in ihren Ergebnissen (Leipzig, 1921).
celebrated “new woman.” But the glamorous, independent, and sexually liberated new woman was an ideal out of reach for most women who had to attend to the more pressing material concerns of their daily existence. More girls therefore sought a higher education out of necessity or out of a desire for independence. The Poor School Sisters in Westphalia noted in 1920 that

because current times make it more than ever necessary even for girls to enter the workforce that requires the attendance …of a Lyzeum, our institute was in high demand. But our facilities are still not sufficient to accommodate everyone, and the terrible rise in prices for building materials and wages will not alter that fact in the foreseeable future.298

It was the Poor School Sisters’ ongoing efforts to improve their educational offerings for girls in more locations that proved their most significant contribution to the Weimar Republic.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, German states came to depend on Catholic sisters to educate girls. States viewed the secondary education of boys as a matter of state but not that of girls. Catholic women religious congregations therefore became important and sometimes the sole providers of secondary educational opportunities for women.299 Women religious’ role in the secondary education of girls adds to the argument that organized religion contributed in significant ways to the

297 For contemporaries’ views of the changing image of women, see Friedrich Huebner, Die Frau von morgen, wie wir sie wünschen. Eine Essaysammlung aus dem Jahre 1929 (Berlin: Insel Verlag, 1996).


299 James C. Albisetti wrote that “in the 1890s, when 272 of 568 secondary schools for boys were wholly or partly supported by the Prussian state, only four of 128 girls’ schools were,” 113. Within forty-five years between the Poor School Sisters’ return to Westphalia in 1888 and the rise of Hitler in 1933, the province had grown to thirteen communities staffed by over two hundred sisters. The exact numbers for the Westphalian province for 1933 are: 217 professed sisters, 24 candidates, and 17 aspirants. Ordensschematismus der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr., 1.1.1933, AKB. See also Jörgens, 6.
advancement of women in modern Germany. For instance, by 1933, various women religious congregations owned and operated about 70 percent, or a total of 84, of all higher schools for girls, and about 90 percent, or 77, middle schools for girls in Bavaria. In comparison, the Catholic Church only provided about 13 percent of the secondary schooling for boys.  

Private Catholic schools were known beyond the Catholic population for their academic excellence. Lisa Japhne from Bingen entered a private Catholic school at age six in 1927, because “public school was not the done thing,” and Catholic school “was deemed to be right place to send a nice Jewish girl.” In the early twentieth century, the schools of women religious congregations stood out for their achievement and excellence in a Catholic milieu that still lagged behind the Protestant and Jewish populations in education and wealth.

The Poor School Sisters in Westphalia expended considerable resources of their own to improve educational opportunities for girls. Amidst hyper-inflation, “when a pound of bread cost one hundred and five billion marks,” they built a new school in Warburg, Westphalia. Unfortunately, a student’s monthly school fees soon rose to 3,000 Marks, and the fast deterioration of the value of money caused the sisters numerous

302 On the social and economic situation of Catholics in Weimar Germany, see Heinz Hürten’s excellent discussion in Deutsche Katholiken, 13 ff.
hardships.\textsuperscript{304} But the subsequent economic recovery imbued Germans with new optimism that justified large investments in a future that once again seemed bright.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame too looked forward to better times. With the improvement of the economy after 1923, the sisters in Prussia took advantage of the ready availability of foreign credits to expand their schools in the towns of Warburg and in Brakel. In July 1926, the sisters signed a twenty-year bond at seven percent interest in the amount of 420,000 Reichsmark to fund the project.\textsuperscript{305} In August 1926, the sisters signed a second bond in the amount of 255,000 Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{306} These transactions came to haunt them during the Nazi era.

The congregation thrived until the onset of the economic crisis in the late 1920s, when their debts became a heavy burden. In their chronicle, the Poor School Sisters in Westphalia often described the final years of the Weimar Republic as “difficult times,” marked by political instability and emergency decrees.\textsuperscript{307} Loss of income meant that the

\textsuperscript{304} The hyperinflation caused hardships throughout the congregation in Bavaria and Prussia. For instance, the inflation seemed to have caused food shortages in some communities that made it difficult to care for convalescent sisters. In October 1923, the family of Sister Maria Jona S. asked permission to care for their daughter suffering from tuberculosis at home, because she needed “above all good nourishment that is not available in the poor cloister in Dinkelsbühl.” Schmitt to Hauck, 12 October 1923, AEB, Rep 4/3 – 152/1. In Bavaria, the state excluded Catholic sisters from their practice of adjusting salaries of public school teachers to inflation. Consequently, the paper money the sisters received rapidly lost its value, and in November 1923 the general superior M. Bruno Thoma pleaded with the state to compensate her teachers with money that reflected current inflationary values (\textit{wertbeständiges Geld}). Thoma to Bayerisches Staatsministerium, 21 November 1923, BayHStA, MK61983.

\textsuperscript{305} Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse..

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.

sisters found it hard to raise the forty-four thousand Reichsmark required every year to satisfy the principle and interest payments on their loans.³⁰⁸

The sisters were nonetheless better off than many Germans who lacked the institutional support and resources still available to them. The Westphalian sisters wrote that “with God’s help, in the year 1932 we were once again able to help our suffering fellow human beings despite our financial difficulties.”³⁰⁹ That year the sisters fed 3,337 unemployed people and provided them with many necessities such as clothing and additional food.³¹⁰ Within months of this entry in the chronicle of the Poor School Sisters in Brakel, Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany. But the women did not record how they experienced these first weeks after January 1933. They now refrained from all political comments, and in January and February of 1933 they only wrote about a severe outbreak of influenza in their institute.³¹¹

2.3 The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1933

Hitler’s elevation to chancellor on 30 January 1933 came at an inopportune time for the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. Their general superior, M. Almeda Schricker, was on a long visit to the United States. M. Almeda Schricker, the daughter of a carpenter, was the congregation’s fifth general superior. She commenced her office in 1928 at the age of forty-nine when the congregation thrived in Europe and the United

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 107.
³⁰⁹ Ibid., 113.
³¹⁰ Ibid.
³¹¹ Ibid., 114.
States with a total of 9,518 sisters in 905 communities. The news reports and “wild rumors” of the new situation in Germany in 1933 very much unsettled M. Almeda Schricker and she considered returning to Germany at once, but the new government’s conciliatory tone toward the Catholic Church convinced her to remain in the United States.

Hitler needed the support of Catholics and the Catholic Church in 1933. The episcopate did not issue a statement until 28 March 1933 that revised the church’s adverse and somewhat unclear stance on National Socialism. The statement followed on the heel of Hitler’s pronouncement that “the national government sees in both

312 Ordensschematismus, der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Frau, 1 January 1929, AKB.

313 Klaus Scholder wrote that overcoming Catholic objections to National Socialism “was one of the most important tasks that Hitler faced in the first weeks of his rule,” and he therefore courted Catholics. Illusionen, 237.

314 Accounts and document collections of the church’s initial reaction to National Socialism often highlight the institution’s adverse stance toward National Socialism such as the 1930 pastoral instructions issued by the diocese of Munich and Freising that noted that a dictatorship of the Nazi party offered only the “bleakest prospects” for Catholics. “Pastorale Anweisung für den Klerus,” 1930, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8040. In the final years of the Weimar Republic, German bishops issued a series of pronouncements in which they criticized and rejected National Socialist ideology. The Bavarian bishops issued guidelines in February 1931 that forbade members of clergy to participate in any form in the National Socialist movement. The Conference of Bishops at Fulda followed suit in August 1931. For a selection of original texts of the hierarchy’s pronouncements, see Hubert Gruber, Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus, 1930-1945. Ein Bericht in Quellen (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), and Bernhard Stasiewski, Akten deutscher Bischöfe über die Lage der Kirche, 1933-1945, 6 vols. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1964). But Kevin Spicer showed in his work that despite the episcopate’s serious reservations about National Socialism, the Catholic response was gradual and lacked clarity, and the hierarchy “never put forth any uniform response to condemn it.” Resisting the Third Reich, 15. Although Bertram’s statement in 1933 did not present a wholesale endorsement of National Socialism on the part of the bishops, it represented a considerable reversal of the church’s previous stance. The statement did not retract the church’s previous condemnation of certain National Socialist teachings, but it also admonished Catholic Christians to obey authority and reject any revolutionary behavior. “Kundgebung der deutschen Bischöfe über die Haltung zum Nationalsozialismus,” 28 March 1933, in Gruber, 38, 39.
Christian denominations the most important factor for the maintenance of our society.”

Catholics could now participate in the new state.

Hitler’s vague promises of national renewal and economic recovery won him the enthusiasm and support of many Germans even as violence against some groups escalated. Catholic women religious were not beyond sharing in the elation that gripped much of Germany in 1933, and Sister Consilia S., then a twenty-two-year-old Poor School Sister, recalled that

some sisters thought he [Hitler] was a good leader…To win me over, I was ushered into the community room so that I could listen to one of Hitler’s famous speeches.”

In 1933, M. Bonavita Kainz was a teenager and an aspirant for sisterhood. She recalled that after January 1933, the atmosphere in the Poor School Sisters’ institute in Weichs near Munich changed. People no longer spoke freely, “because even in the cloister Hitler had friends!”

In his work on Silesian women religious congregations, Thomas Mengel found that the Poor School Sister M. Theophania G. was an ardent National Socialist, who soon earned the derisive nickname “our dear lady of the swastika” from fellow-

315 Qtd. in Conway, Persecution, 20. Hitler also courted conservative Catholics and Protestants in a pompous display at the opening of the Reichstag at Potsdam on 21 March 1933.

316 For a description of the enthusiasm many Germans felt in 1933, see Richard Evans, The Coming of Third Reich (New York: Penguin, 2005), 311 ff. During these early months, the celebrations and speeches by Hitler and other [Nazis] were accompanied by unprecedented terror perpetrated by the Storm Troopers and the police, but Ian Kershaw argued that the violence against Communists and other perceived enemies was not necessarily unpopular and won Hitler more supporters. Ian Kershaw, Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 456.


sisters.\textsuperscript{319} But Kevin Spicer showed in his monograph that the number of German clergy who became “brown priests” or convinced Nazis was small, and the same seems to hold true for women religious.\textsuperscript{320}

Many Poor School Sisters felt apprehensive in the weeks after Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933. M. Benedetta S., in charge during M. Almeda Schricker’s absence, acknowledged these feelings in a circular letter of April 1933 addressed to the congregation:

\begin{quote}
We share from our hearts, dear sisters, your fears and concerns and understand that you long for advice and help. But the quickly changing times and the great differences in the situation of individual communities make it impossible to issue general instructions to guide your behavior.\textsuperscript{321}
\end{quote}

M. Benedetta counseled caution, advising sisters to keep travel to a minimum and to weigh their words before speaking.\textsuperscript{322} The timing of the letter is noteworthy, because the congregation waited for more than two months to issue its first instructions. The circular appeared just prior to the new school year when the Nazis began to interfere in education. After her return from the United States in June 1933, M. Almeda Schricker also admonished sisters to maintain “prudent restraint, wise silence, and strict self-control.”\textsuperscript{323}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{319} M. Theophania was the principal of the Poor School Sisters’ private secondary school for girls (\textit{Gymnasium}) in Oppeln in Silesia, and in May 1933, she assured the magistrate of Oppeln that the “children in her school are being raised in the spirit of National Socialism,” and that “a great number of devout Catholic parents were also National Socialists.” Mengel, 35 ff.

\textsuperscript{320} In his meticulous research, Kevin Spicer identified 138 “brown priests,” the derogatory name for men “who stayed in the priesthood and promoted National Socialism.” \textit{Hitler’s Priests}, 5.

\textsuperscript{321} M. Benedetta S., memorandum, 3 April 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{323} M. Almeda Schricker issued the memorandum following the violent unrest during the Catholic \textit{Gesellentag} in June 1933. She wrote that “from the center” in Munich, it was possible to “see things
She asked the women not to leave the “seclusion of our cloister…unless the fulfillment of [our] religious and educational duties…demands it.” The sisters’ fear that public sentiment was turning against them was not unfounded. In 1933 some Germans began to express their hostilities toward religious life and sisters. The congregation in Munich began receiving disparaging “letters of complaints” (*Klagebriefe*), and sisters clad in their distinctive black habits became targets in public. Candidates venturing into the streets of Munich in their habits remembered being openly mocked and called “Faulhaber’s SS” by pedestrians. Although the Poor School could avoid certain conflicts through seclusion, this was not an option in the classroom.

### 2.3.1 The Nazification of Bavarian Public Schools in 1933

In Nazi Germany teachers became agents of the state, and classrooms became contested spaces. The organization and indoctrination of youth was a main concern of clearer” than in the provinces and urged sisters to heed her instructions. M. Schricker, memorandum, 29 June 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. By summer 1933, the Nazis escalated terror and violence against perceived enemies and Catholics, though not the main target, were not always exempt from it. In Bavaria, the home of Heinrich Himmler, prisons overflowed in 1933 with political prisoners and in March 1933, Dachau in Bavaria became the site of the first Nazi concentration camp. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945. Nemesis.* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.), 462 ff, and Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 344 ff.

324 M. Schricker, memorandum, 29 June 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich

325 M. Benedetta S. mentioned these letters of complaint in her memorandum from April 1933, but unfortunately none of the letters survived in the archive. M. Benedetta S., memorandum, 3 April 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

326 Several sisters remembered verbal insults directed at them after Hitler’s ascension to power. Sister Dolores R. was a candidate in Munich in 1933, and she and her fellow-candidates often went for walks in Munich. She recalled that the term “Faulhaber’s SS” was not always meant as an insult, but it raised the ire of Nazi supporters and drew attention to sisters in religious habits. Wishing to avoid controversies and attention of any kind, M. Benedetta advised sisters to keep outings to a minimum. M. Dolores R. and her friends eventually ceased their walks through Munich. M. Dolores R., interview in Wietheral, 8.
Hitler. He wrote in *Mein Kampf* that it was the “first task of the state” to preserve and develop “the best racial elements,” and that the state must also “educate the young offspring to become a valuable link in the chain of future reproduction.”\(^{327}\) The Nazis began to “reform” schools as soon as they were able.

In 1933 the responsibility for education first passed to the Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick before Bernhard Rust became the new Reich Minister of Science, Education, and National Culture in May 1934. Prior to the Nazi era, education was in the hands of the states, and all authority in matters of education should have passed in 1934 from the states to Rust.\(^{328}\) But as was typical in Nazi Germany, it was not that simple, and states retained significant authority over education policy. The Bavarian State Ministry for Education and Culture under Hans Schemm in particular remained very active in matters of education and often set precedents for the rest of Germany.\(^{329}\) After Rust’s appointment, Frick also continued to meddle in education, as did the National Socialist Teachers’ Association (NSLB), the Hitler Youth, the *Arbeitsfront* (labor service), and the SS.\(^{330}\)

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\(^{328}\) States lost their jurisdiction over education prior to the establishment of the ministry of education with the “Gesetz über den Neuaufbau des Reiches” (RGBl. 1934, I. 75) that abolished state parliaments. States became mere administrative units in Germany. But with the first *Durchführungsverordnung* (instructions for implementation) of this law, states were given back authority and competencies in the name of the Reich. Therefore, even after the establishment of the *Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung, und Volksbildung*, states retained much of their sovereignty in matters of education. Fürnrohr, 189.

\(^{329}\) On 16 March 1933, the Nazis replaced the Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture Franz Goldenberger, who was a member of the Bavarian People’s Party, with the National Socialist Hans Schemm in time for the new school year. Ibid., 176.

\(^{330}\) Despite the competition among individuals and agencies, Nazi education policy was fairly uniform and Frick expressed that its fundamental purpose was to raise committed followers and create “a
Due to economic and structural constraints, the Nazis did not implement comprehensive education reforms for a number of years. Historian Harald Scholtz divided Nazi educational policies into three phases. He found that during the first phase from 1933 to 1936, the Nazis’ main focus was on the coordination of teachers and the organization of students in the Hitler Youth as an effective means to nazify schools.\footnote{Phase II lasted from 1937 to 1940 and was marked by further consolidation of power and preparation for war, and Phase III lasted from 1940 to 1945, and was marked first by further acquisition of power and then by deterioration. Scholtz, 47 ff.}

According to one Nazi official from Upper Franconia, ideologically committed teachers ceased to be mere educators but became “carriers and preachers of the National Socialist world of ideas.”\footnote{NSLB Bamberg to NSLB Oberfranken, 31 December 1934, USHMM, NS 12. Selected Records from Hauptamt für Erzieher/Reichswaltung des Nationalsozialistischen Lehrerbundes (1933-1945), RG-68.053M, Reel 5.} Hans Schemm, who was also the founder of the National Socialist Teachers’ Association, demanded in March 1933 that with the beginning of the new school year 1933/34, teachers in all schools in Bavaria….have to introduce students to the meaning and greatness of the historical event of the national revolution, whereby it is crucial to awaken in the …youth a sense and feeling for the honor and power of the nation (Volk).\footnote{Schemm further instructed history teachers to impart to students “Versailles and its consequences: the collapse of the German economy…Germany under Marxist leadership, a slave to inflation…1930-1933: Horst Wessel becomes the symbol of the struggle for freedom…30 January 1933: Hitler becomes chancellor. From this day forward…a nation united in brotherhood reach for each others’ hands.” Hans Schemm, Entschl. d. Staatsmin. f. Unt. u. Kult. v. 27.3.33 Nr. VIII 12478 über die Behandlung des Stoffgebietes ‘Aufbruch der deutschen Nation von 1918 bis 1933’ im Geschichts-, Heimatkunde, Anschaungs- sowie staatsbürgerlichen Unterricht, 30 March 1933, in Amtsblatt des Bayer. Staatsministeriums für Unterricht und Kultus, 31.}

uniform political will” that formed a “lasting basis” for the future of Germany. Qtd. in Harald Scholtz, \textit{Erziehung und Unterricht unterm Hakenkreuz} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 58. This pronouncement by Frick was part of his speech “Kampfziele der deutschen Schule” that he made on 9 May 1933 to the education ministers of German states. According to Fürnrohr, Frick had no intention of surrendering authority over education to the states and wanted to direct education ministers toward uniform policies. Ibid., 176.
New history lessons on Hitler’s ascension to power were to be accompanied by a “dignified ceremony,” complete with flags and “short speeches by the teacher and a student about the “awakening (Aufbruch) of the nation.” History teachers were now expected to act as Nazi propagandists.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame adopted a stance of compliance toward the regime. In accordance with Schemm’s directives, they purchased the mandated new textbook *From the World War of 1914 to the National Revolution of 1933*. But the congregation’s leaders also reminded sisters in a memorandum dated 24 April 1933 that “of course not all lessons in the book must be covered in equal depth.” In informal interviews with M. Angela Hatwiger in 1990, several Poor School Sisters testified that they routinely corrected false information in history textbooks. The circular further instructed sisters that going forward “the swastika, the swastika flag, and the names Hindenburg and Hitler” played a role in all subjects, and girls belonging to the League of German Girls (BDM) “may not be in the least bit harassed.” Armed with these directions, the Poor School Sisters in Bavaria entered their classrooms in public Volksschulen in May 1933.

The sisters still had reason for optimism. The new government appeared to make Christian education a priority and targeted alleged non-Christian influences in schools.

334 Ibid.

335 M. Schricker, memorandum, 24 April 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

336 S. Angela Hatwiger interviewed some of her fellow-sisters in 1990 for a master’s thesis, but unfortunately she did not record the names or other details, but incorporated the information directly into her thesis. Angela Hatwiger, “Die Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr. in Bayern im Dritten Reich” (Zulassungsarbeit für das Lehramt an Gymnasien, Katholische Universität Eichstätt, 1990), 41.

337 Ibid.
Hitler also assured Wilhelm Berning, Bishop of Osnabrück, on 26 April 1933 that his
government “would preserve confessional schools in order to raise pious human
beings.”

Hans Schemm announced on 28 March 1933 that “Christendom and
Germandom are the highest laws of all education.”

The Nazis’ strong emphasis on
Christianity in 1933 served as justification for measures and violence against communists
and social democrats. In February 1933, the Nazis abolished Sammelschulen, non-
confessional schools without religious instructions, and in April 1933 all parents had to
enroll their children in religious lessons in school.

The regime also used the Law for
the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service from 7 April 1933 as a means to remove
non-Christian Marxist, social democratic, atheist, and Jewish teachers from German
schools.

338 Aufzeichnung über eine Besprechung des Bischofs von Osnabrück, Wilhelm Berning, und des
Generalvikars des Bistums Berlin, Paul Steinmann, mit Reichskanzler Hitler über kirchenpolitische Fragen,
26 April 1933, in Gruber, no 33. Bishops also focused on private Catholic schools early on. In April 1933,
Matthias Ehrenfried, bishop of Würzburg, voiced his “concerns about congregational private schools” and
vowed that German bishops would fight for the schools’ preservation. Protokoll der Konferenz des
bayerischen Episkopates, 20 April 1933, in Stasiewski, Akten, vol. 1, 70.

und nationale Haltung der Lehrkräfte an den bayerischen Schulen,” 30 March 1933, Amtsblatt des Bayer.
Staatsministeriums für Unterricht und Kultus no. 3, 37.

340 Eilers, 23. In 1933 in Bavaria, Hans Schemm ordered teachers to attend mass at the beginning
and end of the school year. His apparent pro-religion stance in 1933 raised the ire of Nazis who wished for
a more decisive anti-church policy. Schäffer, 131.

341 Charles B. Lansing wrote in his recent monograph that whereas the impact of the Law for the
Restoration of the Professional Civil Service should not be understated, its impact was also not sweeping
and relatively few non-Jewish teachers were dismissed from schools because of it. For instance, Lansing
found that in the district of Potsdam, of the 3,700 teachers who completed questionnaires, 47 lost their
positions. Charles B. Lansing, From Nazism to Communism. German School teachers Under Two
The conclusion of a concordat between the Catholic Church and the National Socialist state in July 1933 appeared further to strengthen the Catholic presence in the state and schools. The concordat reaffirmed the confessional nature of education and guaranteed the freedom of religious orders along with their right to establish and operate private Catholic schools. Articles 21 to 25 of the concordat dealt with confessional and private Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{342} Still, the concordat did not to dissuade the regime from the belief that women religious teachers were politically unreliable and unsuited to teach in German schools.

Frictions between the state and women religious teachers became commonplace after January 1933. On 25 April 1933, an article that appeared in the newspaper \textit{Deutsche Junglehrerzeitung} lamented the harmful presence and influence of Catholic sisters (\textit{Verklösterlichung}) in Bavarian public schools:

\begin{quote}
A strong state that determines its own values and that recognizes the special interest of individual groups only insofar as these groups benefit it and do not threaten its existence or the existential interest (\textit{Lebensinteresse}) of its whole people (\textit{Volksganzen}), must not tolerate the ongoing cloistering (\textit{Verklösterlichung}) of Bavarian public schools.\textsuperscript{343}
\end{quote}

The article pronounced a religious vocation and loyalty to the National Socialist state as incompatible. The authors also blamed Catholic sisters for the shortage of teaching.

\textsuperscript{342} Article 25 was of particular importance for the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. It explicitly granted religious congregations and orders the right to establish and operate private schools. For a discussion of the importance of the school question during the negotiations prior to the conclusion of the concordat see Maier, 14 ff. For an analysis of the articles of the concordat pertaining to schools and religious instructions, see Damberg, \textit{Schulen in Westfalen}, 33-37.

\textsuperscript{343} “Das bayer. Klosterschulwesen,” 25 April 1933, Sondernummer, \textit{Deutsche Junglehrerzeitung}.
positions for World War I veterans and demanded that the state commence with the immediate removal of women religious teachers from Bavarian public schools.\textsuperscript{344}

Women religious teachers were in part suspect because they did not join the National Socialist Teachers’ Association (NSLB). Membership in the association signaled a teacher’s political reliability and his or her place in the people’s community. The NSLB was founded in 1927 by Hans Schemm and oversaw much of the political indoctrination of teachers that was a cornerstone of Nazi education policy in 1933.\textsuperscript{345} Catholic sisters never joined the NSLB and M. Almeda Schricker often warned Poor School Sisters to resist any pressure to join the organization.\textsuperscript{346}

Catholic sisters’ self-exclusion from the Nazi teachers’ association underscored the regime’s conviction that women religious teachers lacked loyalty to the National Socialist state. Numerous documents speak to this fact. In a memorandum that the teacher and self-appointed expert Maria Luthner prepared for the NSLB in 1936, she articulated the common suspicion that Catholic sisters were faking their commitment to the state. She concluded that religious life, its seclusion, rules, and vows of obedience

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{344} Women religious should only pursue work in the fields of health care and social work where work was available in abundance. Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{345} Scholars have often interpreted the rapid self-coordination of teachers in 1933 as evidence of their affinity to National Socialism. Wilhelm Damberg concluded, for instance, that Catholic male teachers in Westphalia quickly moved toward National Socialism when they dissolved their professional organization in 1933 and joined the NSLB. Catholic female teachers, on the other hand, resisted coordination and refused to dissolve the League of Catholic Women Teachers until forced to do so in 1937. Damberg, \textit{Schulen in Westfalen}, 42. Rolf Eilers wrote that by 1936, 97% of teachers in Germany belonged to the NSLB,\textsuperscript{74}. But Charles Lansing argued that the rapid self-coordination of teachers was not so much a sign of enthusiasm for Nazism but an indicator of their ideological flexibility and adaptability. Lansing also provides a good overview of the history of the NSLB, 61 ff. Marjorie Lamberti made a similar argument in her article, Marjorie Lamberti, “German Schoolteachers, National Socialism, and the Politics of Culture at the End of the Weimar Republic,” \textit{Central European History} 34, no. 1 (2001): 53-82.
\item \textsuperscript{346} Schricker, memorandum, 1 November 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
\end{itemize}
resulted in the “limiting” of the women’s “intellectual horizon,” and even if “women religious teachers were willing, they would never have the opportunity…to comprehend the true nature of National Socialism [emphasis in original].”347 Luthner further wrote that only in the rarest cases did Catholic sisters embrace National Socialist ideas, and that instead, “the teachers reject the Third Reich, something they cleverly cover up with impeccable work.”348 She also cited congregations’ alleged selfish hoarding of wealth as a source of their disloyalty.

The association of cloisters with wealth and greed became a favorite theme of Nazi officials. Luthner wrote that “for the cloisters, public schools are economic objects of exploitation,” from which they reaped large profits that flowed directly into their coffers without benefitting German communities.349 A member of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) wrote in the 1930s that “the easiest and most effective way to get at cloisters” was through economic measures, and “their own ideal of total poverty shall strike the deadly blow.” 350 In 1933, Hans Schemm implemented punitive economic measures against women religious teaching congregations.


348 Ibid. The belief that women religious lacked all loyalty to the state and were only pretending was an often-voiced criticism in Nazi Germany. For instance, during a meeting in April 1935, an official in Munich (Stadtschulrat Förschl) verbally attacked the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, asserting that the women’s efforts in the rebuilding of the Reich was „only a mask.“ “Bericht eines Teilnehmers über die 2 Leherratsitzungen an der kathl. Konfessionsschule an der Silberhornstrasse in Muenchen,” April 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8151

349 Ibid.

350 SD-Bericht, ca. 1935, BArch B, R 58/5611b, Bl. 587-607, quote Bl. 607.
The Bavarian state sent a message to religious teaching congregations when it revoked their tax-exempt status and congregations became subject to the church tax.\textsuperscript{351} In 1933, the state of Bavaria also cut the income of women religious teachers. The compensation of German civil servants consisted of a base salary and the so-called \textit{Ortszuschlag}, also referred to as a rental subsidy.\textsuperscript{352} In September 1933, women religious teachers no longer received the rental subsidy.\textsuperscript{353} The cut of sisters’ compensation equaled about twenty percent of their salaries, and Schemm used the savings to help cover a budget deficit of over twenty million Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{354} The salaries of unmarried and childless teachers were also cut but not as drastically as the income of women religious.\textsuperscript{355} At the same time, the congregation became subject to a mandatory charitable deduction equaling two percent of the annual rent or property taxes.\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{351} In June 1933, Mother Almeda Schricker informed her sisters that religious congregations had to start paying church taxes, because the state no longer included them in exempt organizations serving the common good (gemeinnützige Zwecke). Schricker to Poor School Sisters, 29 June 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{352} The compensation of women religious teaching in Bavarian public schools had always been lower than that of secular teachers. Women religious teachers received the basic starting salary of secular female teachers along with half of the rental subsidy paid to lay teachers. Memorandum, Bay. Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, Betreff: Die klösterlichen Lehrkräfte an den Volksschulen, 6 April 1931, BayHStA, MK 61983.

\textsuperscript{353} Schricker, Rundbrief, 9 September 1933, OAAS M. As the name suggests, the rental subsidy was intended to help civil servants cover housing expenses. In the case of women religious, many communities did not charge the sisters rent and the \textit{Ortszuschlag} therefore formed part of the income of the congregation. Along with the elimination of the rental subsidy in 1933, Nazi officials ordered communities to enter negotiations with women religious congregations about rental charges for apartments owned by the municipalities.

\textsuperscript{354} Fürnrohr, 184.

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{356} Schricker, memorandum, 5 October 1933, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
Rewriting tax and law codes to the detriment of certain groups became a favored and much utilized tool in Hitler’s Germany. Jews suffered the worst from economic violence starting in 1933. Via economic measures the state struck out at perceived enemies, added to its empty coffers and, in the case of Catholic congregations, avoided raising the ire of Catholics whose loyalty the regime sought to secure. The sisters had to tighten their belts, and in 1934 M. Almeda Schricker thanked all who, in “praiseworthy frugality and in a loving sense of community,” had continued to add savings to the congregations’ accounts. Although none of these measures spelled the sisters’ financial doom, the significant cuts to their income added to their growing feelings of uncertainty about their future in the National Socialist state at a time when Hitler reveled in the political prestige that came with the conclusion of the concordat in July 1933.

The uncertainties the sisters felt were magnified by their experiences in the classroom. In Bavarian public Volksschulen, the Poor School Sisters were more vulnerable to conflicts with the regime than in their private schools. In public school, the sisters were within the jurisdiction and easy reach of local and regional authorities. Also, in Catholic private schools the tuition-paying student body was self-selected and presumably more committed to the Catholic faith. This was not the case in public Volksschulen, and in 1933 the power relationship in classrooms shifted in favor of students.

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357 Initial anti-Jewish economic measures such as the boycott of 1 April 1933 against Jewish businesses and the Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service of 7 April 1933 enabled the regime to reign in the violent SA and take control of measures against Jews. Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Die Jahre der Verfolgung 1933-1939* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2000), 32 ff.

358 Schricker, Rundschreiben, undated (probably Easter 1934), OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
The Poor School Sisters in the public Volksschule in Bad Tölz became subject to the close scrutiny of parents and the city council. City council records from the 1930s contain a litany of complaints brought by parents against the sisters. Parents complained, for instance, that the sisters singled out Protestant children for special punishment and forbade girls to wear short sleeves to school, which some parents viewed as “an exaggerated expression of morality.” The mayor concluded that the sisters proved with their behavior that “they still clung to bygone times and their inner attitude makes an adjustment [to the current era] impossible.” To the mayor and some citizens of Bad Tölz, the sisters’ stance toward the local chapter of the League of German Girls (BDM) was further evidence of their disloyalty. Students reported that “they [sisters] don’t like to see girls joining the Hitler Youth,” and that the Poor School Sisters in fact intimidated the girls to keep them out of the BDM. Membership in the League of German Girls was indeed low in Bad Tölz, and by the end of 1935 only 56 percent of girls attending the Poor School Sisters’ Volksschule belonged to the organization.

The Poor School Sisters’ relationship with the local Leagues of German Girls was a point of constant friction. Nazi officials used the BDM membership of students in the sisters’ schools as a measure of the latter’s commitment to National Socialism. In her

359 Mayor of Bad Tölz to Bayer. Staatsministerium für Kirchen- und Schulangelegenheiten, 25 May 1935, StaBT, A IIb 188.

360 Ibid.

361 Ibid.

assessment of women religious teachers, Maria Luthner paid particular attention to Catholic sisters’ attitude to the League of German Girls. According to Luthner, Catholic schools showed their true colors in regard to the BDM. She wrote that she had obtained “reliable data” on sixty-six Bavarian public schools and of those, 73 percent maintained an “indifferent or adversarial stance toward the BDM.” Luthner listed a number of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame’s public schools where sisters either just followed guidelines or displayed neutral or adversarial attitudes toward the League of German Girls. In Königsdorf the sisters only “suffered [the BDM] because it was unavoidable,” and in Lengries, there was “zero promotion” (Werbung = 0) for the organization. The sisters’ school in Schongau, on the other hand, “acted according to regulation,” and in Mühldorf, 87 percent of girls belonged to the League.

The Poor School Sisters in Bad Tölz rejected any suggestions that they worked against the BDM. The women insisted that they had lobbied on behalf of the organization and even rearranged their lesson plan to free girls to attend the League’s meetings on Saturday morning. It did not really matter what Catholic sisters did. Their behavior always remained suspect in the eyes of Nazi officials. In 1933, Sister Clara F. raised the ire of her principal when she awarded a high grade to a member of the BDM. The

363 Luthner identified six Catholic public schools that maintained “exemplary” relations with the BDM but she questioned whether this cooperation was genuine, noting that “die Klosterfrauen verstehen sich geschickt zu tarnen.” Ibid.

364 Luthner identified seven public schools of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame located in Upper Bavaria whose sisters maintained an adversarial stance toward the BDM: Mammendorf, Lengries, Königsdorf, Rosenheim, Birkenstein, and Ingolstadt. Ibid.

365 Ibid.

366 Leitung der Mädchen-Volksschule Bad Tölz to Bezirksamt Bad Tölz, 22 May 1935, StaBT, A IIb 188.
principal accused her of attempting to lure the girl away from the organization with favorable treatment. 367

Sister Clara’s experiences illustrate the difficulties women religious teachers encountered in the classroom beginning in 1933. After completing her novitiate, Sister Clara began teaching in 1933 in Franconia. She recalled the “seventy headstrong girls aged ten to thirteen,” who often challenged her authority in the classroom. 368 The sister decided that “to flare up or to punish them was no good,” and so she tried to convince students to study in order to “become useful members of the [Nazi] Party.” 369 To encourage girls to attend Saturday lessons, Sister Clara started a “Hitler book” in which she “collected all the facts about him that were for the good of the nation,” such as public works projects, and “we wrote in our Hitler book about his marvelous achievements and attached colorful pictures.” 370 Nevertheless, when local Nazi officials offered Sister Clara a post as a Nazi youth leader, she declined. 371

Sister Clara was able to succeed in the classroom not because of her authority but because she became popular. M. Almeda Schricker recognized the new power of students in a memorandum in August 1934 when she admonished everyone that

it is absolutely necessary that the sisters teach with motherly benevolence and steadfast patience. Only recently, a friend of our

367 S. Clara F., interview in Wiethaler.
368 Ibid.
369 Ibid.
370 Ibid.
371 Bernhard Höpfl found that in 1933 the episcopate actually encouraged Catholic lay and religious teachers to accept posts in the League of German Girls to assure the Christian education of youth in that setting. 187.
order gave us the advice that the sisters should no longer employ such strictness in the classroom, and at all cost should no longer punish the children corporally. If anything can save us now it is the love of the children and the parents.\footnote{372}

This statement is significant. It indicates the high level of uncertainty the sisters already felt in 1934 and their fears for the loss of their teaching positions. The excerpt also confirms the inordinate power of children in the situation. In a dictatorship of consent, the women did not rely on the concordat or the episcopate to protect them but on their popularity with ordinary Germans, including children. Their relationship with ordinary Germans proved the most important factor in the Poor School Sisters’ experiences in Nazi Germany.

M. Almeda Schricker issued the statement about the importance of winning children’s affections after a Poor School Sister was denounced by her students. In July 1934, M. Almira F. was suspended from her teaching position after an article in the \textit{Völkischer Beobachter} claimed that she forbade singing of the German anthem in her class. The state did not accept the sister’s defense that she prohibited all singing in her class.\footnote{373} M. Flavina S. did not heed her general superior’s advice and in November 1934, a leader of the League of German Girls denounced her to district officials for corporally punishing a student.\footnote{374} The sister admitted to beating the “student Stöckl with a rod and

\footnote{372} M. Schricker, memorandum, 15 August 1934, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\footnote{373} Fragebogen A. Nationalsozialistische Verfolgung kath. Geistlicher, Almia Förtsch, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\footnote{374} M. Flavina wrote that the students accused her of saying that “the Catholic faith was to be abolished and that a uniform church (\textit{Einheitskirche}) will be established, M. Flavina S. to Schricker, 2 December 1934, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
her bare hand," because the girl frequently disrupted class with uninvited comments and laughter and no longer responded to verbal corrections.\footnote{Ibid.}

Local officials visited M. Flavina’s class on 9 November 1934 “to test her national attitude” and to question students.\footnote{Ibid.} After they determined that the sister’s “national attitude” was acceptable, district officials referred the case to the government of Upper Bavaria. The state issued a warning to the sister for using a prohibited form of corporal punishment and for making comments to students that “must give children the impression that the National Socialist state was involved in a struggle with the Catholic Church and thereby causing Catholic students to become conflicted.”\footnote{Sister Flavina violated rules on corporal punishment. Physical punishment was only permitted with a stick and slapping a student with the bare hand constituted a violation. Regierung von Oberbayern to Generalat der Armen Schulschwestern, 6 February 1935. OAAS M, Drittes Reich.} M. Flavina S. transferred to a different school in April 1934.

The above examples reveal the heightened vulnerability of Catholic sisters teaching in public schools after January 1933 that manifested itself mainly in surveillance and harassment by students, parents, and local officials. Denunciations of teachers by their students got so out of hand that the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture instructed police in 1936 not to pursue the many official complaints children made against their teachers without knowledge of their parents.\footnote{The letter instructed police to forward any such complaints to the ministry. Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus to Regierungen von Bayern, 16 May 1936, BayHStA, MK 61945.} The memorandum noted that most of these complaints were made by students “who had to be disciplined in the
classroom.”379 Many sisters commented in the 1930s on the enormous pressures they were under in nazified classroom, and not a few expressed relief when they lost their positions in 1937.380

The congregation’s policy of compliance caused some sisters severe inner conflicts. Although they did not belong to the National Socialist Teachers’ Association, women religious teachers still had to attend some of its events, and in March 1936, a sister only identified as M. Antonia wrote to M. Almeda Schricker that

once again I find myself tangled up in conflicts of conscience…and over and over I ask myself: Can the attendance of events in which stones are regularly thrown at our holy church be the will of God? Every one of us has the task to model Christ! Can I as an ‘alternate Christ’ attend these events? – And over and over I must answer myself: No!381

M. Antonia contemplated in her letter that if she were free, she would follow her conscience, “but now I am told, I have to blindly obey, [because] secular authorities have the right to demand this,” and “attendance is necessary to not make ourselves impossible, to save of the school what can be saved.”382 M. Almeda Schricker’s answer to M. Antonia did not survive.

379 Ibid.

380 For instance, Sister Cortina V. of Bad Tölz expressed relief that she was leaving the town in May 1937: “…at the end of May I finish with shorthand lessons…and then I can go in peace …perhaps one day I will return to teaching; but as schools are at the moment one cannot look forward it.” M. Cortina V. to Schricker, 22 April 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

381 M. Antonia to Schricker, 19 March 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

382 Ibid.
2.3.2 The Nazification of Prussian Private Catholic Schools

M. Antonia’s letter raises the crucial question whether Catholic sisters were able to preserve the Catholic character of confessional schools, or whether the schools became nazified to such a degree it rendered the designation “Catholic” meaningless. The strong growth of women religious congregations in Germany between 1932 and 1935 from 77,525 to 84,558 professed sisters indicates that a religious vocation remained an attractive option for thousands of young women and speaks to the continued existence of separate Catholic spheres after 1933.\textsuperscript{383} A Catholic sister in her conspicuous habit embodied the opposite of the ideal Nazi woman. The regime was convinced that Catholic sisters preserved separate spheres in Catholic private schools for girls, which they viewed as the main source of the continued growth of women religious congregations. Maria Luthner wrote in her aforementioned assessment that

\begin{quote}
   a majority of girls from so-called ‘higher’ classes….receive their education in the secondary schools of cloisters, and often they are housed in the boarding schools of these cloisters. There they are removed from parental influence and for six to nine years they are exposed to a clerical and life-denying environment that is so strong cloisters can still fill their ranks from their flock of students.\textsuperscript{384}
\end{quote}

But private Catholic schools too came under the pronounced influence of National Socialism beginning in 1933.


Extant records from the Poor School Sisters’ private secondary schools in Arnsberg and Brakel in Westphalia reveal that the lines between Catholicism and National Socialism often became blurred.\textsuperscript{385} Students in Catholic school too fell under the spell of National Socialism. But women religious may have preserved important alternate spaces in their schools in Nazi Germany that were largely free from violent antisemitism. For this reason, more Jewish girls attended private Catholic schools after 1933.

It is important first to establish important characteristics of a private Catholic education in modern Germany. A Catholic education was crucial in preparing students for a committed life in the faith and institution of the Catholic Church. Reaffirming the church’s authority over education, Pope Pius XI proclaimed in 1929 that “Church and family together form a temple for Christian education.”\textsuperscript{386} Catholic students’ school days and the school year were therefore framed by regular prayers, mass, and the observance of Catholic feast days. Catholic schools also promoted and hosted extracurricular Catholic associations for students including the White Rose and the Marienkinder.

Catholic schools were known for academic excellence and discipline. Sue Speier described the women religious teachers who educated her in the 1930s in Bocholt, Germany as “kind though strict, very good teaching” [sic].\textsuperscript{387} Sue Speier was Jewish and did not have to partake in Catholic religious life in school.

\textsuperscript{385} Records from the Poor School Sisters’ secondary schools in Bavaria were fragmentary because after the closure of private Catholic school in the later 1930s, congregations had to hand over school files to Nazi authorities, and many were subsequently destroyed.


The *Bredebrief* of 1933 shows a community of sisters and students anchored in Catholic life. The *Bredebrief* was an annual school publication by the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame and their students in Brakel. Much of the newsletter of 1933 was devoted to aspects of Catholicism and Catholic celebrations such as the one-hundred-year anniversary of the congregation, the visit of an archbishop, the clothing ceremony of eleven postulants, and the many events of the youth group Marienkinder. The teacher conferences of early 1933 in the sisters’ school in Arnsberg also have a distinct Catholic content. For instance, in May 1933, the faculty discussed at length aspects of “the religious life of female youth.”\(^{388}\) Within a year, however, National Socialist topics came to dominate these conferences in Arnsberg.

Beginning in 1933, Catholic and National Socialist rituals were performed alongside each other in the private schools of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. The new school year of the upper Lyzeum in Arnsberg began on 1 May 1933 “with a festive mass…[and] with a speech about the religious meaning of labor.”\(^{389}\) After church, students gathered for a celebration in the gymnasium and listened to a radio broadcast from Berlin with speeches by Hitler and Hindenburg.\(^{390}\) National Socialist celebrations quickly overshadowed Catholic festivities during the 1933/34 school year in Arnsberg. Students participated in nineteen events that celebrated aspects of Nazi ideology or the regime as opposed to only five distinctly Catholic events. For instance, students attended

\(^{388}\) Konferenz-Niederschriften 1933-1938, 15 May 1933, AKB, Arnsberg-Schule.


\(^{390}\) Ibid.
“a festive assembly in protest of the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles” in June 1993 and watched the film *Hitler Youth Quex* in December.\(^{391}\)

Students in the Poor School Sisters’ institute in nearby Warburg had the great honor on 16 October \[1933\] to welcome our Regierungspräsident Freiherr von Oeynhausen. The girls formed a line from the school gate to the portal and greeted the honored guest with a cheerful “Heil Hitler.”

These extracurricular events framed lessons that also became infused with National Socialist ideology.

Notes from teacher conferences and annual school reports reveal that although early Nazi school reforms were ad hoc in nature they did not lack in effectiveness.\(^{392}\) In 1933, the curriculum became laced with National Socialist themes such as war, sacrifice, community, and race. In her presentation on 20 March 1934 to the faculty of Arnsberg, one of the lay teachers on staff, Agnes Goebel, asserted that the purpose of teaching nationalistic literature to students was to “bring to life the sober heroism of frontline soldiers, the capacity of people’s suffering for an idea...the camaraderie of war as the foundation of the national people’s community, leadership (*Führertum*), and allegiance as rebirth of our political powers – in other words, the birth of National Socialism as a

\(^{391}\) Among the Catholic events were celebrations on the occasion of students’ first communion, a visit by the congregation’s general superior M. Almeda Schricker, and Christmas. Priv. kath. Oberlyzeum der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr., “Bericht über das Schuljahr 1933,” AKB, Arnsberg-Schule.

\(^{392}\) The conference reports from Arnsberg show that the regime had not issued new schoolbooks one year after Hitler’s ascension to power and relied on pamphlets and additions to the school library “that expressed National Socialist aims” and that could serve as supplements to old school books until new ones were issued. Konferenz 5 February 1934, AKB. In the absence of new school books and comprehensive reform, the ideologically committed teacher gained in even greater importance, and the conference notes reflect this fact. For instance, during a conference on 26 November 1934, the faculty listened to a lecture titled “Hitler Youth and School,” and the speaker asked teachers to be “racially conscious, heroic N[ational] S[ocialists] so that s/he can support the Hitler Youth.” Konferenz Niederschriften 1933-1938, 26 November 1934, AKB, Arnsberg-Schule.
frontline experience.”  

She added that, on the other hand, “cheap war mongering” and “feeble pacifism” were to be combated. In the Lyzeum in Brakel, M. Elizabeth S. led an extracurricular study group of fourteen girls in 1934 that discussed Hans Grimm’s *Volk ohne Raum (A People Without Living Space).* Students discussed the heroism of soldiers in World War I and learned about the supposed “lack of living space of the German people with all its dangers and sorrows that it caused the individual.” In Catholic schools, National Socialist ideology and rituals competed both with Catholic observances and traditional academic content.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame continued to teach a rigorous academic curriculum after 1933. An examination of essay topics in German for the school year 1933/34 in the sisters’ Lyzeum in Arnsberg showed that of a total of 105 essay choices, ten were topics directly pertaining to National Socialism. The number of National Socialist essay topics posed in the Poor School Sisters’ school in Arnsberg was lower, ten

[393] The faculty of the Poor School Sisters’ Lyzeum in Arnsberg consisted of both religious and lay staff, as was the norm. Of twenty faculty members in Arnsberg twelve were women religious and eight were lay teachers. Konferenz-Niederschriften 1933-1938, 20 March 1934, AKB, Arnsberg-Schule.

[394] Ibid.

[395] The report of the study group further reads that “the engagement with the lack of living space of the German people steered the gaze to the German border issues that had become so urgent since ‘Versailles’…” “Teilnahme am Freiwilligen Unterricht,” *Bredebrief* 1934, AKB.

[396] The ten topics included two quotes from Hitler and one quote from von Hindenburg. Again, war and sacrifice were included among the ten topics e. g. “The danger of air-raids and air-raid protection.” Students could also choose to write about why they participated in the *Winterhilfswerk* or elaborate on what constituted “true patriotism.” Other topics unrelated to National Socialism included “We are young and that is nice” (for the lower grades), and “My impressions of Shakespeare’s drama ‘Hamlet,’” and “Rafael’s ‘Sixtine Madonna.’” In English, students read works by Shakespeare, H. G. Wells, and Oscar Wilde. Priv. kath. Oberlyzeum der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr., “Bericht über das Schuljahr 1933,” AKB, Arnsberg-Schule.

Despite the sisters’ maintenance of academic rigor and the continuance of religious life, the prevalence of National Socialism did not fail to make an impression on students. Christel Beilmann was shocked to discover upon reading as an adult her diary of her time as a student in a German Catholic school in the 1930s, “how we were part of it all and yet we were not…I remembered something different, a stronger rejection of National Socialism.”\footnote{Christel Beilmann, \textit{Eine katholische Jugend in Gottes und dem Dritten Reich} (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1989), 9. Alfons Heck too became a fanatic member of the Hitler Youth and continued to serve as an altar boy in the local Catholic Church. He planned on becoming a priest. Alfons Heck, \textit{A Child of Hitler. Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika} (Phoenix: Renaissance House, 1985).} The writings of students in the \textit{Bredebriefe} also reveal that students reconciled aspects of National Socialist ideology with their Catholic identity. In the \textit{Bredebrief} for 1934, students wrote about their stay in a Catholic youth hostel with their women religious teachers. The students’ days included daily mass and prayer as well as lessons in National Socialist ideology.\footnote{“Bericht über den Schulungs-Lehrgang und das Gemeinschaftsleben der Abiturientinnen im Landheim,” \textit{Bredebrief} 1934, AKB.} The girls celebrated and could relate to the new emphasis on community and sacrifice that had long been leading principles of Catholicism. The reading material of students included the \textit{Völkischer Beobachter} and Hitler’s \textit{Mein Kampf}. The history teacher M. Canisia B. discussed with students “National Socialist educational principles” and parts of the program of the NSDAP.\footnote{Ibid.}

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  \item \footnote{Christel Beilmann, \textit{Eine katholische Jugend in Gottes und dem Dritten Reich} (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1989), 9. Alfons Heck too became a fanatic member of the Hitler Youth and continued to serve as an altar boy in the local Catholic Church. He planned on becoming a priest. Alfons Heck, \textit{A Child of Hitler. Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika} (Phoenix: Renaissance House, 1985).}
  \item \footnote{“Bericht über den Schulungs-Lehrgang und das Gemeinschaftsleben der Abiturientinnen im Landheim,” \textit{Bredebrief} 1934, AKB.}
  \item \footnote{Ibid.}
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\end{footnotesize}
The enthusiasm with which some girls wrote about aspects of National Socialism is striking. One student wrote in the 1934 *Bredebrief*: “How we love to hear about the German farmer and about our Führer Adolf Hitler….and when it is the swastika’s turn, we are all on fire.”

Catholic schools could not shield children from the pernicious influence of National Socialism, but some women religious may nonetheless have mitigated some of its worst aspects, namely antisemitism.

A close reading of the Poor School Sisters’ annual reports, conference notes, and publications is notable for its absence of antisemitism or anti-Communism. The sisters could perhaps not avoid teaching National Socialist views on race, but the women could refuse to practice the exclusion of Jewish students in their classrooms. Evidence suggests that some Jewish children transferred to Catholic schools after 1933 to avoid the violent antisemitism in public schools.

Women religious’ discomfort with Nazi racial science is not surprising since the Catholic Church as a whole challenged Nazi racial teachings. But Christian antisemitism and Nazi racial antisemitism are nonetheless linked. Doris Bergen has noted that whereas Christian antisemitism did not cause the Holocaust, it “did play a

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401 “Der schöne Samstag,” *Bredebrief* 1934, AKB.

402 The topic of race could not be avoided and permeated many subject matters. When the principal of the Poor School Sisters’ school in Arnsberg M. Norberta S. was asked by one of the lay teachers in 1934 how she planned on testing students separately about eugenics and racial science, M. Norberta was somewhat evasive and said the subject matters would be part of testing in biology, history, and geography. Not satisfied with the answer, the teacher requested a further meeting and demanded racial questions be incorporated into German exams as well. Konferenz-Niederschriften 1933-1938, 5 February 1934, AKB, Schule-Arnsberg.

critical role…in making their [Nazis’] commands comprehensible and tolerable to the 
rank-and-file – the people who actively carried out the measures against Jews.”

The blood libel, the Christian belief that Jews killed Christ, and scriptures like Matthew 27:25
(“His blood be on us, and on our children”) were well-known and accepted anti-Jewish
beliefs in modern Germany and Europe. Kevin Spicer found that Catholic leaders in the
1920s actually strengthened popular Christian antisemitism when they advocated the
toleration of religious Jews, but denounced secular Jews as a destructive force in society
and associated them with bolshevism and liberalism. Robert Krieg has shown that in
the twentieth century, German theologians’ accounts of the historical Jesus reinforced
images of Jews as the killers of Christ and as a cursed people.

The extent to which Germans internalized stereotypes of the “secular Jew” also
emerges from the records of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. The sisters only

404 Doris L. Bergen, “Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany,”
Central European History 27, no. 3 (1994), 329. For further discussions on the link between Christian and
Nazi racial antisemitism, see Uriel Tal, “Religious and Anti-Religious Roots of Anti-Semitism,” in
Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Third Reich, ed. Saul Friedländer (New York: Routledge, 2004), 171-
190, Uriel Tal, Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich
Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), and James Carroll,

405 Bergen, Antisemitism, 331. For a history of the legend of the blood libel, see: Helmut Walser
Smith, The Butcher’s Tale. Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town (New York and London: W. W.
Norton & Company, 2002), 91-133.

406 Spicer, Resisting the Third Reich, 120,121.

407 Robert Krieg examined inter-war accounts of the historical Jesus by three German theologians,
Bernhard Bartmann, Karl Adam, and Romano Guardini, and he found, for instance, that Bartmann asserted
that “Jesus had distanced himself from Jewish scripture…[Adam]…presented Jews as…a materialistic,
self-aggrandizing people…[and Guardini]…declared that Jews remained closed to God’s revelation and
hence were responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion.” Robert A. Krieg, “German Catholic Views of Jews and
Judaism, 1918-1945,” in Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust, ed. Kevin P. Spicer
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 68.
rarely commented on Jews and Judaism, but they were still part of a Christian culture in which antisemitism was familiar and commonplace. Evidence reveals that at least some sisters subscribed to stereotypes of the secular Jew as profit-driven, dishonest, and communist. In an undated memorandum from 1934, M. Almeda Schricker warned sisters about a dishonest traveling salesman named Stiegler, who “according to our information is a representative of a Jewish business. Let the sisters be warned!”⁴⁰⁸ Like most Germans, the sisters were well-versed in antisemitic clichés and the general superior did not need to elaborate on her warning, as the association of Jewishness with greediness and dishonesty was familiar.

A second example links Jews and Bolshevism. In 1940, the congregation circulated a report about the Poor School Sisters’ encounter with Soviet forces in Poland and the women’s flight to the West. The report detailed the horrors of war and communist invasion and concluded with the comment that the leadership of one of the sisters’ school was now in the hands of a Jew, “who was repeatedly caught listening at the door to the sisters’ rooms.”⁴⁰⁹ The representation of Jews as sexual predators was commonplace in Hitler’s Germany. The Nazis depended on these pernicious stereotypes of Jews to help bring about the social death of Jewish Germans in the 1930s.

The situation of Jewish Germans deteriorated immediately after January 1933, as physical violence and anti-Jewish legislation threatened their lives and livelihoods.⁴¹⁰

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⁴⁰⁸ M. Almeda Schricker, memorandum, ca. 1934, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.


⁴¹⁰ See, for instance: Friedländer, Verfolgung, Marion Kaplan, Between Dignity and Despair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Wolfgang Benz, Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945: Leben
With the boycott of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933, the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service from 7 April 1933, and the Law against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Higher Institutions from 25 April 1933, the Nazis sought to take away Jews’ livelihoods and opportunities. Alongside these official measures, countless state and local governments and professional organizations implemented their own decrees and rules to exclude Jews from society. Normal life became impossible for all Jewish Germans in 1933, but as Marion Kaplan has found, the 117,000 Jewish school children living in Germany at the time “faced a more drastic deterioration in conditions at public schools and among non-Jewish friends” than their parents did in their professional lives. The antisemitism and discrimination many Jewish German children suffered in German classrooms after January 1933 was immediate and vicious.

Vera Hirtz was nine in 1933 and attended school in Hanover. She had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. When the Nazis came to power, one of her non-Jewish friends told her: “I can’t be friends with you anymore because you are Jewish and I hope you will die.” Vera was shocked. Margaret Federlin was seven in 1933 and remembered being shunned by the other children in her public school in Speyer: “They don’t include you in


Saul Friedländer found, for instance, that in March 1933, the city of Cologne denied Jews the usage of sports facilities. On 4 April 1933, the German Boxing Association excluded Jewish boxers. On 19 April 1933, Baden forbade the use of the Yiddish language in cattle markets. In May, the mayor of Zweibrücken refused to rent booths to Jews during the annual fair. Friedländer, Verfolgung, 49 ff. David Cymet wrote that Germans issued more than 400 anti-Jewish decrees in three weeks in April 1933 that made “normal Jewish existence practically impossible.” David Cymet, History vs. Apologetics. The Holocaust, the Third Reich, and the Catholic Church (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 52.

Kaplan, 94.

Vera Hirtz, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.
games, they don’t want to talk to you…very uncomfortable [sic].”

Margaret Cohen-Tuteur was already sixteen in 1933 and attended a public secondary school in Kaiserslautern. She recalled that the morning after Hitler came to power none of her classmates acknowledged her greeting. Her friend told her she could not speak to her anymore because her father would lose his job. Her fellow-students ignored Margaret and sang songs like “the Jewish blood splashes off our knives.” She testified that in her school, “antisemitism was such, it was impossible for me to survive sanely.” Ursula Frank was a child in Berlin in the 1930s, and she remembered coming home one day with the sign “Jude” (Jew) pasted on her back. Many times teachers encouraged and participated in the persecution of Jewish students in German schools.

Jo Ann Glickman started school at age six in 1934 in Augsburg. She explained that although Jewish children could still go to public school, many teachers made them “sit in the back of the room, they could not ask any questions, they got no papers, no books – it was not a very good education.” Martha Padawer was born in 1924 in Dortmund, and in 1934 she attended a local public Lyzeum. She recalled that

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414 Margaret Federlin, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.


416 Ibid.

417 Ibid.


the trauma started then…the first day of school I was called out by
the teacher in front of the class…the teacher said ‘this is a dirty
Jew and you are not allowed to associate with her…and she has to
sit by herself.’ None of the children broke the taboo…it was
horrible…it was so horrible I don’t know how I got through it.\footnote{420}

For many Jewish children, the anguish was just too great and they left public school after
January 1933.\footnote{421} Margaret Cohen Tuteur told her mother: “If you don’t take me out of
that school, I don’t want to go on living.”\footnote{422} Margaret and all other aforementioned
Jewish girls left public school and enrolled in Catholic schools run by women religious.
Margaret Cohen-Tuteur entered the school of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in
Kaiserslautern, and she testified that the sisters took her in “and they were extremely kind
and considerate and antisemitism as such did not exist, neither with my fellow-students,
who were all Catholic or my teachers.”\footnote{423} Margaret’s experience was not exceptional.

The testimonies of former Jewish students who attended Catholic school in
Hitler’s Germany suggest that Catholic sisters may have been able to maintain certain
separate spheres from National Socialism in their schools that offered a degree of safety
to Jewish girls. Reconstructing the experiences of Jewish girls in Catholic schools poses a
number of methodological challenges. It is difficult to identify the exact number and
names of students in private Catholic schools. Even if the names are known in some

\footnote{420}{Martha Padawer, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.}

\footnote{421}{Marion Kaplan wrote that in May 1932, 8,609 Jewish boys and 6,317 Jewish girls attended
public higher schools in Prussia, “and that only 28 percent of boys and 26 percent of girls remained by May
1936, with girls dropping out at a slightly greater rate,” 98.}

\footnote{422}{Margaret Cohen-Tuteur, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.}

\footnote{423}{Ibid.}
cases, many Jewish girls perished in the Holocaust. The following analysis relies on the testimonies of Jewish women given to the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Because the testimonies are so scarce and in order to compare experiences, I used the accounts of women who attended the private schools of various women religious congregations across Germany.

As established earlier in this chapter, women religious complied with Nazi school reforms and the school day and curricula of private Catholic schools too became nazified. The testimonies of former students confirm that Nazi rituals and celebrations were indeed routine in Catholic schools. Margaret Cohen-Tuteur and Trudy Coppel both described the performance of the “Heil Hitler” greeting by nuns and students.\textsuperscript{424} Margaret also recalled images of Hitler displayed in her school. Susan Fleischmann, who attended Catholic school in Augsburg, accompanied her class to a Nazi rally on the occasion of Hitler’s visit to the city. She remembered seeing Hitler drive by in his open car as she too raised her arm in greeting. Her parents were horrified, but Susan felt safe amidst her classmates and soon forgot about the incident.\textsuperscript{425}

It appears that the mere performance of Nazi rituals did not affect how the women experienced Catholic school. In spite of being surrounded by images of Hitler and confronted every hour with Nazi greetings, Margaret Cohen-Tuteur remembered that “this time in the convent was a good time, a peaceful time…Outside of the convent, in

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid. and Trudy Coppel, Interview, \textit{Visual History Archive}, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web. Trudy Coppel was born on 12 August 1921 in Gleiwitz near Breslau, and although she did not identify the name of the private Catholic school she attended in Gleiwitz, it is likely she attended a Hausfrauenschule (housekeeping school) of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame.

my house, in the street, it was a very scary time.” It is noteworthy that Margaret felt safer in Catholic school than at home. She did not believe the sisters when they gave the “Heil Hitler” greeting in class, and she was convinced that “they [women religious] suffered quite badly from that, because as far as they were concerned God came first still.” Trudy Coppel also stated that “it was even forced on the nuns to say ‘Heil Hitler.’”

Anne Goodwin grew up in Berlin and felt “really very well protected” by the sisters in her Catholic school, who “were all very good to Jewish children.” She believed that the sisters were so sympathetic to the plight of Jewish children “because the Roman Catholics were also persecuted to some degree by Hitler, [and] that is probably why they were different.” What emerges from these testimonies is that in Catholic school, Nazi rituals could take on a different meaning than in public school, perhaps because they were not accompanied by exclusion and hatred. The fact that Catholic sisters did not act out Nazi antisemitic ideology in their classrooms may have reinforced students’ belief that the women were just pretending.

It appears that many Catholic sisters did not practice the exclusion of Jewish girls. Henni Glick was born in 1920. When the rise of Nazism made her attendance of public

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427 Ibid.


430 Ibid.
secondary school impossible, she transferred to a women religious business school for girls (*Handelschule*) in Neuss in the Rhineland, where she learned typing and bookkeeping. Although she had to scale back her academic ambitions, Henni felt lucky. She was the only Jewish child in the class and she testified that “it was nice…we were all friends…the nuns were just wonderful … especially, they knew who I was, where I came from [sic].” Margaret Federlin stated that the nuns “saw to it that you got a good education and they cared for you whether you were Jewish or not.” The women religious teacher of Jo Ann Glickman included the Jewish child in the school community but also respected religious differences. Jo Ann described her first day of Catholic school in Augsburg in 1934:

School started in spring right around Easter time and at every desk [on the first school day], there was a little green straw basket with a little chocolate bunny and jelly beans, and on my desk, since it was also Passover, she, the nun had gone out and bought a kosher candy bar, so I had something that I could eat.

Her teacher, Sister Anastasia, also coordinated Jo Ann’s religious instructions with the local rabbi. Jo Ann recalled that the sister regularly sent for a report card from the rabbi. Catholic sisters usually respected the different religious practices of both their Jewish and Protestant students, but not always. In some cases, Jewish girls came to resent

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432 Ibid.


434 Jo Ann Glickmann, Interview, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web

435 Ibid.
Catholic sisters who forced them to partake in Catholic rituals. Ursula Frank attended a private Catholic school in Berlin in 1936 and she hated it when the sisters in her school made her kneel although they knew she was Jewish.436

The experiences of Jo Ann Glickmann, Margaret Federlin and other Jewish women reiterate to what extent the Nazis depended on Germans to practice the exclusion of Jewish Germans in order to give Nazi ideology and antisemitism meaning. Most Jews suffered what Marion Kaplan called “social death” at the hands of ordinary Germans. This “social death” of Jews was an important precondition to genocide. It appears that many Catholic sisters refused to participate in this central aspect of National Socialism.

The fact that a number of Jewish children found some respite in Catholic schools in the 1930s did not escape Nazi officials. On 11 May 1937, the Gauleiter for Westphalia North wrote to the Oberpräsidenten of the state:

The Higher School for Daughters in Warburg belongs to the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. That this school is not being conducted in the National Socialist spirit becomes evident from the following: The Untertertia of this school comprises about 12 students, two of whom are Jewish. These Jewish students are seated next to Aryan students although there are 14 benches in the classroom.437

436 Ursula Frank, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web. Only a few women testified that Catholic sisters forced them to partake in Catholic rituals, and Jo Ann Glickman’s experience seemed to have been more common. But Jewish children were of course surrounded by Catholic rituals at all times. For instance, Vera Krakauer attended first grade in 1934 in a women religious school in Berlin and she testified: “they were nuns, and there were two Jewish children, and it was really just learning…when the girls, would practice walking on their knees going up a straight line, you know for their first communions…I used to sit up on a chair and tell them if they are doing it straight…and I know they were very understanding, because we would draw things for Christmas and I said “I can’t draw a Christmas tree because I am sending my books to my uncle in Israel…” Vera Krakauer, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.

437 I am grateful to M. Apollinaris Jörgens for providing me with the following reference: Gauleiter der NSDAP Westfalen Nord to Oberpräsidenten, 11 May 1937, Staatsarchiv Detmold, M 1 II B 6034.
The Gauleiter continued that the sisters refused to segregate the Jewish girls because it would violate Christian principles and he requested “a thorough investigation” of the school.\textsuperscript{438} The letter also indicated that non-Jewish girls initially refused to sit next to Jewish girls. Although it is impossible to know if this claim was true, it is important to point out that the integration of Jewish girls into Catholic schools also had limits and not all Jewish children had good experiences.

It was common for Jewish children to have little or no contact with non-Jewish children outside of school in the Nazi period. In 1933 in Worms, Elsbeth Schmidt’s parents had to make a choice to send their daughter to either a Catholic or Jewish school. They chose the former because they believed the Catholic school to be better academically. Elsbeth too testified that “the sisters treated us very well,” and although she and her Jewish friend felt fully included in the school and found “there was no difference between us and the other girls… there was no social interchange, so to speak…we met at school and then went home.”\textsuperscript{439} Irma Mathes attended the private Catholic Volksschule of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Forchheim in 1933. She testified that “the nuns had a special part in my life, they were very good to me, but the other part of the story is the children in the classroom…, they knew I was a Jewish girl and that was very difficult.”\textsuperscript{440} Irma remembered how hard it became to play with Christian children. She felt left out when Christian children joined the League of German

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{440} Irma Mathes, Interview, \textit{Visual History Archive}, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.
Girls; she too wanted to wear a uniform. Herta Adler had a particularly hurtful experience in Catholic school, when the sisters asked her to stay home on the first day of the school year in 1935. She found out later that the sisters wanted to spare her the humiliation of rejection because none of the Catholic children wanted to sit next to a Jewish girl. The sisters finally forced someone to share her desk: an aspirant for sisterhood who submitted in tears.

For Vera Hirtz, Catholic school did not prove the hoped-for escape from antisemitism when a lay teacher made her sit in the back and humiliated her in class. He would throw chalk at her and call out: “Hey, Jew girl do you know the answer?” Vera also recalled that

complaining to the principal, who was a nun and who was wonderful, was no good because she was totally powerless over the lay teachers, because they [nuns] were persecuted themselves …she had lost her total power. But she was wonderful with us, as were all the nuns. Vera’s testimony describes the complicated position of Catholic sisters in Nazi Germany at the fringes of the “peoples’ community.”

In the twentieth century, women religious teaching congregations became an integral part of the nation state. In Imperial and Weimar Germany, Catholic sisters

441 Ibid.
443 The cruelty Vera experienced was not confined to children and teachers but also included other adults. When she was eleven she was asked to leave the swimming pool because she was Jewish. As Vera exited the water, a woman said: “I am glad you made her leave the water, I was wondering why the water was getting so dirty.” Vera remembered crying uncontrollably when she reached home,” Vera Hirtz, Interview, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2011, Web.
444 Ibid.
partnered with the state and contributed in significant ways to the advancement of women by offering girls access to higher education. The Nazis challenged women religious’ integration into German society and their political reliability. Already in 1933 some called for the removal from Catholic sisters from the classroom. The concordat did little to reassure the women about their future. The sisters relied instead on the popularity with students and parents and worked to ensure their continued support.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame complied with Nazi school reforms, and Catholic schools too became nazified, at least to a degree, after January 1933. Nazi and Catholic rituals were performed alongside each other in Catholic schools, and sisters emphasized aspects of Nazi ideology such as community and sacrifice that seemed compatible with Catholicism. The labor of women religious teachers in Catholic schools cultivated and legitimized the criminal Nazi regime in Catholic students’ eyes and freed them enthusiastically to support at least aspects of National Socialism.

At the same time, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame also preserved important free spaces in their schools. The mere presence of Catholic sisters clad in distinctive religious habits publicly challenged National Socialist ideas of womanhood. Catholic sisters may also have been able to preserve important free spaces in their schools. The nazification of Catholic schools takes on a different meaning when examined from the perspective of Jewish students, who appeared to enroll in higher numbers in Catholic schools after January 1933. Based on testimonies of former Jewish students in Catholic schools, it appears that at least in some Catholic schools Nazi rituals lost their meaning when Catholic sisters refused to act out racial antisemitism. Women religious continued to show compassion to Jewish children, the weakest members in German society who
were often the most cruelly persecuted, at a time when such compassion was considered un-German. To Nazi officials, the presence of Jewish students in Catholic schools was only further proof of women religious’ political unreliability. In 1935, the regime launched a vicious propaganda campaign against Catholic sisters as they prepared to remove them from the public sphere.
CHAPTER 3:

NUNS IMPRISONED: THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRIALS OF 1935/36

3.1 Argument and Historiography

On 14 March 1935, German customs officers and Gestapo agents searched the motherhouse and two other communities of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in and near Munich. The agents demanded to see financial records and bank statements. That day, German officials conducted about forty searches of various Catholic religious institutions across Germany. The North German edition of the Völkischer Beobachter reported on 30 March 1935 that the investigations of Catholic institutions had revealed “major violations of laws regulating foreign exchange…A number of priests, Catholic sisters and brothers have been imprisoned.”

The investigations continued on 25 April 1935, when German officials searched the houses of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Westphalia and arrested the

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445 The two other communities were Giesing and Munich-Au.


447 Rapp, 53.

former provincial leader, M. Canisia Brüggemann. Four days later, Sister Canisia wrote to her fellow-sisters from prison in Dortmund that “I am being treated with much courtesy and consideration. I will be interrogated in Berlin, and I hope to return home soon thereafter.” Her wish was not granted. The state charged M. Canisia Brüggemann with six criminal violations of laws that regulated the purchase, possession, and transfer of foreign exchange. She was convicted in October 1935, and spent time in four different prisons until her release in December 1936.

The foreign exchange trials of 1935/36 marked a zenith in the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state. In May 1935 the Catholic lawyer Dr. Alfred Etscheit wrote to Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli that criminal cases against fifty-two German Catholic congregations accused of violating foreign exchange laws were pending, and that a special prosecutor and his staff “have devoted their days and nights to uncovering these violations.” Between May 1935 and April 1936 the special prosecutor Schulte-Limbeck tried ninety-seven Catholic sisters, priests, and one bishop in thirty-five separate and sensational proceedings at a special court in Berlin.

This chapter examines the foreign exchange trials and the concurrent propaganda campaign against the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Catholic Church in 1935. To illuminate the importance of the trials, I also discuss proceedings against other


450 Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 29 April 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

451 Etscheit to Pacelli, 29 May 1935, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-76-001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives: Reel 40.

452 For a detailed list of the trials see: Hoffmann and Janssen, 224 ff.
women religious congregations. It is difficult to overstate the significance of the foreign exchange trials in the psyche of the Poor School Sisters and they warrant an in-depth discussion. The trials marked a decisive break in the history of congregations and the church in Nazi Germany, because for the first time the regime targeted Catholic sisters in an organized and public campaign that went far beyond the sporadic and petty harassment the women had previously experienced.

The events also exposed the futility of the sisters’ longstanding strategy of relying on retreat and professional excellence in dealing with opponents. The trials erased any hopes the sisters had of maintaining their schools, and in 1935 the regime launched concurrent regional campaigns against confessional schools. The impact of the foreign exchange trials on the sisters was magnified by the imposition of large fines at a time when the regime announced the dismissal of hundreds of women religious teachers from public schools. The specter of financial ruin these fines represented proved an effective way for the Nazis to assure religious congregations’ continued compliance with their demands for years to come.

Although scholars have long acknowledged that the foreign exchange trials changed and heightened the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi regime, research on the topic remains limited. The morality trials of 1937 overshadow the

453 The campaign against Bavarian Volksschulen is the subject of the next chapter.

454 Already in 1946, Johann Neuhäusler acknowledged the importance of the trials in his document collection Kreuz und Hakenkreuz, 127 ff. See also Conway, Persecution, 125 ff, Hürten, Katholiken, 292 ff, Besier, 197 ff. and 667 ff. Only two monographs in German exist on the foreign exchange trials: The often-referenced 1981 work by Madeleine Rapp and the 1967 hagiographic publication by E. Hoffmann and H. Janssen. Hoffmann and Janssen included a useful document collection in their work but their analysis often lacked objectivity. Rapp’s account is detailed but lacks context. She only considered in passing how the events related to the church struggle as a whole. For a more recent article on the trial of three Dominican padres, see: Maria Zumholz, “‘Verbrecher oder Märtyrer?’” Der Devisenprozesse gegen
foreign exchange trials in contemporary accounts which may in part explain the lack of scholarship on the latter. Some scholars also cannot hide their discomfort with the criminal violations a number of the accused may have committed, and in the historiography the preoccupation with the guilt or innocence of the accused often takes precedence over questions of the precise connection between the trials and the church struggle. Even Madeleine Rapp, whose 1981 monograph on the foreign exchange trials remains the standard work, did not go beyond the conclusion that the trials “could not be separated from the Catholic Church struggle” and that the Nazi propaganda campaign aimed at “driving a wedge” between the laity and the clergy. It is of course true that the Nazis wanted to defame religious congregations and the Catholic Church in the eyes of Germans, but what is not entirely clear is how the trials intersected with the church

455 Heinz Hürten wrote, for instance, that the morality trials constituted a “much greater shaming” for the church than the foreign exchange trials. Hürten, Katholiken, 296. Rinnerthaler wrote that the “morality trials were a much greater catastrophe for the church than the foreign exchange trials,” Rinnerthaler 357, and Madeleine Rapp wrote that the foreign exchange trials lacked in the “merciless sharpness” and “the spectacular form” of the morality trials, Rapp, 320. Besier concluded that the foreign exchange trials were but a prelude to the morality trials,” Besier, 162.

456 Johann Neuhäusler’s discomfort with the topic is obvious. This was not a clear-cut case of innocent victims persecuted by Nazis, and although Neuhäusler cited the complexity of foreign exchange regulation that caused in particular “inexperienced sisters to fall prey to financial advisors” and condemned the politicization of the trials, he also acknowledged that “there were undoubtedly clear-cut cases that made the illegal transfer of currency difficult to defend,” Neuhäusler,127. Heinz Hürten wrote that the legality of the trials and the evidence “made it difficult for the church to defend itself against the regime’s defamation campaign,” Katholiken, Hürten, 294. Annette Mertens also concluded that “from a judicial standpoint the conviction of religious (Ordensleute) was hardly contestable,” Mertens, Klostersturm, 56. Both Hürten and Mertens relied at least in part on the conclusions of Madeleine Rapp who argued that although the regime conducted the trials to enrich itself, and the trials also “constituted legal criminal proceedings that were conducted in an orderly fashion,” even though the justice system had to endure the humiliation of having to balance “justice and propaganda,” Rapp, 318 ff.

457 Rapp, 320.
struggle or why the Nazis focused on complicated legal proceedings over foreign exchange violations to accomplish this goal.

The foreign exchange trials served the regime in two distinct ways. First, in 1935 the regime was in the midst of an economic crisis due to acute shortages of foreign exchange resulting from, among other factors, the costly rearmament program. The Nazis used the foreign exchange trials to shift blame for the ongoing crisis onto the Catholic Church and to deflect attention from the fact that Hitler had not performed the promised economic miracle. Second, the trials commenced at a time when the conflict between the church and the regime over the control of German youth was escalating. In the spring of 1935, Nazi officials began to campaign in earnest against confessional schools. The state and the church were also locked in negotiations over the continued existence of Catholic youth organizations. The Nazis used the trials and propaganda assault against religious congregations like the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame to create a public scandal that they hoped would force the episcopate into concessions at the negotiating table and convince Germans that women religious were unfit to raise German children. The Nazis routinely criminalized the behavior of enemies to justify the exclusion of certain groups from society.

3.2 The Case against M. Canisia Brüggemann

The main issue in the foreign exchange trials against the Catholic Church was how Catholic institutions disposed of their private funds to satisfy their large foreign debts. At issue in the proceedings against Sister Canisia Brüggemann in October 1935 was the bond the Poor School Sisters in Westphalia signed in 1926 in the amount of 420,000 Reichsmark to expand their private schools for girls in Warburg. The bond was
amortized over twenty years at seven percent interest, and the money came from the United States.\textsuperscript{458}

With the commencement of the economic crisis in the late 1920s, the sisters started having difficulties paying their debts as incomes fell but debts remained constant. In March 1933, M. Canisia Brüggemann wrote to the Bishop of Paderborn, Dr. Caspar Klein: “We are desperately trying to find money to satisfy the American bond, but so far we have been unsuccessful.”\textsuperscript{459} But Sister Canisia’s problems were no longer just a question of finding money, because beginning in 1931 Germans were no longer free to conduct foreign monetary transactions without official approval.

In 1931, Germany’s foreign debts equaled 21,515 million Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{460} Without new foreign loans, Germany needed to generate a trade surplus to service its sizeable debts, make reparation payments, and pay for minimal imports. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning therefore implemented a series of painful deflationary decrees, and in 1931 Germany did indeed achieve a trade surplus in the amount of 2.8 billion Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{461}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{458} Although the money originated in the United States, the sisters did not borrow from the United States directly. The so-called Hilfsgemeinschaft für Katholische Wohlfahrts- und Kulturpflege (Hilfsgemeinschaft), which represented the German Catholic charitable institution Caritasverband e. V., borrowed six million U.S. Dollars from American creditors and issued sub-bonds to German Catholic institutions. Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
\item \textsuperscript{460} Adam Tooze, \textit{The Wages of Destruction} (New York:Penguin, 2008), 7.
\item \textsuperscript{461} Although the Brüning government’s policy was generally one of fulfillment, according to Tooze, rumors of a unilateral moratorium on Germany’s debts and reparation payments caused widespread panic in international financial markets and made an already bad situation worse. Brüning further exacerbated the monetary crisis by aggressively calling for an end to reparations. Ibid., 17 ff.
\end{itemize}

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But the surplus did not cover the continued capital flight, debt payments, and imports.\footnote{462} The Reichsbank continued to hemorrhage foreign exchange and its reserves sank to alarmingly low levels. Brüning attempted to address these serious problems with three emergency decrees in July and August 1931, which nationalized all foreign exchange and transactions.\footnote{463} These measures presented a decisive incursion into the private financial lives of German citizens who had to relinquish control over their foreign exchange, held inside or outside of Germany, to the state.\footnote{464} German debtors could also no longer transfer payments outside of Germany to satisfy foreign creditors without approval of their regional tax authority.

Later, the Nazis never tired of pointing out that Brüning, a member of the Catholic Center Party, implemented these “sharp measures” in 1931 to save “the German

\footnote{462} Michael Ebi, “Devisenrecht und Aussenhandel,” in \textit{Wirtschaftskontrolle und Recht in der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur}, ed. Dieter Gosewinkel (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005), 183. Ebi writes that after covering the capital flight, Germany was left with about 450 million Reichsmarks to pay about 1 billion Reichsmarks in reparations and 1.2 billion in interest to service foreign debt. The Reichsbank had to use 1.7 billion Reichsmarks of gold and of its remaining foreign exchange reserves to cover the payments, 183 ff.


\footnote{464} According to the emergency decrees dated 8 August 1931, the state suspended the free convertibility of the Reichsmark. Germans could no longer purchase foreign securities, repay foreign loans, or transfer payments to foreign accounts. See RGBL, Teil I, 421 ff. Ralf Banken discusses Brüning’s policies in detail. He writes that the Brüning government aimed to achieve three main objectives via these emergency decrees: One: To stem the capital flight caused by the repayment of foreign credits. Two: To control payments and transfers to foreign countries and to prevent illegal or unwanted payments and transfers. Three: To create a basis that enabled the state to call on private citizens to offer their foreign exchange to the state. Ralf Banken, “‘Das wirklich gesamte Devisenrecht! – In stets gültiger Fassung!’ Das nationalsozialistische Devisenrecht als Steuerungs- und Diskriminierungsinstrument,” in \textit{Wirtschaftssteuerung durch Recht im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Entwicklung des Wirtschaftsrechts im Interventionsstaat des ‘Dritten Reichs,’} ed. Johannes Bähr and Ralf Banken. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 121 ff.
economy from certain collapse even then.” But despite restricting foreign monetary transactions, the Weimar government generally strove to fulfill its obligations and usually transferred scheduled loan payments in full to foreign creditors. Hitler abandoned Germany’s policy of fulfillment in favor of aggressive rearmament and unilateralism.

Hitler used the Reichsbank’s shrinking gold and foreign exchange reserves to import raw materials that fed an insatiable arms industry. German newspapers often reported on the acute foreign exchange shortages, and readers were left in no doubt about the severe fiscal difficulties the country was facing. For instance, on 21 March 1933 the *Völkischer Beobachter* quoted Reichsbank president Hjalmar Schacht, who stated that within three years German foreign exchange and gold reserves had shrunk from 3.3 billion Reichsmark to a mere fraction because international markets remained closed to German goods. He continued that his immediate and main task was to stabilize the value of the Reichsmark. Schacht’s strong hint about the possibility of renewed inflation resonated with millions of Germans and served to justify the Nazis’ tight controls of foreign exchange.

The Nazis stiffened foreign exchange regulations, and it became clear that Hitler and Schacht intended to default on Germany’s debts. In February 1933, Hitler stated in an interview that the repayment of foreign debts was “not just a question of wanting to do it

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465 “Irrte Brüning oder die Klosterfrau?” *Das Schwarze Korps* (DSK), 5 June 1935.

466 RGBL, Teil 1, 1931, Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten über die Devisenbewirtschaftung vom 1. August 1931, 421 ff.


468 “Schacht über die Aufgaben der Reichsbank,” VB NA, 21 March 1933. Hjalmar Schacht returned as president of the Reichsbank on 17 March 1933.
but also a question of having the means to do so, and a debtor who is expected to pay must not first be destroyed through economic and political means." On 1 June 1933, Germany implemented a transfer moratorium, “a temporary emergency measure,” on foreign debt payments because, as the *Völkischer Beobachter* stated, “that Germany cannot in its current economic situation repay its foreign debts is clear.” The paper also reiterated that “the Reichsbank must be in possession of foreign exchange in order to pay for foreign raw materials.” On 10 June 1933, the regime announced the Law on Treason against the German Economy, which “reserved severe punishments” for those who did not register their foreign exchange holdings by 31 August 1933.

But the Reichsbank was still unable to master the crisis and increase its gold and foreign exchange reserves. By 1934, Adam Tooze has observed, “Germany teetered on the brink of economic disaster,” and “between March and September 1934 the Nazi regime suffered the closest thing to a comprehensive socio-economic crisis in its entire

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469 “Adolf Hitler an Amerika,” VB NA, 24 February 1933.

470 “Transfer-Moratorium: Sicherung des Wirtschaftsaufbaues,” VB NA, 3 June 1933; and “Reichsbank erklärt das Transfer-Moratorium,” VB NA, 3 June 1933.

471 Ibid. German debtors had to deposit their payments due to foreign creditors into a so-called conversion account controlled by the Reichsbank. The state promised that once the Reichsbank had accumulated enough foreign exchange, payments to foreign creditors would continue. But due to creditors’ protests, Germany relented and agreed to pay 50% of interest and principal owed. In December 1933, the regime cut payments to 30%. Tooze 58.

472 “Gesetz gegen den Verrat an der deutschen Volkswirtschaft,” VB NA, 10 June 1933. See also: RGBL, Teil I, 360, 1933, Gesetz gegen Verrat der Deutschen Volkswirtschaft vom 12. Juni 1933. The law stipulated that persons who voluntary reported their foreign exchange holdings to the state by the deadline by filing a so-called *Volksverratsanzeige* (literally, a treason report) would be exempt from prosecution.

473 Banken writes that the Reichsbank’s reserves continued to decline and fell to a low of only 78 million Reichsmark in Juli 1934. In October 1934, the regime extended the amnesty for reporting private holdings of foreign currency until December that year, 138. See also Tooze, 70 ff.
In October 1934, the regime extended the amnesty for reporting private foreign exchange holdings to the Reichsbank until 31 December 1934, and shortly thereafter the Nazis commenced their investigation of the finances of Catholic cloisters.\footnote{Rapp, 46 ff.}

The chronic shortage of foreign exchange adversely affected most Germans.\footnote{Tooze further writes that “from the beginning of 1934 the Reichsbank’s reserves of foreign currency dwindled to alarmingly low levels. So desperate was the situation that Germans travelling abroad were restricted to a foreign ration of no more than 50 Reichsmark per month,” Tooze, 69.} Together with aggressive rearmament it arrested a general recovery of the German economy, and in 1935 the situation still looked dismal for many.\footnote{The example of Hans Scholl, brother of Sophie Scholl and members of the White Rose who was later executed by the Nazis, illustrates to what extent strict foreign exchange regulations infringed on the lives of ordinary Germans. The biographer Barbara Leisner wrote that when in 1935 Hans Scholl went on a vacation with his Hitler Youth group to Finland and Sweden, he smuggled money in a toothpaste tube to bypass foreign exchange regulations. Barbara Leisner, “Ich würde es genauso wieder machen.” Sophie Scholl (Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2008), 110.} The Nazis did not perform a miraculous economic revival, and Germans grumbled about low wages, substandard housing, and high prices. Chronic shortages of consumer goods and certain foods, such as textiles and butter, were the direct result of how the regime spent its insufficient foreign exchange resources.\footnote{Tooze, 69 ff.}

A joke circulating in Potsdam in 1934 articulated popular sentiments about the Nazis’ economic policy:

\begin{quote}
A joke circulating in Potsdam in 1934:

\begin{itemize}
\item The Oberpräsident of Saxony reported in September 1934, for instance, that a textile factory in his district had to close due to lack of raw materials. “Lagebericht des Oberpräsidenten der Provinz Sachsen für August 1934,” 8 September 1934, in Hermann-J. Rupieper and Alexander Sperk, eds., \textit{Die Lageberichte der Geheimen Staatspolizei zur Provinz Sachsen 1933 bis 1936}, vol. 3, \textit{Regierungsbezirk Erfurt} (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2006), 109. The office of the state police in Potsdam concluded in October 1934 that “the food question appears to me to be the most urgent at the moment….The prices of some necessities have increased by 40%.” “Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Potsdam für Oktober 1934,” in Wolfgang Ribbe, ed., \textit{Die Lageberichte der Geheimen Staatspolizei über die Provinz Brandenburg und die Reichshauptstadt Berlin 1933 bis 1936}, vol. 1, \textit{Der Regierungsbezirk Potsdam} (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1998), 207. See also: Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Erfurt für März 1935, in Rupieper and Sperk, 169.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
Shortly a new holiday will be introduced in Germany…to be known as ‘Day of the Reichsbank.’ The occasion for the new holiday is the fact that Germany is free from all gold and foreign exchange.\(^{479}\)

Although the ongoing world economic crisis and restrictions of foreign exchange transactions caused hardships for many people, they also brought many debtors, including Catholic religious congregations, an unexpected windfall.

With each passing year after 1931, it seemed less and less likely that Germany’s creditors would be repaid in full, and the foreign bonds that represented German credits sharply fell in value. By June 1933, bonds securing German debt traded for an average of fifty percent of their face value.\(^{480}\) Provided they received approval from the regime, German debtors could satisfy their foreign loans at a fraction of the actual outstanding principle amount by purchasing these discounted bonds. The most sensational foreign exchange trials in 1935 and 1936 concerned the repayment or restructuring of Catholic institutions’ foreign debts through the purchase of discounted bonds.

The banker Dr. Friedrich Hofius, who became a notorious fugitive during the foreign exchange trials, specialized in the restructuring of Catholic institutions’ foreign debts. In 1932 he approached the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Westphalia and offered his help with refinancing their loans. Hofius was the director of the Universum-Bank A.G. in Berlin (Universum-Bank), and in 1933, he also established a branch in

\(^{479}\) “Bericht des Regierungspräsidenten für den Regierungsbezirk Potsdam über die politische Lage,” 5 October 1934, in Ribbe, 185.

\(^{480}\) Tooze writes that “in January 1933, before Hitler took power, bonds owned by German municipalities and corporate borrowers traded on average at 62 per cent. Hitler’s ascension to power lowered the value by twelve points to 50 per cent.” Tooze, 78.
Amsterdam (Universum-Bank Amsterdam).\footnote{At the time, the bank was still named Bank für Kommunalwirtschaft A.G. Hofius changed the name in January 1934. Rapp, 183.} His activities did not go unnoticed by the Catholic hierarchy, and in 1932 the dioceses of Berlin and Cologne urged parishes and religious institutions to be cautious in their dealings with private financial institutions, but they did not mention Hofius specifically.\footnote{The diocese of Cologne published the same text. The warning did not specifically name Hofius or his bank. “Verkehr mit Geldinstituten,” 20 Januar 1932, Amtsblatt des Bischöflichen Ordinariates, USHMM, RG-76-001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.}

The Poor School Sisters hired the attorney Konrad Kaltenbach, the brother of two of their sisters, to look after their interests.\footnote{Kaltenbach later admitted that he had worked as a legal advisor for Hofius while he represented the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. Kaltenbach formally joined the Universum-Bank as a director in June 1934. Abschrift. Vernehmung von Rechtsanwalt Konrad Kaltenbach durch Oberinspektor Weiss, 22.2.1935, AKB, Best. Devisenprozesse.} Of the 420,000 Reichsmark the sisters had borrowed in 1926, about 340,000 Reichsmark remained outstanding in November 1933.\footnote{Hofius helped the Poor School Sisters to restructure both their loans in the original amounts of 255,000 and 420,000 Reichsmark. At issue during the trial of Sister Canisia was only the larger of the two loans. The restructuring of the debt of 255,000 Reichsmark was completed in February 1933. Jörgens, “Licht und Dunkel,” 32.} To repay their German creditor, the sisters needed to purchase so-called “Roman bonds”\footnote{The reason why the bonds were called “Roman bonds” was because the name of the American debtor was “Roman Catholic Church and Welfare Institutions.”} in the United States that represented their debt. The bonds had to add up to a converted face value of 340,000 Reichsmark, or 81,000 US Dollars. Lacking the financial resources to purchase the bonds outright, Hofius agreed to loan the sisters the necessary funds through the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam at seven percent interest. The bank purchased the US bonds, and offered the securities to the sisters at the discounted rate of
fifty-five percent of face value. The Poor School Sisters therefore needed only 188,000 Reichsmark to satisfy their debt of 340,000 Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{486}

The transaction was subject to state approval. German officials agreed to the restructuring of the Poor School Sisters’ debt on the condition that Hofius first lower the interest rate of the loan by two percent and reduce the purchase price of the bonds to fifty-one percent of face value. Both demands benefitted the state as well as the sisters. The parties agreed, and in November 1933, the Poor School Sisters borrowed 175,000 Reichsmark at five percent interest payable in Dutch guilders to the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{487} With this transaction, the Poor School Sisters eliminated almost half their debt. It appeared that Kaltenbach and Hofius had brokered an advantageous deal for the women, and all seemed well until customs officials and Gestapo agents appeared on the Poor School Sisters’ doorstep in 1935.

In February 1935, Nazi officials audited the books of the Universum-Bank on the suspicion that Hofius had restructured numerous religious congregations’ debts without state approval. One month later, the newly appointed special prosecutor Schulte-Limbeck ordered a search of the houses of about forty Catholic institutions that had done business with Hofius, including those of the Poor School Sisters in Westphalia and Bavaria.\textsuperscript{488} The state also arrested Kaltenbach, who became the director of the Universum-Bank in Berlin in 1934, and several other employees.

\textsuperscript{486} The Universum-Bank charged the sisters an exchange rate of 4.20 Reichsmark for 1.00 US Dollar. Bonds in the amount of 81,000 US dollars multiplied by 4.20 equaled 340,200 Reichsmark. The bank offered the bonds to the congregation at a price of 55% of face value, or 44,450 US Dollars, which approximately equaled 186,690 Reichsmark. The Hilfgemeinschaft agreed to accept the bonds as payment in full for the Poor School Sisters remaining debt. Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935, AKB, Best. Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{487} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{488} Ibid. The state also arrested Kaltenbach, who became the director of the Universum-Bank in Berlin in 1934, and several other employees.
Gestapo also issued a warrant for Hofius’s arrest but he prudently remained abroad until 1945.\footnote{Hoffmann and Janssen, 84; Rapp, 51.}

As the former provincial superior of Westphalia, M. Canisia Brüggemann had to answer for the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. According to the prosecutor, the congregation had refused to participate in Germany’s heroic struggle for economic survival, and had instead willfully harmed the people’s community.\footnote{Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935, AKB, Best. Devisenprozesse.} The prosecutor alleged that Sister Canisia had authorized the illegal purchase of foreign securities in 1932 and 1933.\footnote{Sister Canisia Brüggemann was charged with a total of six violations of the Verordnung über die Devisenbewirtschaftung vom 23. Mai 1932. Ibid.} Although the congregation had provided no funds to the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam and the state had approved the transaction, the court found Sister Canisia guilty on all counts.\footnote{Bäcker to Kloster Brede, 14 December 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse.}

The state now alleged that M. Canisia Brüggemann had fraudulently obtained the permit to restructure the debt. According to court documents, the congregation failed to fulfill the provisions that made approval of the transaction contingent on the reduction of the loan’s interest rate and the purchase price of the bonds. Hofius had indeed first agreed to both the reduction of the interest rate and the price of the bonds but after the loan had closed, he asked the congregation to sign a separate promissory note in the amount of 21,000 Reichsmark payable to his bank. The amount represented the four percent difference between the offered and agreed upon purchase price of the bonds and various
fees. Hofius was also not willing to lower the interest rate after all and asked the sisters for “an annual two percent commission” of the outstanding principle balance for the life of the loan.\footnote{Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse. The court alleged that the transaction was subject to state approval because the Universum-Bank in Germany collected funds on behalf of a foreign creditor, the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam. In April 1936, Hofius sent a letter to the Poor School Sisters, in which he insisted that his bank never purchased bonds on behalf of the Poor School Sisters prior to the state’s approval of the transaction. He also defended the additional charges as commissions, which, although high, were justified by prevailing circumstances. Hofius insisted had he had been honest and that “it required more than mere lack of objectivity to doubt his intentions.” Hofius to Kloster Brede, 16 April 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.} The sisters agreed to the additional charges because the congregation’s overall situation had improved substantially.\footnote{Abschrift. Vernehmung von Hiltberta Brand durch Oberinspector Weiss, 25 April 1935, AKB, Best. Devisenprozesse.}

The sisters could have done even better. Wilhem Beck, the director of the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam testified that his bank actually purchased the bonds for about forty-two percent of face value, and the congregation had therefore paid a premium of approximately 40,000 Reichsmark to his bank.\footnote{Abschrift. Vernehmung von Wilhelm Beck, April 30, 1935, AKB, Best. Devisenprozesse. The congregation’s financial advisor reported to the sisters in March 1936 that bank officials had admitted that their goal had always been a commission of ten percent of the bonds’ purchase price. The commission was much higher, because as the sisters’ accountant later determined that Hofius had purchased part of the bonds for only 39 percent of face value. It is unclear whether Hofius disclosed the premium to the sisters beforehand. Overall, the restructuring of the Poor School Sisters’ debt turned out to be an expensive transaction. In addition to the extra charges of the Universum-Bank, the sisters also had to pay a prepayment penalty in the amount of 33,600 Reichsmark to the Hilfsgemeinschaft. Bossig to Kloster Brede, 20 March 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse, and Jörgens, “Licht und Dunkel,” 34 ff.} The court ruled that this overpayment constituted a separate offense in addition to the issue over the permit, which had further harmed Germany’s economy. The judge therefore ordered the Poor School Sisters to pay 40,000 Reichsmark in damages to the state. In October 1935, Sister Canisia
Brüggemann was convicted of all counts against her. The court fined her an additional 40,000 Reichsmark and sentenced her to two years in prison.\footnote{Abschrift. Schnellschöffengericht Berlin in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonie Brüggemann, 14 October 1935. AKB, Devisenprozesse.}

3.3 The Propaganda Campaign

The prosecutor found it “especially reprehensible” that M. Canisia Brüggemann had, through the violation of foreign exchange regulations, “excluded herself from the collective misery (Notgemeinschaft) of the German people in order to benefit her own community.”\footnote{Ibid.} Sister Canisia’s trial in October 1935 was already the fifteenth foreign exchange trial that year. It was part of a nasty propaganda campaign the Nazi regime waged against religious congregations and the Catholic Church in 1935 and 1936. The impact of the foreign exchange trial of M. Canisia Brüggemann of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame went far beyond the outcome of her own legal proceedings, and the event must be considered in the context of the entire propaganda campaign against women religious and the church.

The number and quick succession of the foreign exchange trials were crucial elements in the regime’s offensive against the Catholic Church. It did not miss its mark. Adolf Cardinal Bertram wrote to Pacelli on 11 June 1935 that the “mockery to which bishops and members of religious congregations has been subjected escalated into veritable orgies….one trial follows another, which keeps the soul of the nation in a
constant state of agitation.” The Nazi press covered all trials, but four cases stand out for the extensive and sensational coverage newspapers devoted to them.

The Nazi propaganda campaign commenced on 17 May 1935 with the trial against Sister Wernera Wiedenhöfer from the congregation of the Daughters of Charity from St. Vincent de Paul (Daughters of Charity) in Cologne. In regular and detailed instructions to the press, the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda under Joseph Goebbels choreographed the press coverage of the trials. On 13 May 1935, the ministry issued instructions to editors to announce “proceedings against certain Catholic orders regarding foreign exchange violations.” The state alleged that, with the help of Hofius, the Daughters of Charity had illegally transferred money to the Netherlands in the early 1930s to purchase discounted bonds to repay debts of 100,000 US dollars and 460,000 Dutch guilders. The court found the sister guilty and sentenced her to a large fine and five years in prison. The Nazi combat press devoted large-scale front-page

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498 Bertram to Pacelli, 11 June 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.

499 Of the 97 persons tried in Berlin in connection with the foreign currency trials, 39 were Catholic sisters or nuns. Hoffmann and Janssen, 224 ff.


502 The court fined the sister 150,000 Reichsmark, and the congregation had to pay an additional 250,000 Reichsmark in restitution to the state. Ibid.

503 Consisting of the *Völkischer Beobachter, Das Schwarze Korps, Der Angriff, and Der Stürmer*, the “combat press” was a vital mouthpiece of the regime and, as Martin Plieninger wrote in 1933, sought to stage a “daily mass rally for the Führer.” Qtld. in Thomas Pegelow, “‘German Jews,’ ‘National Jews,’ ‘Jewish Volk’ or ‘Racial Jews’? The Constitution of ‘Jewishness’ in Newspapers of Nazi Germany, 1933-1938,” *Central European History* 35, no. 2 (2002), 201.
headlines, articles, and commentaries to the proceedings against the Daughters of Charity. Evidently satisfied with the start of the foreign exchange trials and propaganda campaign, Goebbels recorded in his diary on 19 May 1935: “Catholic sister 5 years prison [sic] because of foreign exchange violations. Hard blow for the church.”  

Five days later, on 22 May 1935, the second trial against two Catholic sisters from Cologne began.

The state accused the two Augustinian sisters Sister Neophyta Menke and Sister Englatia Dohm of unapproved transfer of funds. The prosecutor asserted that the women transferred large sums to the Universum-Bank in Amsterdam to satisfy their congregation’s debts exceeding two million Dutch guilders, or about four million Reichsmark.  

The state fined the sisters and the congregation 312,000 Reichsmark, and sentenced Sister Neophyta to five years and Sister Englatia to ten months in prison.  

After a brief pause, the trials continued in July 1935 and went on with minor interruptions.

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505 The legal name of the congregation is Genossenschaft der Cellitinnen nach der Regel des heiligen Augustinus, Köln/Severinstrasse. The prosecutor alleged that “in the year 1929, the congregation took out loans with interest rates of 8% and 7% respectively in the amounts of 1,200,000 Dutch Guilders each….In 1932, the congregation, with the help of Dr. Hofius, took advantage of the low trading value of bonds of 40 to 60% of the bonds’ face value [which represented the debt], and he began to repurchase said bonds…In the years 1932 to 1932, the accused Menke had a subordinate sister secretly transfer about 200,000 RM across the Belgian border.” In addition, the sisters were charged with several other minor violations of foreign exchange laws. Abschrift. Anklage gegen die Generaloberin Maria Menke (Schwester Neophyta) und Generalschaffnerin Getrud Dohm (Schwester Englatia), 18 May 1935, USHMM, R 3001: Bundesarchiv, Reichsjustizministerium, IIIg 17 612/38, Bl. 2.

506 Abschrift. Urteil in der Strafsache gegen die Generaloberin Maria Menke und die Generalschaffnerin Gertrud Dohm, 27 July 1935, USHMM, R 3001: Bundesarchiv, Reichsjustizministerium: IIIg 17 612/38, Bl. 10 - 34.
until April 1936. The proceedings against thirteen padres from the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer dominated the month of August. The arrest, trial, and conviction of the Bishop of Meissen, Dr. Petrus Legge, created a sensation in October and November 1935, and the press made the most of it. Also in October 1935, Sister Libora Schoers from the congregation Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frau in Mühlhausen stood trial for the unauthorized transfer of money to the Netherlands. At issue were sums totaling 825,000 Reichsmark. Sister Libora received the maximum sentence of ten

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507 Following the trial of Sisters Neophyta Menke and Englantia Dohm, the press devoted some attention to the case against the Franciscan Brother Epiphan Goertler from Waldbreitbach. The state sentenced Brother Epiphan to ten years in prison and fined him 600,000 Reichsmark for illegally transferring 400,000 Reichsmark to the Netherlands with the help of Hofius. The proceedings against Brother Epiphan Goertler marked the end of the first phase of the foreign exchange trials. “Klosterbruder Epiphan, der Devisenschieber,” 30 May 1935, VB NA.

508 The state accused the padres of the illegal purchase, possession, and sale of securities, the unauthorized transfer of funds to a foreign country, and forgery. For a discussion of the trial against the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or Redemporists. Rapp, 122 ff.

509 The state accused the bishop of having conspired with Hofius to transfer 180,000 Reichsmark to Amsterdam. The banker then purchased discounted bonds, which represented debt of the Diocese of Meissen in the original amount of 300,000 Dutch guilders. The court convicted Bishop Petrus Legge and fined him 100,000 Reichsmark, but did not sentence him to any time in prison. The court also ordered the confiscation of bonds in the amount of 95,000 Dutch guilders. Two officials from the diocese of Meissen stood trial alongside the Bishop of Meissen, namely the bishop’s brother Dr. Theodor Legge and Dr. Wilhelm Soppa. Theodor Legge was sentenced to five years in prison and fined 70,000 Reichsmark. Wilhelm Soppa was sentenced to three years in prison and fined 70,000 Reichsmark. See Rapp, 146 ff. The regime carefully watched domestic and international reactions to the arrest and trial of the Bishop of Meissen, and the propaganda ministry therefore closely supervised the coverage of the proceedings. On 14 November 1935, the day the bishop’s trial commenced in Berlin, the propaganda ministry issued the following instructions to the press: “The propaganda ministry asks to eschew any hateful remarks in reports about the trial, and to let the facts speak for themselves instead. Articles on the front page are not desired, but the trial can be covered in grand style in the interior of the paper.” Presseanweisung, 14 November 1935, ZSg. 101/6/183/Nr. 1827, in Toepper-Ziegert,757.

510 Abschrift. Der Prozess gegen die Generalprokuratorin und Geschaeftsfuehrerin Anna Schroers (Schwester Libora) in der Genossenschaft “Schwestern Unserer Lieben Frauen” und Heimleiterin Anna Gerdemann (Lucilla), 29 October 1935 to 5 November 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8371.
years in prison, was fined 250,000 Reichsmark, and had to pay additional restitution in the amount of 625,000 Reichsmark.  

Some Germans expressed their outrage about the harsh sentence Sister Libora received. In a letter dated November 1935 to the Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl, an anonymous Protestant German citizen voiced his anger over the conviction of Sister Libora Schoers and the lack of due process in German courts that, he concluded, “certainly does nothing to improve the reputation of the criminal justice system.” In particular, the writer found the sentence too severe, because the sisters had used the money in question for the good of the German community.

This letter reveals an important goal of the campaign as well as the enormous difficulties the state faced in achieving it. A central purpose of the propaganda offensive was to change the positive opinions many Germans of all confessions, like this anonymous letter writer, had about nuns and the crucial social and charitable work they performed for the benefit of German society.

Changing the minds of Germans, in particular the minds of Catholic Germans, about the charity, selflessness, and importance of women religious proved very hard for the Nazis. By criminalizing the behavior of Catholic sisters they hoped to convince Germans of the prudence and necessity of excluding the women from the people’s community. For instance, the *Völkischer Beobachter* asserted in November 1935 that “the gravity of the crimes [of Sister Libora] revealed in the proceedings against [Catholic]

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511 Neeb to Gürtner, 12 November 1935, BArch B, R5101/23329, Bl. 387.

512 Anonymous to Kerrl, November 11, 1935, BArch B, R5101/23310, Bl. 323.

513 Ibid.
orders can only be compared with the stab in the back of the German army during the
war."  Criminalizing political opponents and social outsiders was a familiar and
effective routine in Hitler’s Germany.

The Nazis prided themselves in restoring public order. Robert Gellately showed
that a regular diet of “crime and punishment” stories in the press conveyed to “good
Germans” the need to forfeit their civil and legal rights to defend the people’s community
against pernicious enemies such as communists, Jews, homosexuals, alcoholics, and
vagrants. Especially in the case of Jews, German courts played a central role in
implementing Nazi racial ideology. Michael Berkowitz argued that “a major part of the
Nazi effort to cultivate anti-Semitism among Germans, especially between 1934 and
1938, was the attempt to portray, and then to prosecute Jews, for transgressing any
number of rules,” but in particular for violating financial regulations such as foreign
exchange laws. In Nazi Germany, criminal offences were no longer seen as harmful
acts of one individual against another but as harmful acts against the entire people’s
community. Werner Johe wrote that the accused now “stood outside of the community,
and] he became…a Volksschädling, a parasite.” In 1935, the regime attempted to
convince Germans that Catholic sisters and brothers were enemies of the state.

514 “Schwester Libora eine notorische Verbrecherin,” 3 November 1935, VB NA.
515 Gellately, 44.
Criminality (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 29. The combat press routinely reported about
foreign exchange violations allegedly committed by Jews. For instance, in June 1935, the Völkischer
Beobachter ran a story titled “Large-scale Jewish Foreign Exchange Smuggling Operation Discovered in
Danzig. Große jüdische Devisenschiebungen in Danzig aufgedeckt!” 30 June 1935, VB NA.
517 Werner Johe, Die gleichgeschaltete Justiz. Organisation des Rechtswesens und Politisierung
der Rechtssprechung 1933-1945 dargestellt am Beispiel des Oberlandesgerichtsbezirks Hamburg
The negative representations of the accused in the Nazi combat press were often so exaggerated they were grotesque. The *Völkischer Beobachter* wrote about the Augustinian sisters Neophyte Menke and Englatia Dohm in May 1935 that the women stood

in their order’s habit before the court. Question after question, the judge unclothes them more and more of their humble demeanor and let them appear for what they are: dangerous, intentional criminals to the common good of our Volk.518

*Das Schwarze Korps* commented that even “Galician Jews as well as the American underworld” could not trump the accused in guile.519

Against these alleged crimes, the propaganda ministry juxtaposed a righteous, heroic National Socialist state on an urgent mission to protect Germans from the accused. The *Völkischer Beobachter* wrote on 23 May 1935 that

the Reich must dictate which foreign debts are to be paid first. Even for cloisters no exceptions can be made … The entire German Volk has been negatively impacted, and the security of the currency and the entire economy has been endangered. I put foreign exchange laws on the same level as laws on high treason.520

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519 *Das Schwarze Korps*, “Die Patrioten des Herrn Erzbischof,” 5 June 1935, DSK.

520 “Wieder klösterliche Devisenschieber vor Gericht: Ueber 200,000 Mark ins Ausland verschoben,” 23 May 1935, VB NA.
The court justified the lengthy prison sentence of Sister Wernera Wiedenhöfer with the argument that “at issue was the struggle for the preservation of the German currency, a matter of the very existence (Lebensnotwendigkeit) of the German Volk.” By portraying themselves as pitched in a life-and-death struggle over the economy with nuns and members of the clergy, Nazi leaders attempted to shift blame for the ongoing economic crisis onto the accused sisters and brothers.

Hitler’s fortunes were at first tied to the economy. By blaming continued economic difficulties on the accused, the Nazis deflected attention from the fact that they had not performed the promised economic miracle. Der Angriff insisted repeatedly that the total sums the cloisters had illegally removed from the German Reich “could free us from all shortages of raw materials.” This was of course absurd. The press also never acknowledged the fact that all reductions of foreign debts actually benefitted the state. Newspapers instead stressed the financial sacrifices most Germans made and compared those to the supposed wealth and recklessness of religious congregations.

The papers described female religious as “crafty currency smugglers” who conducted their transactions with guile and conniving. Der Angriff alerted its readers that, “one will hear what kind of smuggled tobacco, foreign currency, and other nice things they [the nuns] could not hide from custom officials and the prosecutor.” In the trial of the Augustinian Sister Leophyta Menke in May 1935, the Völkischer Beobachter

521 “Die Begründung des Urteils gegen ‘Schwester Wernera,” 19 May 1935, VB NA.
522 “Schamlose Gotteslästerung,” 18 May 1935, DA.
524 “Sister Wernera sagt aus,” 17 May 1935, DA.
wrote that the sisters kept large amounts of money in unsecured drawers, prompting the
court to comment that “it is really shocking that such large sums are stored in this way as
if the streets were littered with money.”525 Religious houses became “curiously
businesslike organizations (Unternehmen)” in the press.526 In a crass poem titled “Was
Brüning in error – or the nun?” Das Schwarze Korps underscored the notion that Catholic
sisters were greedy and shallow women. The first verse read as follows:

Into the cloister …
I went a long time ago
There, I dedicated to God
My earthly, sinful soul.
However, my faith is shaken
quite a bit, when the Dollar falls.
That can steal my peace
from the Etsch to the Belt.527

The foreign exchange trials against female and male religious reinforced the Nazis’ belief
that the influence of the Catholic Church and in particular that of religious congregations
was based on enormous illicit wealth and economic influence. The “brown priest” and
SS-Sturmbannführer Albert Hartl was one of many Nazis who believed in this
stereotype.528 He insisted in January 1935 that through their enormous economic power,
Catholic cloisters “exert influence over the economy of the entire Reich.”529 In the

525 “Wieder klösterliche Devisenschieber vor Gericht: Ueber 200,000 Mark ins Ausland
verschoben,” 23 May 1935, VB NA.

526 Ibid.

527 “Irrte Brüning oder die Klosterfrau?,” 5 June 1935, DSK.

528 For a discussion of Hartl, see Spicer, Hitler’s Priests.

529 “Ausserung Albert Harls in einer Rede vor Teilnehmern eines Lehrgangs in der SD-Schule
Berlin-Grünewald,” January 1935, in Heinz Boberach, Regimekritik, Widerstand und Verfolgung in
Deutschland und den besetzten Gebieten Meldungen und Berichte aus dem Geheimen Staatspolizeiamt,
dem SD-Hauptamt der SS und dem Reichssicherheitshauptamt 1933-1944 (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1999), 902.
coverage of the foreign exchange trials, the press also made use of much older clichés about Catholics, cloisters, nuns, and monks to reinforce their message.

The Nazis raised stereotypes such as the supposed internationalism of congregations, the moral and sexual depravity of male and female religious, and the perversion of authority, in particular female authority, in convents. *Das Schwarze Korps* raised the cliché of sexual transgressions behind cloister walls, and proclaimed that “if those priests and religious, whose often questionable love adventures are common knowledge, are all of a sudden adorned with the martyr crown…then we must emphatically counter such misleading maneuvers.”\(^{530}\)

At the same time, *Das Schwarze Korps* derided the unnaturalness of chastity and portrayed the life of a childless nun as suffocating, idle, and unhappy.\(^{531}\) In an article titled “Also a ‘Mother,’” the *Völkische Beobachter* portrayed secluded, all-female religious communities as a perversion of motherhood that led to coercion, blind obedience, immorality, and crime.\(^{532}\) The press also derided the “un-Germanness” of international religious congregations. *Das Schwarze Korps*

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\(^{530}\) DSK, 12 August 1935.

\(^{531}\) *Das Schwarze Korps* stressed the supposedly unfulfilling, empty life of women religious in a poem titled “To a Nun.” The life of a nun is portrayed as suffocating and as a “Jammertal” (valley of lament). “In the poem, an idle, unhappy nun, whose hands had turned white and useless as wax, bemoans the “thousand grandchildren” she will never have. ”An eine Nonne,” 21 August 1935, DSK.

\(^{532}\) Auch eine ‘Mutter’: Betrachtungen zum 2. Prozess gegen klösterliche Devisenschieber,” 24 May 1935, VB NA. Portraying the accused sisters and brothers as immoral liars was central to the propaganda campaign. The press often stressed the supposed immorality of the accused. For instance, the *Völkischer Beobachter* described how the prosecutor “flogged (geiselle) the mean character of the accused” Sister Wernera, who had used the reverence her habit inspired to smuggle currency under its protection.

"Die Gnade Gottes sei mit uns:' Devisenschiebungen unter dem Ordensmantel,” 18 May 1935, VB NA, 18 May 1935. The *Völkischer Beobachter* wrote in May 1935 in conjunction with the trial of Sisters Leophyta and Englaita that “we are hard pressed after the impression we won during the proceedings not to view the testimonies of the two sisters as preposterous lies.” The article continued that the understanding of morals and the “spiritual attitude” (Geisteshaltung) of the leadership of the order had yielded a “clear and distressing picture.” “Die Begründung des Urteils gegen ‘Schwester Wernera,’” 19 May 1935, VB NA.
Korps claimed that a German nun was “spiritually much closer to a negro woman…from the same order than to a German woman who practiced so-called new paganism.”

Prejudices about female and male religious’ disloyalty, celibacy, and communal life fit the National Socialist worldview.

### 3.4 The Reaction of the Catholic Church to the Foreign Exchange Trials

Creating a rift between the Catholics and their church was a prime objective of the propaganda campaign. The *Völkischer Beobachter* hoped that after revealing the supposed “blasphemy, lies, immorality and criminal violations” committed by nuns and the clergy that “every Catholic or non-Catholic German turns away with equal disgust from such excess of uncleanliness.”

Although scholars agree that most Germans did not abandon the accused during the foreign exchange trials and instead rallied around them, the evidence does suggest that the campaign was at least a partial success for the Nazis and caused considerable turmoil among the laity and the clergy. Officials also successfully used the trials to force the episcopate into further concessions to the regime.

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533 “Das sind die wahren Kirchenfeinde!” 29 May 1935, DSK. The combat press also stressed the Jewish influence on the congregations, and according to *Der Angriff*, the prosecutor asked Sister Wernera if she was aware that Dr. Hofius, who was the order’s banker, “also used Jewish émigré capital to realize the plans of Catholic orders?” “Schwester Wernera sagt aus: Die Angeklagte wird der Unwahrheit überführt,” 17 May 1935, DA. At the height of the campaign, he recorded on 5 June 1935 that he worked “diligently in the struggle against Jews and Jesuits.” Joseph Goebbels, May 19, 1935, in Fröhlich, vol. 3/I, 234.

534 “Die neuesten Glaubenskämpfer: Meineid und Auslandsflucht,” 17 May 1935, VB NA.

535 John Conway writes, for instance, that the “virulence and scurrility of these attacks still failed, however, to produce the desired results. The laity refused to desert their clergy and rallied more strongly to their defense.” Conway, *Persecution*, 127. Heinz Hürten also concluded that “in spite of the enormous efforts [by the regime] the offensive against the clergy and orders did not achieve the desired results.” Hürten, *Katholiken*, 297. Rapp reached the same conclusion, Rapp, 285 ff.
In 1935, the hierarchy lacked the benefit of hindsight and did not know how the laity would react to the accusations. Both bishops and prominent lay Catholics noted with alarm the negative impact of the trials on the Catholic Church. The Catholic lawyer Dr. Alfred Etscheit wrote to Pacelli on 29 May 1935 that the danger to the church was incalculable, and that the state aimed “violently to turn public sentiment against Catholicism in preparation for a new secularization of church properties.” A group of prominent German Catholics also wrote to Pacelli in June 1935 that “because of the foreign exchange trials, the situation of the Catholic Church has become critical.” Bertram sent his own report to the cardinal secretary of state and concluded that the entire Catholic Church suffered due to religious congregations’ violations of foreign exchange laws. But it was Bertram and other bishops who made the already precarious situation worse when they seemed publicly to abandon the accused Catholic sisters and brothers and acknowledged the legitimacy of the trials.

German bishops did not challenge legal proceedings against Catholic congregations. They repeatedly distanced themselves from the accused and censured their behavior. Cardinal Bertram first issued a statement on 4 June 1935 that appeared in the


537 Schmittmann, Massen et. al. to Pacelli, June 1935, USHMM, RG-76-001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.

538 Betram to Pacelli, 11 June 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.
Frankfurter Zeitung. Bertram stated that he was sorry that the transgressions of a few had given rise to publications against the entire church:

The church also seriously disapproves of the violations of foreign exchange regulations although the question whether the transgressions were committed out of ignorance or were the result of the ill advice of third parties must be determined in each case individually….The bishops are not responsible for Catholic sisters and brothers, and had no part in the transactions conducted by the latter. In economic matters, congregations are not subject to the supervision of the bishops.  

Bertram concluded with the thought that any judgments of the events would be reserved for a later time, and would take into account the extraordinary works of Catholic congregations inside and outside of Germany. He did offer a very hesitant defense of religious institutions in his statement that did not satisfy the regime. The Völkischer Beobachter called the cardinal’s declaration a “provocation,” and Goebbels wrote that the “insolent conduct of priests (Pfaffen)” was unbelievable. In a letter to Pacelli, Bertram expressed his frustration about the fact that the state countered any attempts to point out ameliorating circumstances “with the sharpest retorts.” The bishop

539 Ibid.
540 Ibid.
541 The regime rejected the cardinal’s assertion that the accused had acted out of ignorance rather than malice, and that the bishops had no prior knowledge of the transactions. The Nazis also viewed Bertram’s statement that events would be judged at a later time as a slander of the judicial system in Nazi Germany. “Das Devisenverbrechen der katholischen Orden,” 6 June 1935, VB NA, 6 June 1935.
543 Bertram to Pacelli, 11 June 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.
immediately issued a second firmer statement on the trials that was published in the Nazi combat press.

Bertram once again stated that the church “seriously disapproves of the transgressions against the state and the German national community.” He acknowledged that “the German justice system has drawn a clear dividing line” between the Catholic Church and the accused individuals. The archbishop of Cologne, Karl Joseph Cardinal Schulte, also issued a statement on 14 June 1935. Schulte “wholly condemned” the violations of foreign exchange laws by Catholic sisters from Cologne, and asserted that it must be counted among “the worst surprises and disappointments” of his life that some congregations had disregarded the explicit warnings he had issued in 1931. The Nazis distributed Schulte’s statement as a flyer before it appeared in the press.

The Catholic press also weighed in on the trials. On 28 May 1935, the Katholisches Kirchenblatt published an article titled “A Word about the Foreign Exchange Trials,” in which the authors echoed the sentiments of Bertram and Schulte. The article accused Catholic religious congregations of fiscal incompetence and asserted

544 “Eine Erklärung des Kardinals Bertram,” 7 June 1935, VB NA.

545 Ibid.


that the state only did its duty when it restricted the transfer of foreign exchange outside of Germany.\textsuperscript{548} The authors concluded that

\begin{quote}
the representatives of the orders who are now sitting in…prison…violated the law and must now bear the consequences of their unlawful (gesetzwidrigen) behavior…We protest against the notion that the entire church is held accountable for this regrettable affair.\textsuperscript{549}
\end{quote}

The Catholic newspaper \textit{Junge Front} published a lengthy article on the foreign exchange trials in June 1935 that rebuked “cloisters for their entanglement in the capitalist economy” and “for adopting a capitalist attitude.”\textsuperscript{550} The article sharply criticized some congregations “for their exaggerated emphasis on obedience” and for placing the well-being of their religious communities above the greater German community.\textsuperscript{551} The paper called for immediate reforms of religious congregations.

The Catholic Church’s response to the foreign exchange trials threatened to damage its standing among German Catholics. Many Germans could not understand why bishops did not defend the accused Catholic sisters and brothers. Bertram and Schulte’s public statements in particular unsettled the laity. A well-connected but anonymous writer urged Pacelli in June 1935 to “prevent, your excellency, any further individual

\textsuperscript{548} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{549} The article continued that entire religious orders should not be held accountable for the actions of individual members of orders, and that it was in the interest of the Catholic Church to investigate these painful foreign exchange matters in a “calm and objective” manner. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{550} The article in the \textit{Junge Front} actually replicated common clichés about male and female religious such as the issue of the perversion of authority and obedience and described religious communities as isolated from society. “Devisenprozesse,” 23 June 1935, \textit{Junge Front}. See also: Hürten, \textit{Katholiken}, 295.

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.
declarations by German bishops about the foreign exchange trials.” The author reported that the state was trying to extort more statements from bishops, and that “the declarations of the two cardinals have caused much agitation and confusion among the Volk; the good Volk says openly that now the bishops have abandoned the poor imprisoned Catholic sisters and brothers.” German bishops were well aware of popular sentiments.

The bishops realized they were “inconsistent and too compliant” and “must show more support for imprisoned members of the church.” Yet, in a joint pastoral letter to the laity dated August 1935, the episcopate offered only a limited and hesitant defense of the accused, and in a lengthy petition to Hitler dated 20 August 1935, the bishops mentioned the foreign exchange trials in a single, insignificant byline. The episcopate issued no further public statements about the trials.

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552 Anonymous to Pacelli, 25 June 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.

553 Ibid. The reaction of Catholics to the foreign exchange trials is difficult to assess. Reports from two different districts, Regensburg and Munich from August and May 1935, respectively, both note the general approval of the convictions in vast segments of society but, at the same time, the reports indicate the overwhelming support of Catholic Germans for the church because, as the Regensburg report indicates, “the Catholic clergy still has the backing of the majority of the population in urban as well as rural areas.” Walter Ziegler, ed. Die Kirchliche Lage in Bayern nach den Regierungspräsidentenberichten 1933-1943, vol. 4, Regierungsbezirk Niederbayern und Oberpfalz 1933-1945 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1973), 58. For the report from Munich see, Helmut Witetschek, ed., Die Kirchliche Lage in Bayern nach den Regierungspräsidentenberichten 1933-1943 vol. 1, Regierungsbezirk Oberbayern 1933-1945 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1966), 68 ff.

3.5 Extorting Concessions from the Church

Meanwhile, Alfred Etscheit insisted that the hierarchy had to do everything in its power to stop the disastrous trials and propaganda campaign. He suggested offering the regime foreign currency in exchange for the immediate cessation of the trials. Etscheit estimated that fines against religious congregations would eventually total five million Reichsmarks, and he believed the regime could be tempted into accepting half that sum as a pay-off on account of the acute foreign exchange shortages in Germany.

The prominent Catholic lawyer served as liaison between the state and the Vatican. In June he wrote to Pacelli that “in first conversations” with the Nazi state, he found that “it is the wish and in the German interest that the matter be put to rest soon.” Etscheit did not identify whom he met with, but in 1935 Hitler appointed Hanns Kerrl, then still Reichminister without portfolio, to negotiate with the Catholic Church. On 26 June 1935, Hitler ordered Justice Minister Franz Gürtner to halt the foreign exchange trials. It remains unclear what was achieved during the brief cessation of the proceedings. The papal nuncio Cesare Orsenigo confided to secretary von Bülow in the

555 Etscheit to Pacelli, 29 May 1935, USHMM: RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 37.
556 Ibid.
557 Etscheit to Pacelli, 6 June 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 37.
559 Gürtner immediately voiced his protest to Hitler, arguing that “I believe there is the real danger that the cessation of the proceedings will…severely shake the [Volk’s] trust in the [German] administration of justice.” Ibid.
foreign office that he did not know why the trials had been halted and urgently wished to speak to Gürtner.\textsuperscript{560} The proceedings resumed on 14 July 1935.

In August 1935, Hitler once again stopped the trials. Goebbels recorded in his diary on the occasion that “[the Führer] wants to make peace with the churches, at least for a while. Has great foreign policy potential” \textit{[sic]}.\textsuperscript{561} Etscheit revealed in a letter to Pacelli dated 12 August 1935 what might persuade the German state to abandon the foreign exchange trials for good. He wrote:

I have it on good authority that, if one is so inclined, to come back to the negotiating table – I am thinking about the implementation provisions for the concordat – the unpleasant proceedings will be halted...With the achievement of a political success, and a mere beginning of negotiations would be viewed as such, one would be inclined to honor such wishes.\textsuperscript{562}

The negotiations Etscheit referred to in his letter concerned unresolved issues over the implementation of article 31 of the concordat that protected Catholic organizations devoted “exclusively to religious, cultural, and charitable activities.” Upon conclusion of the concordat in July 1933, the identification of protected Catholic groups remained open and subject to later negotiations, which proved a grave mistake for the church. The Nazis believed Catholic organizations, in particular youth organizations, to be the seat of the

\textsuperscript{560} Aufzeichnungen Bülows (10 July 1933), in Albrecht, \textit{Notenwechsel}, vol. 1, 100. Rumors about “advanced negotiations” about the cessation of the trials also prompted Hofius, the director of the Universum Bank, to write a letter from his self-imposed exile in Holland to Pacelli. He was concerned that a sudden termination of the foreign exchange trial would not be in his or his bank’s best interest, as he believed that arguments presented in court would eventually prove his and his staff’s innocence. Hofius to Pacelli, 10 July 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 37.

\textsuperscript{561} Goebbels, 19 August 1935, in Fröhlich, 278.

\textsuperscript{562} Etscheit to Pacelli, 12 August 1935, USHMM, RG-76.001M: Selected Records from the Vatican Archives, reel 40.
church’s subversive political power and beginning in 1934, the regime made curbing
these groups a priority.\textsuperscript{563} In 1934 and 1935, the state implemented new decrees against
Catholic youth organizations and increased police surveillance of the groups.\textsuperscript{564}

Tensions between the Vatican and the episcopate and regime over article 31
increased steadily in 1934 and 1935. After failed negotiations between the Vatican and
the state, the episcopate’s efforts to reach an agreement ended with the Röhm Putsch in
June 1934. The relationship between the church and the regime worsened when the Nazis
stepped up measures against the Catholic press and confessional schools. The church and
the state were also engaged in a public ideological contest over neo-paganism,
specifically the promotion of Germanic and Nordic religions by Nazi ideologue Alfred
Rosenberg.\textsuperscript{565}

Etscheit acknowledged the difficulty of reviving negotiations but he urged Pacelli
to pursue the possibility. The relationship between the Vatican and the Nazi regime

\textsuperscript{563} In 1934, the Gestapo issued a report that pointed to the mass mobilization capability of
Catholic organizations and thereby portrayed the church as a threatening rival power. Besier, 140. John
Conway wrote that “in May 1934 Himmler’s personal ‘security service’…recommended an all-out attack
against Catholic Action, the leading layman’s organization.” Conway, \textit{Persecution}, 88.

\textsuperscript{564} See for instance, “Verordnung des Preussischen Ministerpräsidenten und Chefs der Geheimen
Staatspolizei: Verbot kirchlich-konfessioneller Veranstaltungen” (7 December 1934). See also “I. Erlaß des
Reichinnenministers an die Landesregierung und den stellvertretenden Chef und Inspekteur der
preußischen Geheimen Staatspolizei (20 July 1935), “II. Verordnung des preußischen Ministerpräsidenten
und Chef der Geheimen Staatspolizei” (23 July 1935), and “III. Verordnung des Politischen
Polizeikommandeurs im bayerischen Innenministerium” (30 July 1935). Nicolaisen and Grünzinger, vol. 3,
18 ff., 233 ff.

\textsuperscript{565} In 1935, Alfred Rosenberg published his pamphlet titled \textit{An die Dunkelmänner unserer Zeit}. In
response to the protest of Clemens-August Count von Galen, the Bishop of Münster, the regime passed a
decree against so-called “political Catholicism” in July 1935. Conway, \textit{Persecution}, 127. See also “II.
Runderlaß des preußischen Ministerpräsidenten an die preußischen Ober- und Regierungspräsidenten, den
Staatskommissar der Hauptstadt Berlin und den Polizeipräsidenten in Berlin” (16 July 1935) in Nicolaisen
and Grünzinger, vol 3, 5 ff.
deteriorated further, however, and by January 1936 tensions had risen to a level that made the resumption of talks unlikely. Pacelli sent a terse note to ambassador Diego von Bergen instead in which he renounced the slanderous foreign exchange trials and campaign against the church.\textsuperscript{566} For Hitler, resolving the question of article 31 and Catholic youth organization in his favor would have been a great triumph and would have calmed German Catholics.

Although the Nazis failed in their objective pertaining to article 31 of the concordat, they successfully used the foreign exchange trials to extort concessions from the episcopate and religious congregations. The example of Cardinal Schulte and the case against the Augustinian women religious congregation Genossenschaft der Cellitinnen nach der Regel des heiligen Augustinus Köln/Severinstrasse in Cologne illustrates how the Nazis used the trials for political purposes and how severely large fines affected individual congregations.

In May 1935, the state fined the two Cellitinnen Sisters Neophyta Menke and Englata Dohm 312,000 Reichsmark. The congregation had used foreign credits to build, operate and staff three state-of-the art hospitals, an asylum, nursing homes, and kindergartens in Cologne. Pending payment of the fines, the state froze the congregation’s bank accounts, and by September 1935, the sisters’ situation was desperate.\textsuperscript{567} The congregation’s accountant filed a formal request with the Reich

\textsuperscript{566} Note des Kardinalsekretärs Pacelli and Botschafter von Bergen, 29 January 1936, in Albrecht, 295 ff.

\textsuperscript{567} Day-to-day operations became difficult for the congregation and the sisters were unable to pay the interest in the amount of 165,000 Reichsmark on their Dutch loan. Rheinische Treuhands-Gesellschaft to Meyer, 14 September 1935, USHMM, Bundesarchiv: R3001: Reichsjustizministerium: IIIg 17 612/38, Bl. 42.
Ministry of Justice to lift the hold on the bank accounts and accept annual installment payments of the fine.\textsuperscript{568} In October of 1935 representatives from the church and the state met in Berlin to discuss the issue, but the state rejected partial payments and Cardinal Schulte’s representative declined to advance funds to the sisters to help settle the matter.\textsuperscript{569}

The state had no intentions of letting the Augustinian congregation collapse. The special prosecutor Schulte-Limbeck personally inspected one of the hospitals and found that “it is known even beyond the borders of Germany for its state-of-the-art equipment.”\textsuperscript{570} Germany also suffered from an acute shortage of nurses, and 457 Augustinian women religious nurses worked in Cologne’s public hospital for considerably less than their secular counterparts.\textsuperscript{571} Nazi officials nonetheless continued to dangle the specter of the congregation’s economic collapse before the sisters and

\textsuperscript{568} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{569} Rektor Füchtjohann represented the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Schulte, and Dr. Wilhelm Warsch represented the interests of the Augustinian sisters. (The congregation operated under the approbation of the local bishop who therefore exercised much power over the internal affairs of the sisters. In response to the congregation’s violation of foreign exchange laws, Cardinal Schulte appointed Warsch to take over the financial and business administration of the congregation.) The chief prosecutor Schulte-Limbeck and Landesgerichtsrat Meyer represented the state. A representative from the sisters’ Dutch creditor was also present. Although Schulte exercised considerable power over the Cellitinnen, when Schulte-Limbeck asked Füchtjohann that the diocese make funds available to the sisters, he indicated that “the diocese was neither legally nor economically in the position to grant such a request.” Vermerk über die am 25. and 26. Oktober im Justizministerium stattgefundene Besprechung über den Antrag des Ordens der Augustinerinnen in Köln, 25/26 October, 1935, USHMM: Bundesarchiv: R3001: Reichsjustizministerium, IIIg 17 612/38, Bl. 48ff.
\textsuperscript{570} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{571} For instance, in its assessment of the sisters’ home for the mentally ill in Zülpich which housed 693 female patients, the state concluded that the daily cost per patient in Zülpich was 1.60 Reichsmark, whereas the cost in the region’s public institutions was 3.70 Reichsmark. Schulte-Limbeck concluded that “this significant difference in cost” can be explained with the simple fact that the sisters earn significantly less than their worldly counterparts. Ibid.
Cardinal Schulte as they delayed a settlement and pressed both parties into making numerous concessions.

The mayor of Cologne, Günter Riesen, registered the first success in the matter. He reported in November 1935 that “after lengthy negotiations with the congregation and the archbishop, we were able to remove a number of elements hostile to the state from the city’s institutions, and elevated an old National Socialist among the sisters to the post of mother superior of the large institution Lindenburg.”572 But the state was not yet satisfied, and the Oberpräsident of the Rhine province Josef Terboven and the Regierungspräsident Rudolf Diels took a leading role in the negotiations in November 1935. Terboven was pleased overall that the foreign exchange trials “had significantly contributed to the suppression of political Catholicism in the Rhine province.”573 He did not wish to take any steps that might upset “the current understanding with the archbishop,” as a “calming

572 Vermerk über den Antrag des Ordens der Augustinerinnen auf Bewilligung von Ratenzahlung, 4/5 November 1935. USHMM: R3001: Bundesarchiv: Reichsjustizministerium: IIIg 17 613/38, Bl. 60 ff. One Augustinian sister in particular only identified as Sister Remberta was a particular thorn in the side of city officials. She was the mother superior of the public Bürgerhospital in Cologne, and charged with negotiating with the city. One physician wrote about her on 4 July 1935 that “it was already a provocation that the congregation did not cheerfully fulfill the wishes of the [Nazi] movement,” and he believed that a mother superior like Sister Rembarta, “who has not so much as a spark of National Socialism within her…must not be allowed to remain even one hour longer in a public institution.” The writer, a physician identified as Mathias M., approved, however, of Sister Romina, who, against the express orders of the congregation and the Catholic Church, had joined the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) before 1933. The Augustinian congregation writes about Sister Romina that “although her membership in the NSDAP was most reprehensible…she showed much courage and tenacity” in negotiations with Nazi officials on the congregation’s behalf. Max Wolters, Einfach Da Sein: 150 Jahre Genossenschaft der Cellitinnen nach der Regel des Heiligen Augustinus Köln/Severinstrasse (Fulda: Verlag Parzeller, 1988), 156 ff.

of the relationship with the church was most beneficial for the National Socialist movement.”\(^{574}\) Terboven was however very interested…to politically exploit any concessions the Ministry of Justice might offer [to the sisters] and use such concessions as leverage in pending negotiations about cultural and political questions (the Catholic press, Catholic youth organizations, [and] the establishment of non-confessional schools.)\(^{575}\)

Although the Reich Ministry of Justice found Terboven’s request problematic because it endangered “the non-political character” of the trials, the ministry maintained the charade of impartiality by making it known to all parties that “the Oberpräsident’s opinion on the matter was of decisive importance to the Reich Ministry of Justice.”\(^{576}\) Diels and Terboven soon reported positive results. In a letter dated November 1935 to Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl, Regierungspräsident Diels praised Cardinal Schulte’s “warm tone” toward the state and noted the “significant decline of adversarial attitudes in church circles.”\(^{577}\) But Diels also warned Kerrl not to confuse church leaders’ changed attitudes with approval of Nazism, and suggested to the minister to use the matter of the Augustinian sisters’ unpaid fines as “a way to make appropriate behavior toward the National Socialist state easy for the Catholic Church.”\(^{578}\) Diels believed that the bishops could be pressed into further

\(^{574}\) Ibid.

\(^{575}\) Ibid.

\(^{576}\) Ibid.

\(^{577}\) Diels to Kerrl, 7 November 1935, USHMM: R3001: Bundesarchiv: Reichjustizministerium: IIIg 17 613/38, Bl. 54 ff.

\(^{578}\) Ibid.
concessions as a way of avoiding “more rigorous forms of confiscation of wealth.”

He suggested demanding the removal of recalcitrant priests who continued to lobby for Catholic youth organizations and the further suppression of the Catholic press. Diels cautioned Kerrl that under no circumstances must a connection between the foreign exchange trials and the political goals of the state become known. He was confident that the trials would “secure the continued submission of the church to the authority of the state for the foreseeable future.”

3.6 The Poor School Sister of Notre Dame’s Negotiations over the Payment of Fines

Through the foreign exchange trials, women religious congregations became directly embroiled in the conflicts between the hierarchy and the state. Each trial presented the state with a new opportunity to wrest concessions from the affected congregation or diocese. Although extant evidence does not reveal in the same detail as the aforementioned case of the Augustinian sisters in Cologne did, what kind of concessions the regime extorted from the Poor School Sisters over the payment of fines, it is clear that difficult negotiations dragged on for years. The matter of the outstanding fines and fees of nearly 90,000 Reichsmark added to the congregation’s financial difficulties at a time when the regime moved aggressively against Catholic schools. It compelled the sisters to adopt the stance of meek petitioners before the state. The women

579 Ibid.
580 Ibid.
581 Ibid.
further complicated matters when they attempted to make payment of their fine contingent on the release of M. Canisia Brüggemann.

After her conviction in October 1935, the fifty-seven-year-old M. Canisia was transferred to the women’s prison in Berlin. She shared a cell with another, unidentified sister also convicted of foreign exchange violations.582 M. Canisia suffered from a heart ailment that worsened during her confinement, but under the circumstances she was treated well. She had access to a prison social worker, physicians, and regular visitors that included her lawyers, sisters, and family members. She corresponded frequently with her fellow-sisters, who sent her necessities such as clothing and additional food as well as diversions such as books and crafts. On one occasion, prison officials admonished her to curb her voluminous correspondence.583 M. Canisia tried to bear her imprisonment with stoicism. She drew courage from the unwavering support of her fellow-sisters and wrote in February 1936 that “the wonderful community within the order gives me the strength to persevere.”584 M. Canisia also trusted in the providence of God “because only through the unconditional surrender” to God could she “endure her fate.”585 The sister was, however, very concerned about the congregation’s high outstanding fine.

582 M. Canisia had at least two cell mates who were Catholic sisters. When her first cell mate was unexpectedly pardoned in July 1936, prison authorities assigned a different sister to her cell. Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 5 July 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

583 M. Canisia also regularly attended mass and every day she was allowed thirty minutes exercise in the prison courtyard. Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 28 June 1935, Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 5 November 1935, and Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 26 December 1935, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

584 Brüggemann to Kloster Brede, 5 February 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

585 Brüggemann to Koster Brede, 25 April 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
In 1936, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Westphalia owed a total of 80,000 Reichsmark in fines and nearly 10,000 Reichsmark in court fees to the state. M. Canisia wrote from prison that

I am most anxious about the high monetary fine...How grateful I was back then to leave you [provincial superior] the reduced obligation, so that you did not have to suffer as much from financial woes as I did, but now your burden is even greater.\textsuperscript{586}

The Poor School Sisters in Westphalia did not have the funds to pay the penalty, and what followed were years of frustrating negotiations with the state to achieve a settlement in the matter.

Both the prosecutor and the defense filed an appeal following the conviction of M. Canisia Brüggemann. Proceedings for the appeal were scheduled for April 1936, but in preliminary hearings the courts refused the defense lawyers’ permission to introduce new witnesses and evidence. The prosecutor and the judge instead urged the Poor School Sisters’ legal counsel to withdraw the appeal and submit a petition for clemency to the Ministry of Justice.\textsuperscript{587} The prosecutor Schulte-Limbeck offered the defense the full recognition of M. Canisia’s time served in protective custody prior to her trial and let it be known that the court was amenable to installment payments of the fine, although there would be no reduction in the actual amount owed.\textsuperscript{588}

\textsuperscript{586} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{587} M. Hilberta B. to Josef Brüggemann, 17 April 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid.
The Poor School Sisters agreed and the defense filed a request for clemency for M. Canisia Brüggemann on 19 June 1936. The lawyers asked for the immediate release of the incarcerated sister who had yet to serve half of her two-year sentence. They assured Nazi officials of the Poor School Sisters’ goodwill and pointed to the congregation’s traditional close relationship with the state. Officials in the Ministry of Justice as well as the prosecution assured the defense of their “warmest support” of the request. However, there was still the matter of the fine the sisters could not pay, and Schulte-Limbeck did perhaps not see the irony in his suggestion that the sisters apply for a loan from the Universum-Bank in Berlin. In May 1936, the bank regretted to inform the sisters that it could not grant them a loan in the amount of 55,000 Reichsmark because the financial situation of the congregation was simply too precarious.

M. Almeda Schricker decided that the Bavarian province should contribute 35,000 Reichsmark toward the payment of the fine, and the Westphalian sisters agreed to

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589 Strafaussetzungsgesuch in der Strafsache gegen die Oberin Antonia Brüggemann (Schwester Maria Canisia) wegen Devisenvergehens, 19 June 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

590 For good measure, the lawyers also added that during the Bolshevik takeover of Munich, the sisters had remained a bulwark of the Freikorps idea and were keen to fulfill their legal obligations to the state. Ibid.

591 Bäcker to Schricker, 11 August 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

592 Weis to Becker, 6 June 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

593 The Universum-Bank cited in particular the inability of the congregation to afford the repayment of the loan unless it was granted in the form of a mortgage, which, considering previous liens on the congregation’s real estate, was not an option. Universum-Bank AG to Generalat des Ordens der Armen Schulschwestern, 29 May 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse. In 1936, the Universum-Bank representative Conrad Kaltenbach also faced trial for foreign exchange violations, and the lawyer of Kaltenbach applied to the Poor School Sisters for payment of his fees of 8,000 Reichsmark because Mrs. Kaltenbach lacked the resources and he was unable to work for free. The sisters declined. Von Stein to Bäcker, 20 June 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse. In October 1936, Kaltenbach was sentenced to three years in prison and to a fine of 80,000 Reichsmark. Abschrift. Strafsache gegen den Rechtsanwalt Conrad Kaltenbach, 24 November 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
pay the remaining fine and cost in four installments of 15,000 Reichsmark each.\textsuperscript{594} The sisters’ legal counsel attempted to make payment of the initial 35,000 Reichsmark from Munich contingent on M. Canisia’s immediate release.\textsuperscript{595} But in August 1936, the Ministry of Justice suddenly, and without explanation, withdrew its support for M. Canisia’s early release.\textsuperscript{596} The matter dragged on without a resolution for two months until the ministry once again reversed its position and approved the Poor School Sisters’ petition.\textsuperscript{597} M. Canisia Brüggemann was released on 23 December 1936 after twenty months in prison.

The release of M. Canisia, though a happy and long anticipated event, did not settle the issue of the outstanding fine, and in 1936 an enterprising Poor School Sister sent a petition to Hitler’s chancellery asking for forgiveness of the entire penalty.\textsuperscript{598} The chancellery forwarded the petition to the prosecutor’s office who described the request as “unfortunate” because it interfered with ongoing negotiations and would most likely impact the latter negatively.\textsuperscript{599} By May 1937, the Poor School Sisters had only paid 5,000

\textsuperscript{594} The matter was complicated by the fact that the 35,000 RM was held in trust by the attorney Kaltenbach, whose funds were confiscated by the regime upon his arrest in 1936 and it took considerable maneuvering by the Poor School Sisters’ attorneys to return the money to the custody of the congregation. Becker to Weiss, 10 June 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{595} Bäcker to Schricker, 20 June 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{596} Bäcker to Schricker, 11 August 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{597} Wiedemann to Brüggemann, 7 October 1936, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{598} The petition was not preserved in the archives but is mentioned in a communication in one of the sister’s attorneys. Engelbert to M. Alix, 12 February 1937, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

\textsuperscript{599} Ibid.
Reichsmark of the total outstanding sum of 89,612.95 Reichsmark, and the state was getting impatient. 600

The sisters’ financial advisor Carl Bossing urged congregational leaders to apply to their American province for 50,000 US Dollars. 601 He “believed that with 400 communities [in the United States] it has to be possible to raise the sum…and if not that much than perhaps 30,000 Dollars.” 602 The state was most keen for the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame to pay their fine in foreign currency but this never happened. However, even without the help of the American province, the Poor School Sisters in Germany managed to pay 44,000 Reichsmark by June 1937. 603

From the time of M. Canisia’s arrest in October 1935 to June 1937, the financial situation of the congregation had worsened considerably, as the state began to move against both public and private Catholic schools. The sisters’ attorney Engelbert wrote to the prosecutor’s office in July 1937 that the “extremely stressed financial situation of the cloister Brede allowed [only] for a maximum annual payment of 10,000 Reichsmark.” 604 The prosecutor’s office declined the sisters’ request to pay the remaining fine in yearly installments of 10,000 Reichsmark and threatened immediate enforcement and

600 Engelbert to Schulte-Limbeck, 10 May 1937, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
601 Bossing to M. Alix, 20 February 1937, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
602 Ibid.
603 Engelbert to Bossing, 25 June 1937, AKB, Devisenprozesse.
foreclosure unless the congregation paid an additional 5,000 Reichsmark by 15 August 1937.605

In October 1937, the state once more tried to compel the Poor School Sisters to pay their fine in the form of foreign currency, preferably US Dollars or British Pounds, but the records do not reveal what came of the request.606 What is certain is that the fine was still outstanding in May 1939 when the congregation once more petitioned for forgiveness of the unspecified outstanding sums. The Ministry of Justice once again declined the request and again threatened with foreclosure.607 Extant records do not reveal if or how the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame ever paid the remaining penalty to the state. What is certain is that the issue of the outstanding fine proved just one more way for the state to assure the congregations’ continued cooperation.

The foreign exchange trials and propaganda campaign marked a significant escalation of the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state, and for the first time the regime targeted women religious directly. The arrest and conviction of M. Canisia convinced the Poor School Sisters that their future in Nazi Germany was bleak. Scholars have concluded that the legal proceedings in 1935 and 1936 against Catholic congregations and institutions were legitimate, and that the latter did indeed violate foreign exchange regulations. The episcopate’s public censor of the accused in 1935 may in fact have influenced historians’ assertions that the trials were valid and justifiable. But,


606 The state even offered the congregation the prospect of a 20,000 RM reduction of the fine should they pay in foreign currency. Engelbert to Bossing, 6 October 1937, AKB, Devisenprozesse.

as the foreign exchange trials demonstrate, it is difficult to speak of reasonable legal proceedings, let alone justice, in Nazi Germany.

The Nazis routinely criminalized actions of perceived enemies. In the case of the foreign exchange trials, the Nazis used the legal system to further specific political and ideological objectives. The regime attempted to deflect attention from the ongoing economic crisis caused by chronic shortages of foreign exchange and aggressive rearmament by shifting the blame for continued economic hardships onto the accused.

The regime attempted to use the trials as leverage to force the Catholic Church back to the negotiating table over article 31 of the concordat. Although the Nazis did not achieve this objective, they were able to press bishops and congregations into making further concessions to the state. The trials also caused considerable upheaval among the laity that appeared to threaten the position of the Catholic Church in Germany.

With the trials and propaganda campaign, the Nazis attempted to convince Germans of the necessity of excluding Catholic sisters (and brothers) from the people’s community. The trials reveal to what extent both the church and the state depended on the support of the public. In 1935, the Nazis appeared confident they were winning the contest over public opinion when they escalated the conflict with the Catholic Church. Victor Klemperer remarked in July 1935 that “the struggle against Catholics, ‘enemies of the state,’ both reactionary and Communist, is increasing.” He added that “it is as if the Nazis were being driven toward and prepared to go to any extreme, as if a catastrophe were imminent.”608 The year 1935 marked of course a radicalization of the Nazis’

persecution of Jews with the passing of the Nuremberg Laws. The Nazis implemented the complete disenfranchisement of Jewish Germans without public protests from non-Jewish Germans.

The Nazis could never move with the same impunity against the Catholic Church. The foreign exchange trials were followed in 1936 by the so-called immorality trials against Catholic clergy and male religious. But the regime abandoned both trials and propaganda campaigns for fear of popular backlash. Hitler himself intervened. Hanns Kerrl reported that he approached Hitler in 1937 for permission to continue trials against religious congregations but the latter refused his consent, because “the time had not yet come” to take measures against cloisters. The Nazis failed in the key objective to compel Germans to exclude women (and male) religious from their social sphere. Subsequent events show that the regime could not overcome positive perceptions of Catholic sisters and trumped-up charges of the women’s greed and treason simply sounded too absurd to be believed.

Although Hitler followed the foreign exchange trials closely and personally intervened on more than one occasion, Ian Kershaw has suggested that by 1937, the church struggle was more of an irritant to Hitler than a “priority concern.” However, his lack of focus did not mean the conflict between the church and state abated. Rather, as

609 See Hockerts. John Conway wrote about the morality trials that “throughout 1936 and 1937 the readers of such papers as the Völkischer Beobachter and Das Schwarze Korps were regaled with sensational allegations of sexual immorality among the priesthood and among members of the religious orders. Every possible accusation was made in the full glare of Goebbel’s publicity. And ‘immorality trials’, catering for the more salacious tastes of the masses, were staged in the courts and, by ingenious spacing, were made to appear as an unbroken series of clerical offences.” Persecution, 159.

610 Kerrl to Bormann, 2 August 1941, BArch B, R 5101/23318, Bl. 191.

611 Kershaw, Nemesis, 39.
the foreign exchange trials were ongoing, state and local officials took their cue from the top and escalated the church struggle further. Local Nazi activists now organized effective grassroots campaigns against Catholic schools
CHAPTER 4:
THE END OF AN ERA: THE REMOVAL OF CATHOLIC SISTERS FROM
GERMAN SCHOOLS

4.1 Argument and Historiography

The foreign exchange trials ushered in a new phase in the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi state. The regime now moved from its policy of the “depoliticization of church life” to the “deconffessionalization of public life.” In October 1936, M. Almeda Schricker noted that “after three years a completely new era is beginning for us” with the loss of schools and teaching positions. Hitler’s fortunes were also changing. Following the triumphant reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Hitler’s popularity soared and he proclaimed that

great are the successes which Providence has let me attain for our fatherland in these three years…In all areas of our national, political and economic life, our position has been improved.


613 Schricker, Rundbrief, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

614 Qtd. in Kershaw, Nemesis, xxxv.
With the reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Hitler altered international power relations in his favor and launched a new phase of radicalization and aggression that accelerated Germany’s course toward war. But to the world, the Nazi regime presented a new face of moderation and respectability. During the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany, the Nazis scaled back violent antisemitic rhetoric and measures, and during the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris the Germans impressed visitors with their popular exhibit.

The economy was also improving. Although shortages of foreign exchange persisted, unemployment had fallen sharply. Ian Kershaw asserted that Hitler’s power became absolute and that “only the intensified ‘Church Struggle’…cast a substantial shadow…over what amounted otherwise to an extensive prevailing consensus.” Public and private Catholic schools were now at the center of this escalating conflict between the church and the state.

This chapter examines the regime’s escalating policy against public and private confessional schools from 1935 onward and the Poor School Sisters’ response to the

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615 Richard Evans wrote that with the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the position of France weakened and countries “previously allied to France, moved to improve relations with the Third Reich.” Before the end of July 1936, Germany was involved in the Spanish civil war. In 1936, Hitler was also allied with Mussolini’s fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. Richard Evans, The Third Reich in Power (New York: Penguin, 2006), 639 ff. In 1936, Hitler named Hermann Göring as manager of a four-year-plan to ready Germany for war. Tooze, 203.

616 Evans, The Third Reich in Power, 574. Tooze wrote that in 1936, “compared to warlike aggression of Fascist Italy in Africa and Imperial Japan in China, not to mention the well-publicized excesses of Stalin’s show trials, Hitler’s government appeared positively reasonable.” Tooze, 205.

617 Kershaw, Nemesis, xxxvi. Tooze wrote that in 1936 the economy was booming, whereas Evans wrote that the domestic situation was still quite bad in the spring of 1936, “with food shortages, worsening conflict with the Catholic Church and general crumbling and discontent, that a diplomatic coup was badly needed to cheer people up.” Evans, The Third Reich in Power, 633. A report prepared by the Poor School Sisters in Geiselhöring in Bavaria in 1937 mentioned the ongoing food shortages when they wrote that “Geiselhöring has almost no farmers and the other people suffer …from the food shortages. We are really poor school sisters now.” Bericht über den Abbaus Geiselhöring, undated, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
gradual loss of their teaching positions and schools. The abolition of public and private
confessional schools and the dismissal of women religious teachers were key components
of the deconfessionalization of public life in Nazi Germany. Ludwig Volk wrote that the
Vatican viewed Catholic schools as the “heart of the concordat,” and historians have long
acknowledged the significance of these events. Against the backdrop of Hitler’s and
the regime’s rising popularity, the conflict over Catholic schools in Nazi Germany took
place on the state, regional, and local levels and led to what appeared to be disparate and
even chaotic policies. With Hitler reluctant to act, it was the state of Bavaria that set the
precedent for all of Germany in the 1930s, with its aggressive grassroots campaigns

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618 Ludwig Volk, “Nationalsozialistischer Kirchenkampf und deutscher Episkopat,” in Die
Katholiken und das Dritte Reich, ed. Klaus Gotto and Konrad Repgen (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1990), 71. The conflict between the church and the state has been the subject of a fair amount of scholarly
attention. Regional studies predominate. See, for instance: Joachim Maier, Schulkampf in Baden, 1933-
1945 and Damberg, Schulen in Westfalen. For Bavaria, see the excellent work by F. Sonnenberger, “Der
neue ‘Kulturkampf.’ Die Gemeinschaftsschule und ihre historischen Voraussetzungen,” in Bayern in der
NS-Zeit, ed. Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, and Falk Wiesemann, vol. 3, Herrschaft und Gesellschaft in
Die Einführung der Gemeinschaftsschule in Bayern, 1935-1938,” in Nationalsozialismus und
Modernisierung, ed. Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), W. Fürnrohr offers an excellent comprehensive history of National Socialist school policy in
Bavaria. See also the contributions in Max Liedtke, ed., Handbuch der Geschichte des bayerischen
Herrschaft. Fritz Schäffer wrote an insightful study of the Bavarian Volksschule in Hitler’s Germany that
includes an in-depth discussion of confessional public schools. Thomas Fandel looked at the clergy’s
involvement in the conflict over confessional schools in the 1930s in the Upper Palatinate. Bernhard Höpf
examined the impact of Nazi educational policy on Bavarian lay teachers and the latter’s resistance.
Joachim Maier, Heinz Hürten, and Gerhard Besier provide an overview of the impact of National Socialist
education policy on the Catholic Church and Catholic schools throughout Germany. Joachim Maier, “Das
katholische Schulwesen im Nationalsozialismus,” in Zur Geschichte des katholischen Schulwesens, ed.
Christoph Kronabel (Cologne: Bachem, 1992), 549-567, Hürten, Katholiken, 285 ff, and Besier, 115 ff and
657 ff. A growing historiography on schools and education in Nazi Germany also often includes excellent
discussions of public and confessional schools. See, for example, Rolf Eilers, Die nationalsozialistische
Schulpolitik and Elke Nyssen, Schule im Nationalsozialismus (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1979),
Ottweiler Ottwilm, Die Volksschule im Nationalsozialismus (Weinheim: Beltz, 1979), Kurt-Ingo Flessau,
Erziehung im Nationalsozialismus (Cologne: Böhlau, 1987). For an overview of schooling and education in
Nazi Germany, see: Lisa Pine, Education in Nazi Germany (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010).

619 Volk, Episkopat, 70.
against confessional schools.\textsuperscript{620} Fandel, Besier, and Höpfl chronicle the Nazis’ fight against confessional schools from the perspective of the clergy, episcopate, and the laity. All present familiar images of a proactive clergy and laity speaking on behalf of invisible and victimized women religious who disappear from the historiographical record along with their schools. Questions of how Catholic sisters themselves responded to school conversions and closures or what happened to the sisters following the loss of their schools are not asked.\textsuperscript{621}

Examining National Socialist school policies from the perspectives of women religious teachers adds significantly to our understanding of this pivotal conflict between the state and the Catholic Church. The regime moved against Catholic schools in phases. Starting in 1935 individual states started an aggressive campaign against public confessional schools that was followed by the dismissal of women religious teachers from Bavarian Volksschulen. The Poor School Sisters showed considerable agency as they attempted to save their positions and remain in their established communities in Bavaria. Although the women did not rely on the hierarchy or the clergy, the support of the laity was crucial. The experiences of the sisters exposed both the power and limits of the Nazis, as the latter succeeded in removing the women from most schools but almost never from their communities. Although the closure of their schools pushed the Poor School Sisters further to the fringes of the people’s community, their popularity and

\textsuperscript{620} Fünrohr, 189.

\textsuperscript{621} One notable exception is Thomas Mengel’s work on women religious orders and congregations in Silesia in Nazi Germany. Due to the scope of his work, Mengel could not examine the reaction of the Ursuline and the Poor School Sisters to the closure of their schools in depth but his contribution is nonetheless significant as it shows the differentiated and independent response of sisters to Nazi measures. Mengel, 42 ff.
status also stayed the Nazis’ hands and the women still enjoyed considerable freedom of movement in Hitler’s Germany.

The second part of the chapter examines the impact of the Nazis’ closure of private Catholic schools on the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. These closures that commenced in 1937 and that affected private Catholic schools across Germany caused the most serious crisis in the Poor School Sisters’ one-hundred-year history. I analyze how the closure of the Poor School Sisters’ schools proceeded and how the women reacted. The situation became more critical than even the Kulturkampf because it affected all communities of the Poor School Sisters in Germany.

The regime’s measures against schools were uneven and often slow due to the centrality of women religious’ schools in the education of girls in Germany. Scholars nonetheless emphasize the Nazis’ success in excluding the Catholic Church from the education system. The impact of Nazi policies on private Catholic schools was indeed devastating. Yet the history of the Poor School Sisters also reveals that the regime failed in its objective to remove women religious from all schools and from the public sphere. Catholic sisters retained their visible presence in German educational institutions as well as in German society.622

4.2 From Confessional to Community Schools

Most children in Germany either attended a confessional school or what was known as a community school (Gemeinschaftsschule). The Catholic Church retained a

622 Heinz Hürten wrote, for instance, that the exclusion of the Catholic Church from schools and education was practically completed in 1939 with the prohibition of Catholic schools to join the “Reich community of German Private Schools.” Hürten, Katholiken, 290.
strong influence over primary and secondary education, in particular in Bavaria and Prussia, where confessional public schools were the norm. For instance, when Hitler came to power in 1933, of the 7,719 Volksschulen in Bavaria only 226 were mixed confessional community schools.\footnote{5,459 were Catholic Volksschulen, 2,014 were Protestant, and 20 were Jewish. Fürnrohr, 190, 194.} In Baden, Württemberg, and Hesse, community schools were more common, but the churches were still influential in matters of religious instructions.\footnote{In Baden, there were only community schools but in Hesse, Anhalt, Thuringa, and Bremen there were some confessional schools, but community schools constituted the majority. Aside from Prussia and Bavaria, confessional schools were also the norm in Mecklenburg and Braunschweig. Eilers,52.} Only a negligible minority of students attended what were known as Sammelschulen (literally, “collective schools”), secular public Volksschulen without religious influences or instruction.\footnote{Parents who did not wish their children to receive any religious instructions could send them to Sammelschulen. The number of sammelschulen was negligible, however, and in 1931 only 295 of the over 53,000 Volksschulen in Germany were Sammelschulen, and 250 of those were located in Prussia. Ibid., 52.} The Nazis resented the stronghold the churches had over schooling and sought to convert confessional schools into community schools.

Conflicts over the influence of organized religion in German public schools were not new to the Nazi era. It was in part due to past political contests that the role of the churches and that of women religious in German Volksschulen was disparate and confusing.\footnote{See, for instance, F. Sonnenberger, “Kulturkampf,” who worked out the continuities between the school struggle in Imperial, Weimar, and Nazi Germany.} The Poor School Sisters taught in private Catholic schools in Bavaria, Westphalia, Hesse, Württemberg, and Silesia, but only in Bavaria did women religious still teach in significant numbers in public confessional Volksschulen.
(Bekenntnisschulen). In 1936, 1,843 Catholic sisters from different congregations taught in 431 Bavarian public schools, and of those, 798 were Poor School Sisters teaching in 176 Volksschulen.

Article 23 of the concordat between Germany and the church strengthened the confessional nature of public schools. In the beginning, the concordat seemed to restrain top Nazis like Bernhard Rust. Days after becoming Reich Minister for Science, Education, and National Culture in June 1934, he declared that he had opposed the concordat that preserved cloister schools (Klosterschulen) from the onset but “now that it has been concluded it has to be adhered to.” Rust posited that the “burning question is the struggle about the youth between school, Hitler Youth, family, and church.” As top Nazis still paid lip service to the concordat, local Nazi activists did not feel the same restraint and pushed ahead to abolish their towns’ confessional schools.

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627 Two Poor School Sisters still taught in one public Volksschule in Allendorf, Hesse, which they lost in 1936 when the state of Hesse forced the sisters to retire.


629 Article 23 of the concordat stipulated the following: “Die Beibehaltung und Neueinrichtung katholischer Bekenntnisschulen bleibt gewährleistet. In allen Gemeinden, in denen Eltern oder sonstige Erziehungsberechtigte es beantragen, werden katholische Volksschulen errichtet werden, wenn die Zahl der Schüler unter gebührender Berücksichtigung der örtlichen schulorganisatorischen Verhältnisse einen nach Maßgabe der staatlichen Vorschriften geordneten Schulbetrieb durchführbar erscheinen läßt.” Joachim Maier wrote that the preservation of confessional schools was one of the most important issues for the church in negotiations with Germany about the concordat, 14 ff.

630 “Ausführungen des Herrn Reichsministers R U S T am 7. Juni 1934 nachmittags (Bayer. Hof),“ AEM, 8151. Rust once more confirmed that the concordat protected confessional schools in June 1935 although he expressed “his deep pain that the youth was being raised in two different schools.” Qtd. in Hürten, Katholiken, 286.

631 Ibid.
Between 1933 and 1936, the Bavarian Ministry of Culture and Education received numerous requests from Bavarian city councils seeking authorization to abolish confessional schools in favor of community schools. Such requests were often tied to the removal of women religious teachers from public Volksschulen. Catholic sisters teaching in public schools in Bavaria were a constant reminder of the continued presence of the Catholic Church in public life. Catholic sisters were not civil servants who could be dismissed individually. Instead, municipalities entrusted religious congregations, not individual sisters, with the operation and staffing of public Volksschulen. According to article 24 of the Bavarian Schulbedarfgesetz from 1920, only a majority of parents had the right to revoke a congregation’s authorization to run the local Volksschule. By the mid-1930s, officials in numerous Bavarian towns attempted to bypass this law and revoke women religious congregations’ authorization to operate their local Volksschule.

In April 1935 the city council of Bad Tölz applied to the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture for permission to dismiss the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame from the local public Catholic Volksschule for girls and establish a community school in its stead. The Bad Tölz city council stated that it acted on numerous complaints of citizens against the Poor School Sisters that included the sisters’ “unnecessary and pointless grumblings and chicaneries” against the League of German Girls and Protestant

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632 See, for instance, Auszug aus der Niederschrift vom 2. Juli 1935 über die Sitzung der Gemeinderäte (Ratherrn) der Stadt Bad Tölz, StaBT, A IIb 188.

633 Schäffer, 189.

634 Representatives from the ministry also acknowledged that they received numerous such requests. Ibid.
students.” The ministry was sympathetic to the city council’s litany of complaints against the sisters but it nonetheless insisted that the law forbade the revocation of the congregations’ authorization without a majority vote of parents and therefore declined the request.  

The Bavarian ministry did acknowledge to the city council of Bad Tölz that the state was indeed “determined in principle to dissolve congregational schools (Klosterschulen).” Two months earlier, on 13 February 1935, the ministry had sent a clear message of this intention when it decreed that religious congregations could no longer train Catholic sisters as public school teachers in their own seminaries. Nazi officials wrote in December 1934 that

until now the number of teacher seminaries owned and staffed by cloisters has been greater than public seminaries, [but] the time has now come to break the power of the cloisters in the area of public education….Every concession to cloisters in the establishment of colleges (Hochschulen), any permission granted to cloister students to live in the boarding schools of cloisters instead of universal communal homes (Kamaradschaftsheimen) means weakening…the state’s control over schools (Schulherrschaft). Cloisters…remain hotspots of passive resistance and their influence on female students and their parents is extraordinary.

635 Bürgermeister von Bad Tölz to Bayer. Staatsministerium für Kirchen- und Schulangelegenheiten, 25 May 1935, StaBT, A IIb 188.

636 Ibid.

637 Ibid.


639 NSLB Gau Oberfranken to NSLB Gauamtleiter Oberfranken, 31 December 1934, NS 12: Selected Records from Hauptamt für Erzieher/Reichswaltung des Nationalsozialistischen Lehrerbundes (NSLB) 1933-1945, RG-68.053 M, reel 5.
The proposed closure of religious congregations’ teacher seminaries was part of a general reform of public school teachers’ training in Bavaria aimed “at elevating the status of the … public school teacher (Volksschullehrer)...after centuries of his subjugation.” The decree abolished teacher seminaries and established six-year Aufbauschulen, literally “building block schools,” that prepared students for newly established colleges for teacher training (Hochschulen für Lehrerbildung). These new colleges were “exclusively inter-confessional in nature without separation by sex.” A new public Hochschule for teachers was established in 1935 in Munich and others opened in 1936 in Bayreuth, Erlangen, and Würzburg.

The Poor School Sisters lost their teacher seminary in Munich. M. Almeda Schricker commented at a later point that the congregation’s inability to educate its own teachers “was like putting an ax to the roots of the congregational tree (Ordensbaum).” But following negotiations between the church and the state, the latter permitted the establishment of four private confessional Aufbauschulen, one of which belonged to the Poor School Sisters in Munich. The state limited the number of students in the Poor School Sisters’ new Aufbauschule to forty-two, a number that was far from sufficient to

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640 Ibid. The social status of Bavarian public Volksschulen teachers was indeed low which was in part due to the fact that these teachers were not trained in universities but in seminaries. Public school teachers’ salaries were small and many had to earn extra income as the local church organist or choir leader. This fact led many teachers to resent the clergy. Höpfl, 179.

641 NSLB Gau Oberfranken to NSLB Gauamtsleiter Oberfranken, 31 December 1934, NS 12: Selected Records from Hauptamt für Erzieher/Reichswaltung des Nationalsozialistischen Lehrerbundes (NSLB) 1933-1945, RG-68.053 M, reel 5.

642 Hatwiger, 22.

643 Schricker, Rundbrief, 26 April 1937, OA, Drittes Reich.

644 Hatwiger, 22.
secure the future staffing of their 176 Volksschulen. Students of private Aufbauschulen also had to attend public teacher seminaries, something M. Almeda Schricker dreaded.

The Poor School Sisters’ leaders viewed the abolition of their teacher seminary as a decisive threat to their congregation that added to their growing uncertainties about the future. Young aspirants for sisterhood like Resi B., however, were excited about the changes. Resi and her classmates were the first students to attend the Poor School Sisters’ new private confessional Aufbauschule in Munich in 1935. She recalled that “not just I but all of us were happy” about the expanded educational and professional opportunities that were part of the reforms: “We learned Latin with burning enthusiasm” in anticipation of matriculating at university.

The new opportunities proved an illusion. Neither Resi nor any of her fellow-classmates ever taught in one of the congregation’s public or private schools in Hitler’s Germany. Even as the young women entered the first grade of the congregation’s Aufbauschule in 1935, party activists in Munich had just concluded their first aggressive campaign to curb the influence of the Catholic Church in public education.

In 1935, local Nazis in Bavaria set the tone for the regime’s measures against confessional Volksschulen. The initial measures by various officials against confessional schools appeared disparate and regionalized, and scholar Walter Fürnrohr wrote that

645 The closure of congregational teacher training seminaries was followed by the Bavarian ministerial decree from 30 June 1934 that mandated that women religious teachers who had reached the age of 65 had to retire from the classroom although Catholic sisters did not receive a public pension. As of 1 September 1934, twenty-four Poor School Sisters over the age of 65 had to retire. “Unser Orden unter der Gewaltherrschaft des Nationalsozialismus (1933-1945).” Bayerische Ordensprovinz, 20 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

Bavaria distinguished itself with its “anticipatory obedience” in matters of education. At the same time, Fürnrohr cautioned that although Nazi educational policy lacked coordination, it was not without clear direction. Its overarching goals were “the ideological saturation of the educational system and the achievement of organizational uniformity.”

Evidence confirms that Rust and Schemm kept abreast and approved of developments on the local level. When Rust met with Schemm in June 1934 in Munich, for instance, to discuss school reforms, the two men agreed to continue “to observe the question of community schools.”

In 1935 local Nazi officials took advantage of the exceptional status of Munich that required an annual referendum to determine the ratio of confessional to community schools. In Bavaria, a law dating from 1883 stipulated that “Volksschulen are as a rule confessional schools.” But in 1919, the Social Democratic Minister President and Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture, Johannes Hoffmann, challenged the status quo. He stipulated that in communities of over 15,000 inhabitants, parents of school children should decide in an annual referendum (Schuleinschreibung) what type of school

647 Volk wrote, for instance, that the school struggle was “ungleichzeitig, regional gestaffelt, and [wurde] scheinbar zusammenhanglos vorangetrieben.” Volk, Episkopat, 70. For a discussion of “anticipatory obedience” see Fürnrohr, 189.

648 Ibid., 188.

649 Protokoll über den Besuch des Herrn Reichsministers Rust in München am 7. und 8. Juni 1934, BayHStA, MK 49971. The interplay between local activism and government and the top tiers of the regime has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention. For instance, in his study of the local government of Augsburg in Nazi Germany, Bernhard Gotto confirms both the importance of local officials in realizing the Nazi regime’s goals and the coordination between the various levels of government. Bernhard Gotto, Nationalsozialistische Kommunalpolitik. Administratve Normalität und Systemstabilisierung durch die Augsburger Stadtverwaltung, 1933-1945 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2006).

650 Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, Vollzug der Verordnung vom 26 August 1883 über die Errichtung von Volksschulen, 25 July 1945, BHStA, MK 61201.
their children should attend, a confessional or community school. Hoffmann was in line with the framers of the Weimar Constitution, who also intended to make community schools the norm, although they too failed. After just one year, in 1920, “Hoffmann’s community school decree” was rescinded except for in Munich, Nuremberg, and Weißenburg, where the law had already been implemented. From 1920 onward, these three cities continued to adhere to the 1919 law and conducted annual referenda that determined the ratio of confessional and community schools in their communities. The rest of Bavaria returned to the 1883 law that once again made confessional schools the norm.

In late 1934, local officials in Munich established the organization “German School Community” (”Deutsche Schulgemeinde”) to promote non-confessional community schools in the city. Trying to abolish confessional Volksschulen via a legal vote allowed the Nazis to circumvent the concordat. The process was also familiar to parents. Even before 1933, annual school referenda in Nuremberg, Munich, and Weißenburg often gave rise to public disputes between advocates of confessional and community schools. For instance, in response to unpleasant scenes leading up to the annual school referendum in Nuremberg in 1925, the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture wrote to the diocese of Bamberg that

the school wars (Schulkämpfe) would lose much of their sharpness if representatives of confessional schools too would observe the called for moderation. Members of the Catholic clergy seem to

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651 Schäffer, 138.
652 Ibid.
think it is their prerogative to campaign for confessional schools during religious instructions in community schools.  

Prior to 1933, school referenda were often a contest between the Catholic clergy and social democrats. Most Germans actually associated community schools with social democracy and communism. This association and the fact that the Nazis attempted to utilize democratic means to achieve their objective presented them with somewhat of a dilemma. The irony of the situation was not lost on city school commissioner (Stadtschulrat) Josef Bauer. He stated in February 1935 that existing legislation was meant to make the establishment of

Marxist community schools easier, but today we National Socialists use the same decree to ease [the introduction] of the German community school. When even Adolf Hitler does not eschew democratic means to achieve…victory, then we too must fight using the methods of our opponents.  

The Nazis’ campaign in Munich for community schools in 1935 differed of course in form and methods from even the most contentious previous referenda. 

The Deutsche Schulgemeinde’s motto was “One People, One Reich, One School.” 

The Nazis put forth the familiar argument that “a Catholic confessional school is not a school of the German people’s community,” but instead “splintered” this “glorious” union. The regime disparaged confessional Volksschulen for “separating people by

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653 Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus to Erzbischöfliches Ordinariat Bamberg, 2 May 1935, BayHStA, MK 61946.


their confession not by their race,” but, at the same time, it assured parents that Christianity would remain an integral part of community schools:

We need a Christian school of the German people’s community. We are Christians. We believe in the same God. We are ecstatic that life is a martyr’s journey (Opfergang).\textsuperscript{656}

Officials spread their message via numerous public meetings, radio programs, and printed materials. Storm troopers, the Hitler Youth, and Nazi block wardens also made the rounds and put pressure on individual Catholic families.\textsuperscript{657} The archdiocese of Munich and Freising complained in February 1935 that “SA men and officials … went from family to family, and with threats of professional disadvantages and promises of special support, such as … a suit for a newly enrolled boy,…they try to compel parents” to sign their children up for community schools.\textsuperscript{658}

The church attempted to counter the Nazis’ aggressive campaign with homilies, letters, flyers, and meetings. In response, the regime forbade meetings of Catholic parents associations, confiscated flyers, and muzzled the Catholic press. Church leaders observed the suppression of the church’s campaign for confessional schools with alarm, and in February 1935, Pacelli protested the open fight against Catholic schools and demanded an immediate halt to it.\textsuperscript{659}

\textsuperscript{656} Rede des Herrn Kreisschulrates [Josef] Streicher im Buergerbraeukeller am 7. Februar 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8151.

\textsuperscript{657} “Zweierlei Mass bei Vorbereitungen der Schuleinschreibung,” 12 February 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8050/1.

\textsuperscript{658} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{659} Pacelli to Bergen, 11 February 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8151.
The Poor School Sisters teaching in the public Volksschule Silberhornstraße in Munich declared publicly that they would not participate in the campaign for community schools.\textsuperscript{660} The women feared the loss of their jobs within months. The school in the Silberhornstraße remained Catholic in 1935, but overall the referendum was a success for the regime. Whereas in 1934, 87.47 percent of parents of children entering first grade had enrolled them in Catholic confessional schools, this number sank to 56.8 percent in 1935.\textsuperscript{661} Officials in Munich repeated the referendum with increasing success in 1936, and only 17 percent of children attended confessional schools that year.\textsuperscript{662}

The successful local referendum for community schools in Munich in 1935 along with the national foreign exchange trials against the church set the stage for the regime’s further actions against Catholic congregational schools. Scholar F. Sonnenberger suggested in 1981 that Bauer’s campaign in Munich in 1934/35 was still against the wishes of the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Socialist Teachers’ Association (NSLB), and even the Nazi party. Following Schemm’s death in March 1935, however, the ministry became committed to the abolition of confessional

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\textsuperscript{660} “Bericht eines Teilnehmers über die 2 Lehrersitzungen an der kathl. Konfessionsschule in der Silberhornstrasse in München,” ca. 1935, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8151.

\textsuperscript{661} Overall, in 1934, 84\% of all public school students attended a confessional school in Munich; the number sank to 65\% the following year. Memorandum. “Kampf um die Bekenntnisschule,” ca. 1935, AEM, Bestand: 8150/2. City officials in Munich repeated the referendum in 1936 and again in 1937 with increasing success. Other cities such as Nuremberg followed suit and conducted their own campaigns and votes for community schools. But Reinhard Heydrich loathed the unrest of these disruptive local campaigns and forbade the holding of referendums for community schools in 1937. Eilers, 91.

\textsuperscript{662} Actually 35\% of parents in Munich still enrolled their children in confessional schools in 1936 but because of the long distances to their school, only 17\% actually attended confessional schools. In Nuremberg that number sank to about 3\%. Ibid.
schools and the removal of women religious teachers. On the national level, Rust followed suit in the fall of 1935.

After the successful referendum in Munich in 1935, state officials also became less concerned with adhering to existing laws and the concordat. They looked instead for ways to avoid future disruptive public votes on the issue and attempted to achieve their goals via pseudo-legal means. Historian Fritz Schäffer wrote that already in April 1935 Bauer and Ernst Boepple of the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture looked to Hitler to approve legislation as a means to avoid future referenda. The matter took on a new urgency when Nazi officials throughout the state began to conduct their own (unlawful) referenda to force the introduction of community schools. Other German states also began to conduct campaigns for community schools. On the national level, Reinhard Heydrich, who loathed these public spectacles, was in favor of passing uniform laws for all of Germany that made community schools the norm. Hitler never signed the

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663 Sonnenberger, “Kulturkampf,” 279. See also Fürnrohr, 191. Following Schemm’s death on 5 March 1935 in a plane crash, his post remained vacant until Adolf Wagner became the new Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture in April 1936. In the meantime, Staatsrat Ernst Boepple took up the reins of the ministry.

664 Hürten, Katholiken, 287.

665 Schäffer, 150.

666 Fürnrohr, 191.

667 Hesse actually abolished confessional schools before the 1935 Munich campaign but because of the low number of Hessian confessional schools, the measure went largely unnoticed in the rest of Germany. Ibid., 87. Hürten offers an excellent succinct overview of the introduction of confessional schools in Germany in the 1930s. For instance, Württemberg conducted public referendums in 1936 and closed its last confessional schools in June 1937. In 1937, the 97% of the Saar population voted for community schools. Prussia was more reticent than other German states, and whereas Berlin abolished confessional schools without a public vote on Easter 1938, the abolition of confessional school for all of Prussia did not commence until the end of 1938. Hürten, Katholiken, 286-288.
proposed legislation into law, and the Bavarian state passed its own decrees in 1937 that ended public votes for schools.\textsuperscript{668}

Although Hitler did not sign national legislation on community schools, the regime was not idle in matters of education. In April 1936, with Hitler’s popularity at an all-time high, it tested the waters and closed the small number of private elementary schools, known as Vorschulen, that were usually attached to private secondary schools.\textsuperscript{669}

The Nazis cited as the reason for closing private Vorschulen that “there was only limited room in the National Socialist state…for private schools of any kind.”\textsuperscript{670} The Poor School Sisters of Notre of Notre Dame lost five Vorschulen in Bavaria, Württemberg, and Westphalia.\textsuperscript{671}

As events unfolded in 1935 and 1936 and the future of public and private Catholic schools looked bleaker and bleaker, the Poor School Sisters prepared to defend their institutions. Although the Nazis’ ongoing campaign for community schools did not mean the automatic dismissal of women religious teachers, it nonetheless proved a critical infringement on the sisters’ work and mission and set the stage for their eventual removal. Teaching in mixed confessional community schools was also against the sisters’

\textsuperscript{668} Even without uniform legislation, states proceeded to introduce community schools often without regard to the legality of their actions, and by 1941 most confessional schools in Germany had been abolished. Eilers,91.

\textsuperscript{669} Fewer than 15,000 children attended such schools. For instance, fewer than 200 children attended the Vorschule of the Poor School Sisters in Detmold/Westphalia. Besier, 676.

\textsuperscript{670} Qtd. in Besier, 708-709.

\textsuperscript{671} Statistics from Silesia were not available.
Rule and Constitution. Usually, they did not teach boys over six years of age, but in the 1930s the congregation acquiesced to both.\(^{672}\)

The example of the introduction of a coeducational community school in 1936 in the Bavarian town of Mittenwald illustrates what the changes meant in concrete terms for the Poor School Sisters. On 30 August 1936 the town celebrated the formal opening of the Adolf-Wagner-Schule, and on 14 September 1936 the sisters received notice that “conditions for coeducation and for the conversion of the confessional to a community school have been met.”\(^{673}\) The sisters’ public Catholic Volksschule for girls closed. The opening of a community school did not affect the automatic dismissal of the Poor School Sisters, who took over the lower classes in the new school. But the sisters loathed the new school and dreaded going to work every day.\(^{674}\)

Coeducational community schools were an effective way for the regime to curb the influence of Catholic sisters over older students and supervise them closely. In Mittenwald, the women lost the independence that came with running their own school and they were now subject to the constant surveillance of the new regime-loyal principal appointed by the state. A dispute over the lack of crucifixes in the classrooms set the tone for the strained and antagonistic the relationship between sisters and lay teachers. When on 14 October 1936, the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture announced the

\(^{672}\) Rule and Constitution, Part II, 65. Separating school children by gender as well as by confession was still the norm in the 1930s, but in the new community schools introduced by the Nazis, girls and boys of different faiths were now taught together. In a post-war report, the Poor School Sisters wrote that “gradually coeducation was forced on us in almost all of our schools.” “Unser Orden unter der Gewaltherrschaft des Nationalsozialismus (1933-1945).” Bayerische Ordensprovinz, 20 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich Rule and Constitution, Part II, 65.

\(^{673}\) Mittenwald, 15 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{674}\) Ibid.
dismissal of women religious teachers from the Mittenwald community school, the sisters wrote that “for us [the news] was in some sense a salvation.” The notice was also not unexpected.

4.3 The Dismissal of Women Religious from Public Volksschulen in Bavaria

Months earlier, on 22 May 1936, the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture Adolf Wagner had announced the planned dismissal of women religious teachers from Bavarian public schools. Just one day before, on 21 May 1936, M. Almeda Schricker had asked sisters to prepare detailed reports “of how the Volk, community and school officials, including enemies,…value the work of sisters [and] how they show their gratitude.” She planned on using the accounts “to justify and defend” the congregation’s schools. In a dictatorship that depended on the consent of its people, the women counted on their own popularity to save their schools and mission.

In 1936, the Nazis no longer felt restrained by laws or the concordat. But to give their actions the appearance of legality, Wagner and Boepple now eliminated article 24 of the Schulbedarfgesetz that protected parents’ rights to determine the type of Volksschule

675 Ibid.
676 Wagner made the announcement during a mandatory teachers’ conference held by the National Socialist Teachers’ Association in Munich. The state did not inform the Catholic Church or congregations prior to the announcement, and an observer noted that the news were greeted with applause from some of the participants. Zinkl, “Arbeitsgemeinschaft kath. Frauenklöster in Bayern,” 25 May 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
677 Schricker, Rundbrief, 21 May 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
678 Ibid.
for their children and transferred that right to the Bavarian state. Eliminating article 24 solved two problems for the state. It could now convert confessional schools into community schools and revoke Catholic congregations’ authorization to run public Volksschulen, without first conducting disruptive referenda. On 28 October 1936, the motherhouse of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Munich received a letter from the government of Upper Bavaria that informed them of the pending loss of their schools in Bad Tölz, Mittenwald, Rosenheim, and Munich (Silberhornstrasse). The missive was the first of many that informed the sisters that

the rights of parents according to Article 24 § II of the Schulbedarfgesetz will be eliminated in a forthcoming law. With this law, the right to revoke the authorizations of religious congregations to operate public Volksschulen will be conferred in its entirety to the government.

The Reichstatthalter of Bavaria, Franz Ritter von Epp, was charged with drafting and publishing the law. For unknown reasons, he delayed this task, which caused considerable confusion in the public. On 30 November 1936, however, the Poor School Sisters received official notice that the law would go into force effective 1 December 1936. The press supported the state’s measures against women religious teachers. The regional newspaper Bayerische Ostmark proclaimed on the occasion that “only the state

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679 Regierung von Oberbayern to Generalat der Armen Schulschwestern, 28 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

680 Regierung von Oberbayern to Generalat des Ordens der Armen Schulschwestern, 28 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

681 Ibid.

682 Regierung von Oberbayern to Generalat des Ordens der Armen Schulschwestern, 30 November 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. Fritz Schäffer wrote that after Boepple announced the forthcoming law, Ritter von Epp apparently had second thoughts and refused to implement his law but after a meeting on 11 November 1936, the Reichsstatthalter changed his mind and dutifully drafted and published the law, 191.
raises youth.”\textsuperscript{683} It asserted that “the National Socialist state leadership has at last taken steps to eradicate an untenable situation: the employment of Catholic sisters as teachers in public schools (Volksschulen).”\textsuperscript{684}

According to the paper, teachers had to be “enthusiastic fighters for the National Socialist worldview,” something women which religious were simply not capable of.\textsuperscript{685} The state removed women religious teachers in phases. In the first wave of dismissals on 1 January 1937, 148 Poor School Sisters in thirty towns lost their positions.\textsuperscript{686} The congregation’s monthly loss of revenue amounted to 24,000 Reichsmark.\textsuperscript{687}

The issue of money also occupied Staatsrat Ernst Boepple of the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, because firing women religious teachers was an expensive proposition for the state. In a memorandum dated January 1936 he gave a further reason for the timing of the dismissal of women religious teachers from public schools. He stated that although it was “a National Socialist duty …..to replace [women religious] in Volksschulen with lay teachers, until now we were lacking the means to solve this task that is of such importance for the education of our youth in the National Socialist spirit.”\textsuperscript{688} Boepple estimated that the dismissal of the first 600 of over 1,600

\textsuperscript{683} “Nur der Staat erzieht die Jugend,” Bayerische Ostmark, 14 October 1936.
\textsuperscript{684} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{685} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{686} The dismissals affected a total of 302 sisters and nearly 100 candidates residing in these 30 communities. Abbau der Volksschullehrerinnen am 1.1.1937. Gesamtbericht, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
\textsuperscript{687} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{688} Boepple to Staatsministerium für Finanzen, 27 January 1936, BayHStA, MK 61197.
women religious teachers from Bavarian Volksschulen would cost the state 4.6 million Reichsmark in additional wages and in construction costs for new schools and housing for teachers.  

The costs between a religious and lay teacher were significant. In 1934, the average annual wage for a lay teacher was 4,048 Reichsmark, whereas a woman religious teacher only earned 2,224 Reichsmark. Boepple estimated that the initial dismissal of six hundred women religious teachers would cost an additional 1,140,000 Reichsmark in annual wages. He planned on using savings from proposed cuts of state subsidies to church institutions, including private Catholic schools, to pay for the additional expenditures.

What emerges clearly from the memorandum is that Boepple was not concerned about violating the concordat but about the availability of funds for his endeavor. He wrote in January 1936 that, “I will implement the proposed change of article 24 of the Schulbedarfsgesetz as soon as I can appropriate the planned sums for use in Volksschulen from the cuts of subsidies [to churches].” Boepple and other Nazi officials simply brushed aside allegations that they had violated the concordat. The Bavarian Minister for Education and Culture Adolf Wagner, for instance, rejected the Vatican’s protests that the abolition of confessional schools and the dismissal of women religious teachers was unlawful or violated the concordat. Wager wrote in June 1937 that

689 Ibid.
690 Ibid.
691 Ibid.
692 Ibid.
the schools in which the religious teachers worked are public Volksschulen of the state. For this reason they are not the property ….of churches or religious congregations but rather that of the state and of municipalities. It is the sole prerogative of the state …to determine who teaches in these schools. 693

He added that the education of youth, in particular in secondary schools for girls, was overwhelmingly in the hands of women religious and the clergy, but “if our girls are meant to become lively mothers for our Volk then they shall be raised by teachers who are familiar with that kind of life.” 694 Boepple also rejected the notion that the state’s actions violated the concordat. He wrote to the Bavarian Conference of Bishops in October 1936 that “the belief that the dismissal of religious teachers violated the Bavarian and the Reich concordat is completely mistaken,” because neither agreement made any assurances that religious congregations would be entrusted with the operation of public Volksschulen. 695 He added that the concordat did not guaranty the preservation of individual schools and the state’s actions therefore “fell within the so-called concordat-free space.” 696 The Catholic Church disagreed.

The abolition of confessional schools and the removal of women religious from schools was a key component of the deconfessionalization of public life in Nazi


694 Ibid.

695 Boepple to Faulhaber, 12 October 1936, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8180/2.

696 Boepple cited as the reason for the dismissal of women religious teachers that it was irresponsible that non-Catholic children should have to attend the schools of Catholic congregations. He further wrote that women religious were incapable of fulfilling the new education requirements in particular in gymnastics, swimming, and hiking .....and in area of ideological historical lessons, racial science and biology. Women religious teachers could also not engage in Nazi organizations outside of school such as the BDM and the NS-Frauenschaft, as it was the wish of the state. Boepple concluded his letter with the remark that any women religious teacher could remain in public school service as long as she severed her ties to her congregation. Ibid.
Germany. As early as 21 June 1936, the bishops of Bavaria issued a joint pastoral letter condemning the state’s proposed actions against women religious teachers. The regime forbade the reading of the letter and ordered its confiscation, but the police noted that it was nonetheless read in most places. The bishops specifically mentioned the service to the state of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in the pastoral letter:

> It was only through [the labor] of the order of the Poor School Sisters…that made it possible for the Bavarian government to implement mandatory schooling. Without the order, it would have had neither the necessary means nor the teachers it needed.

Members of the clergy observed that following the reading of the pastoral letter, “the mood was unanimously for the school sisters,” and people were “very bitter” when they learned of the prohibition of the bishops’ missive.

The episcopate also sent numerous letters and appeals to the regime. The Bavarian Conference of Bishops sent petitions in May and September 1936 to the Reich Ministry of the Interior, the Reich Ministry of Church Affairs, and the Reich Minister for Science, Education, and National Culture in which they insisted that the proposed dismissal of women religious teachers violated the concordat. The bishops sent similar letters to Boepple and to von Epp, and they issued a second pastoral letter in December

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697 Volk, “Episkopat,” 294 ff. For a detailed discussion of the reading of the pastoral letter, see also: Fandel.

698 Hirtenwort der Bayerischen Bischöfe über die geplante Aufhebung der klösterlichen Schulen, Memorandum, undated ca. June 1936, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8181.

699 Hirtenwort der Bayerischen Bischöfe über die geplante Aufhebung der klösterlichen Schulen, 21 June 1936, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8180/1.

700 Ibid.

701 Faulhaber to Frick, Kerl, and Rust, 1 September 1936, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8180/2.
1936. In January 1937, the entire episcopate sent a joint protest to Reich Minister of
Church Affairs Kerrl.\(^\text{702}\) The highlight of protests was Pope Pius XI’s encyclical *With
Burning Concern* published in March 1937, which in part stated that

> even now that a campaign against the confessional schools, which are guaranteed by the concordat, and the destruction of free elections, where Catholics have a right to their children's Catholic education, afford evidence, in a matter so essential to the life of the Church, of the extreme gravity of the situation and the anxiety of every Christian conscience.\(^\text{703}\)

The pope, episcopate and clergy’s response to the dismissal of women religious from
Bavarian public schools is well documented. The almost exclusive focus of scholars on
the hierarchy and clergy’s reaction to the plight of Catholic sisters in 1936 exaggerates
the role of the former in the conflict at the expense of the considerable agency of the
women in confronting and resolving their problems.

Events of 1936 and 1937 expose both the ineffectiveness of the concordat and of
the episcopate’s policy of petitions. Gerhard Besier found that as members of the laity
became party to the conflict between the church and the state in the 1930s, many began to

\(^{702}\) Volk Akten, vol. IV, 89-93.

resent the apparent impotence of the episcopate and the uselessness of the concordat.\textsuperscript{704} According to Besier, Cardinal Bertram was aware of the open bitterness among the laity directed against German bishops, and he remarked that Catholics believed that “the reticence of the…bishops could only be explained with the efforts by the episcopate to prevent economic disadvantages for the clergy.”\textsuperscript{705} The bishop of Würzburg, Matthias Ehrenfried, was also aware of the episcopate’s apparent impotence in the fight over Catholic schools. In anticipation of the escalation of the conflict, he wrote to Faulhaber in January 1936 that the sisters should “take care to make themselves popular” in their towns and schools.\textsuperscript{706}

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame were grateful to bishops and priests for their prayers, sermons, and pastoral letters. The women sent personal thank-you notes to Faulhaber, yet they were nonetheless under no illusion as to the effectiveness of such measures.\textsuperscript{707} The mother superior M. Frida of Vilsiburg appreciated the bishops’ efforts on the sisters’ behalf after the closure their local school. At the same time, she pragmatically remarked that “we were glad to see that his excellency put himself out on our behalf, but it won’t do any good in the end. \textit{(Nützen wird’s ja nichts).}”\textsuperscript{708}

\textsuperscript{704} Besier, 675.

\textsuperscript{705} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{706} Ehrenfried to Faulhaber, January 1936, in Volk, \textit{Akten Faulhabers}, vol 2, 8.

\textsuperscript{707} The Faulhaber Nachlass contains several thank-you letters from Poor School Sisters to the cardinal for his efforts on behalf of the congregation. For instance, the Poor School Sisters in Bad Tölz wrote to Cardinal Faulhaber in July 1936 that they were “deeply moved by the shepherd’s love \textit{(Hirtenliebe)} with which they were surrounded…these past days ” The women thanked the cardinal for his care. Arme Schulschwestern, Bad Tölz to Faulhaber, 8 July 1936, AEM, Faulhaber Nachlass, 8180/1.

\textsuperscript{708} M. Frida to Schricker, 10 April 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
The relationship between the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame and the episcopate was never antagonistic, and bishops were not calculating opportunists protecting their own interests. Cardinal Faulhaber in particular displayed great concern for the sisters throughout the Third Reich. Still, he and other bishops nonetheless achieved little on the women’s behalf.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame never expected the episcopate and the clergy to solve their problems. They had always managed their own affairs, and the assistance the clergy and bishops rendered the sisters during their crisis varied. That priests did not feel obligated to help the Poor School Sisters emerges from the correspondence of the mother superior M. Pauline in Eggenfelden. She wrote to M. Almeda Schricker in November 1936 about her search for new housing for her community. M. Pauline noted that although there was plenty of room in the local rectory, “the reverend Herr Stadtpfarrer [local priest] does not lift a finger on our behalf [and] only expressed his condolences to us.” In Stadtamhof near Regensburg, the predicament of the sisters actually led to an improvement of the relationship between the women and the local priest. The sisters reported that following their dismissal from the Volksschule in 1937, the local priest, “the Reverend Scherbauer, who previously behaved in quite a cool manner toward the sisters, is now full of concern…for the convent.”

The sisters in Geiselhöring felt humiliated when they became dependent on the charity of their bishop Michael Buchberger, in 1937. After their dismissal from school,

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709 The priest later offered to store the sisters’ altar for them in a chamber in the church. M. Pauline to Schricker, 7 November 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

710 Bericht über den Abbau von Regensburg-Stadtamhof, undated ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
the bishop called himself the sisters’ “bread father” and offered them an apartment in a seminary for boys. The apartment turned out to be subpar and after a fire the evening they moved in, the women had to sleep in the kitchen, an arrangement the bishop called “cozy.” Although the women worked for the diocese, they did not earn enough to provide for all their needs and sometimes had to seek food from the seminary’s kitchens. They wrote that despite the kind treatment they received, this was “always an enormous act of humility and cost much willpower and secret tears.” The Poor School Sisters were grateful to the episcopate and the clergy for assistance, but they relied on their own resources to resolve their difficulties.

The women once again exhibited considerable agency and pragmatism as they confronted the loss of schools and income in 1937. Their removal from Bavarian public schools in 1937 illustrates the complex situation of Catholic sisters in Nazi Germany. Although the Poor School Sisters moved further to the fringes of the people’s community, they remained very much part of it and still had considerable bargaining powers to create new free spaces for themselves in a dictatorship that was constrained by public opinion.

The sisters had to leave their schools in the middle of the school year. M. Almeda Schricker called the prospect of losing both “shelter and bread hard and bitter,” but the sisters had no intentions of leaving their posts and communities quietly. Congregational leaders instructed sisters “not to slink away like a defeated army, but to do everything

711 Bericht über den Abbau der klösterlichen Lehrkräfte in Geiselhöring, undated ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

712 Schricker, Rundbrief, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
possible to remain in their towns.” In 1936, M. Almeda Schricker travelled to affected communities to strategize with the local superiors and sisters and to negotiate with town and district officials. Although these negotiations never led to the women’s return to school, they often resulted in considerable concessions that enabled the Poor School Sisters to remain in town.

The sisters in Bad Tölz lost no time and appealed to town officials in November 1936. In her meeting with the mayor, the mother superior of Bad Tölz, M. Corsina V., protested the impossibility of the situation and asked the mayor to provide new housing for her community of fourteen sisters and five candidates, because we too are Volksgenossen of the Third Reich, who have sworn our oath of loyalty to the Führer, and who can prove our Aryan ancestry…and therefore have the right to demand to be cared for like all other German Volksgenossen in the Third Reich.

M. Almeda Schricker also negotiated with the mayor, who agreed to extend the lease of the sisters’ city-owned apartment to April 1937. In a number of cases the sisters achieved long-term extensions of their municipal apartment leases.

M. Corsina V. also petitioned local and district leaders for permission to give private lessons to replace part of her community’s income. Such requests presented Nazi officials with a conundrum. Ernst Boepple wanted the sisters to leave town once and

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714 Abbau der Schwesternschule in Bad Tölz, 26 November 1936, StaBT, A IIb 188.

715 Ibid.

716 Vögl to Bezirksamt Bad Tölz, 23 December 1936, StaBT, A IIb 188.
for all and not give them the opportunity “to once again root themselves in place” through private lessons.\textsuperscript{717} However, officials usually granted the sisters’ requests. The state wanted to avoid the “appearance of harshness and treat the sisters humanely” and thereby avoid a public backlash.\textsuperscript{718} The sisters in Mittenwald also stayed in their village and relied on twenty four private lessons in sewing and crafts to help sustain them.\textsuperscript{719} Private lessons also allowed the sisters to stay in close touch with local people. The Poor School Sisters used their popularity with the population to remain in their communities and towns.

The episcopate encouraged the laity to express their discontent about the dismissal of women religious. Catholics’ responses were mixed. Many remained silent out of fear of reprisals. In Bad Tölz, numerous people signed a petition to keep the sisters in their school, and a group of local women travelled to Munich to demand an audience with Reichstatthalter Ritter von Epp.\textsuperscript{720} In Neumarkt (Opf.) only two women were willing to appeal in person to officials on behalf of the Poor School Sisters.\textsuperscript{721} The people of Gaimersheim refused to even sign a petition for fear of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{722} Harassment rather than imprisonment, however, was the common form of reprisal against Germans

\textsuperscript{717} Der Bürgermeister von Bad Tölz, Niederschrift, ca. January 1937, StaBT, A IIb 188.

\textsuperscript{718} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{719} Bericht über den Abbau der Filiale Mittenwald, undated, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{720} The delegation was turned away. Bericht über den Abbau der Armen Schulschwestern an der Mädchen-Schule Bad Tölz, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{721} Mittenberg to Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Eichstätt, 30 September 1936, DAE, Ordinariat – NS-Kampf gegen die Bekenntnisschule/Kampf gegen klösterl. Lehrkräfte.

\textsuperscript{722} Kath. Pfarramt Gaimersheim to Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Eichstätt, 16 September 1936, Bistumsarchiv Eichstätt, Ordinariat – NS-Kampf gegen die Bekenntnisschule/Kampf gegen klösterl. Lehrkräfte.
who spoke up on behalf of the sisters. Paul Sturm of Arnsdorf lost his minor post and membership in the Nazi party for this “duplicity” and “betrayal of the Führer” when he petitioned district leaders on behalf of women religious teachers.²²³ Although officials told petitioners that their efforts were “useless” and “an affront against the government,” popular discontent greatly influenced the Nazis’ actions toward Catholic sisters.²²⁴

Even more effective than official protests were informal social networks the sisters used to their advantage. When in December 1936 the mother superior M. Frida of Vilsbiburg received an eviction notice for 1 January 1937 for her community’s city-owned apartment, she was “resolved not to lift a finger.”²²⁵ She instead told her student Elfriede “to tell her Frau Mama that I just received notice from the mayor that the sisters must clear out of their apartment by the 31st.”²²⁶ The news spread through town within hours and “the people were terrible upset.”²²⁷ The mayor sent word to the sisters the same day that they could remain in their apartment and “would be taken care of.”²²⁸ M. Frida’s backbone was not unusual among the sisters.

When the mother superior of Cham learned that local officials wanted the women to leave the city, she became “absolutely determined not to yield at any cost.”²²⁹ Local

²²³ Leipold to Sturm, 2 September 1936, DAE, Ordinariat – NS-Kampf gegen die Bekenntnisschule/Kampf gegen klösterl. Lehrkräfte.

²²⁴ Pillund, Memorandum, 18 September 1936, DAE, Ordinariat – NS-Kampf gegen die Bekenntnisschule/Kampf gegen klösterl. Lehrkräfte.

²²⁵ M. Frida to Schricker, 5 January 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Abbaugeschichte Chams, 1 August 1937, OAAS, Drittes Reich.
people started to ostracize the mayor of Cham in the local pub, and the latter refused to expel the Poor School Sisters from their school in April 1937, because of the “huge commotion” in the city. The regime delayed the closing of the sisters’ Volksschule and two middle schools for girls (Höhere Töchterschule and Haustöchterschule) until July 1937 when twenty-seven women religious teachers lost their positions. 730

The congregation owned the building in Cham. The city demanded to purchase it but the sisters were determined to remain and refused to sell. M. Loyola H. reported in 1946 that between November 1936 and March 1938, the Poor School Sisters in Cham received no fewer than 197 visits from numerous Nazi officials, who tried “to force us in a more or less shameless manner” to sell the house.731 Representatives of the League of German Girls were the worst and most determined to obtain the property, but the sisters did not relent. Twice in 1937 they ignored orders from Ernst Boepple from the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture to vacate the house. Boepple himself came and inspected the buildings. The women held out until March 1938, when they were “threatened in such an unbelievable fashion” that they sold the property to the state. 732

The women still refused to leave Cham. The father of one of the sisters’ Jewish students offered his house for purchase to the congregation and the sisters accepted. 733 The Poor School Sisters’ determination paid off almost everywhere, and a limited number of sisters remained in twenty-six of the thirty communities affected by the first

730 Abbaugeschichte Chams, 1 August 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
731 M. Loyola H. to Militär-Regierung Cham, 20 February 1946, BayHStA, MK 61125
732 M. Loyola H. to Militär-Regierung Cham, 20 February 1946, BayHStA, MK 61125.
733 Abbaugeschichte Chams, 1 August 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

The Nazis were able to remove the women from schools but not from their communities. On the contrary, the Poor School Sisters usually became more visible and their connections to the local population grew even stronger in the face of adversity. Although numerous people did participate in official protests, it appears that they had not such reservation when it came to assisting the sisters in a private, informal manner.

The Poor School Sisters could not have remained in many towns without the material support of the local population. The sisters’ experiences were similar wherever they faced dismissal. The women usually received gifts of food, fuel, and money from numerous well-wishers. The sisters in Bad Tölz wrote, for instance, that “every day a different baker delivers bread, and we also get milk and butter for free.”

Citizens and local organizations contributed to the sisters’ rent or provided housing at no cost. In Mittenwald, the sisters moved in with Frau Schröder, a convert from Judaism, who, according to the sisters, made many sacrifices to provide housing for the women. A number of citizens in Eggenfelden raised money, purchased property, and built a new home for their local community of Poor School Sisters.

The example of Eggenfelden reveals that the sisters still enjoyed considerable freedom in Hitler’s Germany, and their sometimes quite brazen acts went unchallenged.

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734 Abbau der Volksschullehrerinnen am 1.1.1937. Gesamtbericht, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

735 Bericht über den Abbau der Armen Schulschwestern an der Mädchen-Schule Bad Tölz, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

736 Mittenwald, Bericht, 15 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

737 The sisters in Eggenfelden also received gifts of flour, meat, vegetables, and wood. Bericht über den Abbau der klösterlichen Volksschule in Eggenfelden, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
The sisters in Eggenfelden received notice of their dismissal in October 1936 and immediately petitioned the mayor for an extension of their apartment lease. The women had a strong case, because they still ran a kindergarten and a middle school for girls. The mayor denied the request and indicated that he planned on closing all of the congregation’s institutions at once.\(^{738}\) Although their middle school remained open for two more years thereafter, the sisters had to vacate their apartment by April 1937.\(^{739}\)

Local citizens in Eggenfelden responded by purchasing property and building a house for the sisters. The women wrote that after “well-intentioned people donated … [a total] sum of 27,000 Reichsmark, a local lawyer, bank director, and shoe factory owner took the matter in hand.”\(^{740}\) It took some efforts to persuade the owner of a suitable building site to sell his property at a good price to the sisters. When the seller died within a week of the sale, the sisters hoped that “the dear Lord would richly reward him in heaven for his good deed.”\(^{741}\) Construction commenced on 1 May 1937 but progress was slowed by the immense difficulties of obtaining raw materials.

The continued and heightened popularity of the Poor School Sisters in Eggenfelden raised the ire of local Nazis. They wanted the women gone, not permanently settled in real estate of their own. In October 1937, officials therefore prohibited the sisters from moving into their new house and instructed all but three sisters still teaching

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\(^{738}\) M. Pauline to Schricker, 7 November 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{739}\) The mayor was unable to find lay teachers to staff the sisters’ middle school, but the Volksschule was taken over by lay teachers on 1 January 1937 and the kindergarten shortly thereafter. Bericht über den Abbau in Eggenfelden, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich

\(^{740}\) The sisters wrote that it was fortunate that the mayor was also the local Ortsgruppenleiter and he approved the building permit forthwith. Ibid.

\(^{741}\) Ibid.
in the middle school to leave town. The mother superior M. Pauline took the news calmly. She had no intention of yielding and defied local Nazi officials by moving her community into the half-finished house the same day.\textsuperscript{742} With the help of local people, and under the cover of darkness, the sisters moved their belongings into the house that still lacked floors, stairs, electricity, water, and bathroom facilities.

The women’s bold move caused considerable excitement among the local population. When challenged, M. Pauline replied that she wanted to keep her already overdue promise to vacate the city-owned apartment by September. M. Pauline wrote that “everyone felt sorry for us, but we were in good spirits, [and] although damp walls and drafts caused the odd cold here and there it…was well worth it.”\textsuperscript{743} Following the incident “the good people of Eggenfelden doubled their efforts to help the sisters with money and goods;“and the women received coal and wood, potatoes, fruit, vegetables, coffee, milk, meat, and lard in abundance.\textsuperscript{744}

Although the nerve of M. Pauline is admirable, she could only push as far as the Nazis let her. Local officials almost certainly did not intervene because they wished to avoid further unrest among the population. At the same time, Ulrich v. Hehl has shown that Nazi officials did not hesitate to imprison numerous members of the clergy, which also caused considerable disquiet among Germans.\textsuperscript{745} This indicates that the regime felt

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{742} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{743} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{744} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
additional constraints in their actions against Catholic sisters, because of their gender and status.

Catholic sisters simply embodied goodness and innocence to most, and the regime had already pushed matters with the dismissal of the women from schools. In some ways, the Nazis tied their own hands when they pointed to violence against nuns in the Spanish civil war in 1936 as the epitome of barbarity and depravity of the Republican faction and communists. This association resonated with Germans. In an anonymous protest letter, the author protested the dismissal of women religious teachers from the Volksschule in Schwandorf and asked: “Would the wicked communists have attacked us Catholics in this way?” It seems that their image of selfless and powerless nuns afforded the Poor School Sisters additional protection not enjoyed by the clergy.

In Schwandorf, public support of the sisters reached levels of popular unrest. In an attempt to restore order, officials in Schwandorf made the sisters’ stay contingent on the good behavior of the local population. The case of the Poor School Sisters’ dismissal from the Volksschule in Schwandorf is better known due to an anonymous letter included in a published situation report that is sometimes quoted in the secondary literature. It read in part:

Which Catholic mother did not weep in the last few days when she was told about it [dismissal of Catholic sisters] by her children? I happened to be a witness as to how the children cried on the streets for their sisters, and all grown-ups who came with them. Must the sisters go to make way again for bigwigs [Bonzen], or because they are Catholics? In fifty years’ time the children will still have fond memories of their good sisters, while certainly no one will

746 Qtd. in Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 188.
The letter was one of many that citizens of Schwandorf sent to the mayor and the school commissioner in Amberg after they learned of the pending removal of Catholic sisters from the Volksschule. The mayor of Schwandorf was unimpressed by the letters. He also remained unmoved when the local mother superior M. Magdalena K. reminded him that in the past, the congregation had loaned the city money interest-free. He did agree, however, to extend the sisters’ lease to 1 April 1937 and allowed them to keep their Handarbeitsschule (sewing and craft school) open.

In December 1936, the local population marked the sisters’ dismissal with a very well-attended church service. The city council was annoyed and retaliated by evicting the entire community of thirty Poor School Sisters as of 8 January 1937. The sisters appealed to the mayor who extended the date to March 1937 provided there was no further popular unrest. Unfortunately, the mayor’s bitterness toward the sisters increased when a local woman (Frau Schädl) wrote a protest letter to Gauleiter Wächter. She criticized the city council’s behavior toward the Poor School Sisters and accused the mayor of hiring a

Ibid., 288.

After the arrival of M. Almeda Schricker, the sisters traveled to Amberg to meet with representatives of the government of the Upper Palatinate. But the meeting was unsuccessful and the women were told their predicament was their “own fault because they did not adjust to the new era.” Mar Magdalena K., Abbau der Klosterfiliale Schwandorf, 24 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

Keeping the sewing and craft school open was entirely self-serving on the part of the city of Schwandorf, because it lacked the funds to hire three secular teachers for 91 hours a week to teach sewing and crafting. The state was adamant, however, that each community must replace women religious sewing teachers because of the exemplary work of sisters in this area. Bayer. Ministerium für Unterricht und Kultus to Regierungen von Bayern, 19 October 1936, BayHStA, MK 61849 and Bürgermeister von Schwandorf to Regierung von Niederbayern und der Oberpfalz, 19 November 1936, BayHStA, MK 61849.

M. Magdalena K., Abbau der Klosterfiliale Schwandorf, 24 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich
“morally questionable” principal for the Volksschule. The city thereafter dissolved the sisters’ Handarbeitsschule without notice, and the mayor missed no opportunity to publicly voice his misgivings about the sisters. The situation in the town became so volatile that on the first school day following Christmas break, the police blocked the market place and stood guard as the new secular teachers entered the school building for the first time. Seven of the thirty sisters nonetheless remained in Schwandorf and relied on the support of citizens to provide housing and means to earn a living. The impact on the congregation of the loss of the sewing school and of the Volksschule in Schwandorf was compounded by further dismissals of women religious teachers from public Volksschulen and the Nazis’ simultaneous measures against private Catholic schools.

### 4.4 The Closure of Private Catholic Schools

The congregation’s problems became more urgent in April 1937 when an additional 103 Poor School Sisters lost their positions. The state also began to close Catholic private schools. In many towns, including Cham and Eggenfelden, the Poor School Sisters maintained not only a public Volksschule but kindergartens, private secondary schools, and a variety of housekeeping and business courses. For instance, aside from their Volksschule, the sisters in Würzburg-Heidingsfeld maintained a

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751 Ibid.
752 Ibid.
753 Ibid.
754 Schricker, Rundbrief, 3 March 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
kindergarten, a higher school for girls (Höhere Mädchenschule), and a housekeeping school (Haushaltungsschule).

Already in March 1936, the Poor School Sisters in Weiden received “a small indication of coming upheavals,” when a ministerial decree demanded that secondary schools had to be headed by academically trained teachers. As a consequence the principal M. Austina S. of the congregation’s Lyzeum in Weiden had to yield her position to M. Reingardis H. from Rosenheim. In September 1937, the state decreed that children of civil servants must attend public schools. The regime also cut subsidies for private Catholic schools and increased the tax burden of the congregation. These measures threatened to erode the economic viability of private Catholic schools.

Officials in Westphalia, Württemberg, and Bavaria began closing private Catholic schools of the Poor School Sisters in early 1937. In February in Westphalia, the state started to phase out the sisters’ private lyceum and Oberlyzeum in Arnsberg and prohibited the sisters from accepting new students. In March 1937, the mayor of Neumarkt in the Upper Palatinate informed the sisters that their services were no longer required in the local middle school for girls. The congregation lost the middle school

755 Bericht Weiden, 15 August 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

756 The cut of subsidies, along with reduced numbers of students due to the Beamtenerlass from 1937, threatened to decimate private Catholic schools since many daughters of civil servants attended these types of schools. In 1940, the Poor School Sisters were forced to close their secondary school in Elberfeld (Westphalia), because they could no longer afford to keep it open.


758 Dotzer to Schricker, 15 March 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
along with the Volksschule in Neumarkt.\textsuperscript{759} In April 1937, the state of Württemberg closed the Poor School Sisters’ secondary school in Ravensburg.\textsuperscript{760} In July 1937, the regime closed the sisters’ aforementioned Volksschule and secondary schools for girls in Cham. In 1937, the regime also decreed the closure in phases of the Poor School Sisters’ Realgymnasium for girls in Gliwice, Silesia.\textsuperscript{761} States moved against these six congregational schools even prior to far-reaching school reforms in December 1937 that created a pseudo-legal basis for the closure of private Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{762}

On 29 December 1937, the Nazi regime decreed the “Reorganization of the Higher School System.” According to scholar Rolf Eilers, this measure “dealt a decisive blow” to private Catholic schools for girls.\textsuperscript{763} The school reforms of 1937 streamlined the education system for girls, and new and less academically demanding school types emphasized the training of housewives and mothers.\textsuperscript{764} The regime was also impatient to wrest the education of girls from the hands of women religious congregations.\textsuperscript{765}

\textsuperscript{759} The Höhere Mädchenschule in Neumarkt was actually a public school that the Poor School Sisters staffed and operated like their Volksschule. Neumarkt i.d. Opf.: Bericht über den Abbau unserer Filiale, undated, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{760} Hatwiger, 46.

\textsuperscript{761} Mengel, 47.

\textsuperscript{762} The reason why the regime moved against the sisters’ schools in Neumarkt, Ravensburg, Cham and the other aforementioned placed prior to December 1937 was because these few schools were technically not private. Although the secondary schools were usually housed in the sisters’ own buildings, with the exception of Neumarkt, the official Träger, or owner, in these cases was an public entity, usually the city. This placed the institutions within easy reach of the regime.

\textsuperscript{763} Eilers, 197.

\textsuperscript{764} Eilers wrote that there were over 70 different types of secondary schools for girls in Germany in the 1930s. The regime simplified the school system for girls and also made it much less academically demanding. The Nazis eliminated the Gymnasium and with it instruction in Latin for girls. Girls could choose from two types of secondary schools that emphasized languages or housekeeping skills and led to what came to be derisively known as the Puddingabitur. Many girls attended a middle school, Realschule, or what were known as Haustöchterschulen, literally “house daughter school.” The Haustöchterschule was
In 1937 in Bavaria, sixty-four women religious communities owned a total of 126 secondary schools for girls along with 58 boarding schools. On 29 December 1937, all sixty-four institutes received notices from the state of the immediate or planned closure of most of their congregational schools. The state informed congregations that “with the beginning of the new school year [1937/98], the secondary school system in Bavaria will be reorganized and the continued need of each school will be reassessed.” The regime once again insisted that “education was a public and not a private matter.” All German states therefore decided there was no longer a need for private Catholic schools.

States closed a number of secondary schools right away. The Poor School Sisters received notices in December 1937 that their institutes in Erding-Hl. Blut, Schillingsfürst, and Würzburg-Heidingsfeld were to close entirely with the conclusion of the 1937/38 school year. The population was once again upset about the school closures but in the a three-year school that students entered in the seventh grade from the Volksschule or from a Lyzeum. As the name indicates and as the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture wrote in 1938, the Haustöchterschule “conveys a sophisticated general education that prepares [girls] for quintessential women’s occupations (in the home, family, and the professional world).” Boepple to Bürgermeisters von Altötting, Aschaffenburg, Augsburg et. al., 23 December 1938, BayHStA, MK 60929, and Eilers, 20.

In his letter to Bavarian mayors, Boepple lamented the fact that the education of girls, in particular the middle school system, remained overwhelmingly in the hands of women religious and he admonished mayors that they had to do everything possible to overcome all difficulties and build a public middle school system for girls as soon as possible. Boepple to Bürgermeisters von Altötting, Aschaffenburg, Augsburg et. al., 23 December 1938, BayHStA, MK 60929

The 126 schools consisted of 10 higher schools with nine classes, 63 higher schools with six classes, and 53 middle schools. Übersicht über den Abbau der Ordensschulen in Bayern zu Beginn des Jahres 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

Boepple to Direktorat der Armen Schulschwestern Amberg, 29 December 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. The new requirement to assess the need for each private school created the pseudo-legal basis for the regime to close Catholic school on the pretext that there was no longer a need for them. This justification was pseudo-legal because private school were not traditionally subjected to this kind of scrutiny. Private school operators did not have to prove a need for their schools.

Bericht Weiden, 15 August 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
case of secondary schools, the sisters reported much less public outrage than during the closure of confessional Volksschulen. Upon learning of the imminent closure of the Catholic Lyzeum in Weiden, for instance, the sisters reported receiving numerous visitors from both friends, who offered assistance, but also from opportunists, “who sought to secure one or the other furnishing for themselves right away.”769 With the exception of two students and members of the League of German Girls, who complained in person to the mayor of Amberg, there was no further public unrest.770 The city of Weiden took over the sisters’ building and most furnishings and reopened the Catholic Lyzeum in April 1938 as a public school.771

Although the state desired to close all Catholic schools immediately, this was not feasible. Shortages of funds, buildings, and secular teachers prevented the closure of Catholic schools for several years.772 It was therefore common for states to phase out congregational schools over a number of years. This was the case in the Poor School Sisters’ schools in Westphalia and Bavaria, in Arnsberg, Brakel, Warburg, Amberg, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Miltenberg, and Munich. On 29 December 1937, the principal of the Poor School Sisters’ Lyzeum for girls in Amberg received notice of the planned closure of the school. Although the state informed the congregation that “there was no longer a need” for the Lyzeum, it was to remain partially open. The sisters could not

769 Ibid.
770 Ibid.
771 The remaining sisters in Weiden reported that “the chapel is now a faculty lounge and the lower part of the sisters’ apartment was converted into a classroom.” Ibid.
772 Because the above-mentioned difficulties, in 1937, the state exempted fourteen middle schools and twelve boarding schools from the decree. None of these schools belonged to the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. Ibid.
accept students for the first grade in the new school year and the continuation of the remaining classes was contingent on the appointment of a secular principal. This interim solution created a confusing situation for parents and students. It also bordered on the grotesque when in April 1938 mayor Hilbig of Amberg invited the Poor School Sisters to the opening celebration of the new public schools for girls to be held in the women’s own gymnasium.

Some cites were not eager to take over Catholic schools. The city of Munich lacked the means in 1938 to implement even the phased closures of the Poor School Sisters’ Lyzeum and middle school in the motherhouse and focused only on the gymnasium. Whereas in Westphalia, the city of Arnsberg agitated to close the Poor School Sisters’ Lyzeum as soon as possible, in Warburg, the city resisted taking over the local Catholic middle school for girls. In 1938, the state closed the congregation’s seminary for kindergarten teachers in Warburg but the middle school never closed. In 1939, state officials negotiated to no avail with the city of Warburg to take over the

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773 Boepple to Direktorat der Armen Schulsschwestern Amberg, 29 December 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

774 Hilbig to Arme Schulsschwestern Amberg, 23 April 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

775 The Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture originally informed the Poor School Sisters in December 1937 of the planned incremental closure of all three schools in the motherhouse but took back the decision in March 1938. The city of Munich focused its efforts on the gymnasium. Like Amberg, the city appointed a secular principal and decreed that only secular teachers could teach in the gymnasium’s first grade. The city of Munich took over all schools in the motherhouse only at the end of the school year in 1941. Hatwiger, 48.

776 The Poor School Sisters’ first secondary school to close in Westphalia was the Lyzeum in Arnsberg. The phased closure of the school began with the school year 1937/1938. The school should have remained open at least until the end of the school year 1939/40, because in 1938/39, the sisters still had a 4th, 5th, and 8th grade. But in the city of Arnsberg agitated to close the school and incorporate the students into the local public school. In March 1939, the Reich Ministry for Science, Education, and Culture approved the closure of the sisters’ school in Arnsberg. Priv. kath. Oberlyzeum der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr., Bericht über das Schuljahr 1938, AKB, Schule-Arnsberg.
school. The mayor of Warburg cited the prohibitive cost of running a public school as the reason for his refusal. In 1940, the city became obligated to take charge of the school when the regime mandated that all private schools become members in the “Reichsgemeinschaft Deutscher Privatschulen.” The state denied Catholic congregations membership in the organization, which was equivalent to the closure of their schools. Still the city of Warburg refused to act. In a report dated January 1941, the Regierungspräsident Ludwig Runte reported to Rust that “due to its bad economic situation, the city of Warburg is not willing to convert even the 1st grade of the private school for girls into a public school.” On account of the mayor’s resistance, the school remained partially in the Poor School Sisters possession for the duration of the Third Reich.

Aside from the issue of cost, shortages of qualified teachers also often prevented the closure of Catholic schools. The outbreak of war in 1939 exacerbated teacher shortages. In March 1941, an impatient Adolf Wagner wrote that “it was time to bring the closure of private Catholic schools to an end” in order to finally eliminate the influence

777 In December 1939, a principal of the Volksschule in Brakel by the name of Andree reported to the Regierungsrat in charge that the city was in principle willing to take over the Poor School Sisters’ school but could only do so “if the state reimbursed the city with all costs associated with the school.” Andree to Regierungsrat, 18 December 1939, Staatsarchiv Detmold, M 1 II B/6034. I thank M. Apollinaries Jörgens for making this reference available.

778 Ibid.

779 Runte to Rust, 27 January 1941, Staatsarchiv Detmold, M 1 II B/3740. I am grateful to M. Apollinaris Jörgens for this reference.

780 In 1943, the city did take over the first and second grades of the school in Warburg, but the closure was never completed.
and presence of women religious in education. He acknowledged the immense difficulties of the endeavor but asserted “that these difficulties had to be overcome.” In practice, this was not possible. The mayor of Dillingen reported a few weeks later that the announcement of the final closure of the local congregational school had caused great unrest among parents because they have no idea where to send their daughters after Easter. The mayor reported that his own efforts to open a public school failed because it was impossible to find qualified secular teachers. He asked Wagner to “quietly approve” that at least part of the Lyzeum remain in the hands of the Dillingen Franciscan sisters.

Despite numerous obstacles, the Nazi regime managed to close most private Catholic schools for girls by the early 1940s. The Poor School Sisters in Bavaria lost all of their secondary schools for girls. The sisters in Westphalia also lost all schools, except for the middle school in Warburg. The impact of these school closures on the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame was severe. In the past, the sisters had also faced significant incursions by the state, most notably during the Kulturkampf, but the crisis of the late 1930s differed in scale and substance.

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781 Wagner to Regierungspräsidenten and Reichskommissar für die Saarpfalz, 8 March 1941, BayHStA, MK 60929.
782 Ibid.
783 Hagen to Wagner, 31 March 1941, BayHStA, MK 60929.
784 Ibid.
785 The Poor School Sisters in Bavaria lost nine middle schools, one realschule, nine lyzeen, four higher schools for girls, and one gymnasium. Hatwiger, 49.
786 The sisters lost schools in Arnsberg (Lyzeum), Brakel (Lyzeum), Elberfeld (middle school), Meschede (middle school), Grossauheim (middle school), Warburg (kindergarten teacher seminary), Neviges and Herzberg (middle school).
Over the years, the sisters had developed effective strategies in dealing with major and minor crises. They could usually overcome the resistance and suspicion of opponents with their professionalism and excellence in the classroom. This was not possible in Nazi Germany. The principal of the Poor School Sisters’ Lyzeum in Arnsberg recognized this fact when she wrote on the occasion of her school’s closure in 1939 that the institution was not closed because it did not meet high academic standards but because it did not fit the “educational principles of the National Socialist state.”

The congregation also depended on its secure base in Bavaria and on its strong partnership with the Bavarian state. Their relatively secure position in Bavaria had allowed the women to manage and contain the losses of sister provinces during the Kulturkampf and the protracted conflict over the congregation’s rule in the nineteenth century. In Nazi Germany, Bavaria became a trendsetter in measures against Catholic congregations and schools. The fact that the upheavals in the later 1930s threatened the entire congregation throughout Germany made it very difficult for a province in distress to seek assistance from a sister province. The injustices women religious in National Socialist Germany suffered were real, and scholars are correct to point to the victimization of Catholic sisters. At the same time, it is also important to contemplate what the sisters did not lose in Nazi Germany.

Although after 1935 the regime pushed women religious further to the fringes of the people’s community, the women still possessed considerable bargaining power as they carved out new free spaces for themselves in Hitler’s Germany. The Poor School

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Sisters showed considerable tenacity and agency as they confronted the loss of teaching positions and schools. The concordat, the hierarchy and the clergy did not figure prominently in the sisters’ strategies to preserve their communities. The continued support of Germans was crucial, however, as the sisters confronted their mounting difficulties in the 1930s. The experiences of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame highlight that the Nazi regime depended on Germans to practice the exclusion of outsiders of the people’s community.

Scholars have proposed a number of reasons why Germans accepted and participated in the exclusion, persecution, and murder of numerous groups and persons. But opportunism, utopian yearnings for unity, or the “ordered” perpetration of violence through police and the legal system were insufficient to persuade Germans to exclude Catholic sisters from society. The evidence suggests that measures usually effective to convince Germans of the necessity to exclude a particular group, such as criminalization or legal measures, achieved the opposite in the case of Catholic sisters. The case of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame shows that these actions actually increased the popularity of women religious in Germany. The Nazis depended on existing prejudices to render the persecution of particular groups plausible. This crucial prerequisite was lacking in the case of Catholic sisters. Moreover, powerful popular images of the selfless, innocent nun who came to symbolize the epitome of victimhood in the twentieth century heightened Germans’ sensitivities to the Nazis’ measures against this group of women. It was their popularity and social status that made it impossible for Nazi officials to move more aggressively against the Poor School Sisters.
The Nazi regime also lacked the means to remove Catholic sisters from the German education system. Although the Poor School Sisters’ losses were substantial, they were not total. The Bavarian government never completed the dismissal of women religious teachers from public Volksschulen. Ninety-four of the congregation’s 683 teachers in public schools did not lose their positions. The Poor School Sisters also retained 78 of 149 kindergartens in Nazi Germany, ten of twelve orphanages, and fourteen of 114 sewing schools. Well into the 1940s, the sisters also continued to teach in their dying secondary schools. At the same time, it was clear to most sisters that they had no future in German schools for as long as the Nazis were power. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame did, however, believe in their continued future in Germany. In 1937, the women started to take advantage of the considerable free spaces still available to them and began to redefine their mission and place in German society.

788 In addition to the aforementioned Volksschulen and secondary schools, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame also lost eight Berufsfortbildungsschulen (occupational colleges), 16 hauswirtschaftliche Schulen and Kurse (housekeeping schools and courses), and three Handelsschulen und Kurse (business schools and courses). Hatwiger, 60.
CHAPTER 5:
A NEW MISSION: SCHOOL SISTERS WITHOUT SCHOOLS

5.1 Argument and Historiography

In 1938, the teenaged Poor School Sister candidate Resi B. pondered the bleak future of women religious teaching congregations in Germany. She noted with concern the growing chaos in the old gymnasium of the candidature tract in Munich as it filled with the belongings of sisters who had to leave their communities after the loss of their teaching positions. Some of the luggage belonged to sisters preparing to leave Germany. Emigration became an obvious choice for the Poor School Sisters in the late 1930s. All emigrants passed through the motherhouse in Munich and candidates participated in cheerful farewell celebrations for sisters departing to North and South America and to other European countries.  

Resi could not help but wonder on one of these occasions about her own prospects and she asked herself: “What will happen to us candidates?”

Despite their uncertain future in Hitler’s Germany, most Poor School Sisters actually remained in the country. Between 1937 and 1945, only 199 professed sisters and

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789 Resi B., “Schulschwesterkandidatin im Dritten Reich, April 1932-Dezember 1945,” OAAS M, Drittes Reich. Even before the first Poor School Sister lost her job in January 1937, M. Almeda Schricker encouraged sisters and candidates in October 1936 to volunteer for emigration to North and South America and to other European countries. Schricker, Rundbrief, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

790 Resi B., “Schulschwesterkandidatin im Dritten Reich, April 1932-Dezember 1945,” OAAS M, Drittes Reich
twenty-one candidates left Germany. Resi also stayed. The many sisters who remained in Germany braced for major change following the loss of most of their schools. After the final closure of their middle school for girls in Ravensburg in October 1939, M. Dosithea wrote that although the congregation was “no longer permitted to serve the child,…we must act and work to serve the people, even if it means that we must make great sacrifices and embrace major change.” When M. Dosithea wrote this entry in October 1939, Germany was also already at war.

This chapter examines the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame from 1937 to 1942. It analyzes how the sisters adjusted first to the loss of their schools and then to the outbreak of World War II a few years later. The historiography is mostly silent about women religious teachers between 1937 and 1939. They once again surface after the commencement of World War II in 1939 as participants in the war effort or as targets of the worsening conflict between the church and the state. War did of course impact the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in significant ways, but it is also a fact that the initial years of war from 1939 to 1942 did not mark as decisive a break in the congregation’s history as the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II. For the Poor School Sisters, war did not cause but accelerated and exacerbated many of the major changes the women started to experience in 1937.

Following the loss of their schools, the Poor School Sisters retrained for alternate employment. In their new positions, the women remained an integral part of Germany’s

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791 Seventy women joined the North American province and forty-nine moved to Brazil and Argentina. Poor School Sisters from Germany also emigrated to Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Hatwiger, 92, 93.

792 Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 24 October 1939, OAAS M.
spiritual economies and even managed to expand their sphere of influence into Protestant regions of Germany where nuns were heretofore mostly unknown. The sisters’ success in the labor market from 1937 onward brings into sharp relief the peculiar status of women religious in Hitler’s Germany as both insiders and outsiders. Although the Nazis expelled the Poor School Sisters from schools, they could not exclude them from society and generally did not hinder the women from obtaining new employment.

During World War II, the congregation of the Poor School Sisters placed their considerable material and human resources at the disposal of the regime. The sisters’ specific motivation for participation in the war effort is often difficult to pinpoint and it ranged from considerations of religious traditions, to patriotism, to self-preservation, to compulsion. My work adds to newer scholarship that has started to shed light on the complicated history of the Catholic Church during World War II. In the past, the dominant narrative was that of the increased victimization of religious congregations during World War II. In particular, the Nazis’ “storming of the cloisters” (Klostersturm) in 1940/41 became emblematic in the historiography of the escalating measures against religious congregations and the Catholic Church during World War II.

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794 Johann Neuhäusler first wrote about the “robbing of the cloisters” in 1946, 146 ff. Ludwig Volk wrote about the Klostersturm in the 1980s, “Episcopate,” and Annette Mertens’s important 2006 monograph revealed that the scope of the Klostersturm was even larger than Volk had first reported.
But Doris Bergen and Winfried Süß both have shown that the apparent paradox of complicity and victimization of Catholics in wartime cannot be separated and must be considered together.⁷⁹⁵ Bergen argued in her work on German military chaplains that the regime’s continued hostility toward the churches may have actually increased the chaplains’ show of support for the war.⁷⁹⁶ Winfried Süß revealed that women religious nursing congregations’ cooperation with the Nazi regime during war was motivated among other things by both patriotism and coercion.

The Poor School Sisters’ loss of their schools and the commencement of war also changed the women’s relationship with the clergy and the episcopate. Claudia Koonz maintained that as conflicts between Nazis and Catholics intensified, the chasm between Catholic lay women and the male hierarchy widened.⁷⁹⁷ Michael Phayer disagreed with Koonz when he wrote that Nazi Germany did not cause a separation of Catholic women “into a women’s world” but instead “promoted greater integration for them in the

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⁷⁹⁵ Winfried Süß is also a co-editor of a recent volume on medicine and National Socialism: Robert Jütte, Wolfgang U. Eckart, Hans-Walter Schmuhl, and Winfried Süß, eds., Medizin und Nationalsozialismus: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011). Women religious nurses, in particular their confrontation with the Nazis’ murder of the handicapped during World War II, has been the subject of several monographs. See: Eberhard Gabriel and Wolfgang Neugebauer, NS-Euthanasie in Wien (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000) and the works by Becker and Balbach on the Barmherzigen Schwestern in Munich and Münster, respectively.


⁷⁹⁷ In her examination of Catholic social workers in Nazi Germany, Koonz argued that the women were in the cross-fire of Nazi racial policies. For instance, social workers were required to report patients for forced sterilization. Koonz argued that the hierarchy left the women mainly to their own devices and did not offer firm guidance even when Elisabeth Zilken, the director of women in the Catholic Social Workers’ Association asked for it. Koonz concluded that Catholic mothers felt similarly abandoned when the regime moved against Catholic education and schools and they staged a “veritable mothers’ revolt.” Mothers Fatherland, 264 ff. (quote p. 288).
churches, and through them, in community affairs."\textsuperscript{798} He added that in Nazi Germany, Protestant women made significant progress toward gender equality in the church when they obtained eldership and full ministerial ordination.\textsuperscript{799}

The case study of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame reveals that Koonz and Phayer are both right about the alienation and integration of women in the Catholic Church in Hitler’s Germany. The Poor School Sisters did not rely on the hierarchy to solve their problems for them. But after 1937, the episcopate and clergy nonetheless took a heightened interest in the affairs and supervision of women religious in part because many of the sisters moved deeper into the Catholic milieu as a result of their reemployment. The position of Catholic women in the church did not improve in Nazi Germany. On the contrary, the interactions between women religious and the clergy sharpened the existing gender divide in the church.

War offered the Poor School Sisters new opportunities for reintegration into German society. After 1939, the line between women religious and secular women often blurred as both labored for the war effort in greater numbers. Yet the very conditions that offered the Poor School Sisters new chances to preserve their congregation also exacted a heavy toll on it.

War threatened to obscure the important division between sacred and the profane, and the hierarchy and congregational leaders were right to fear that women religious were slipping from their grasp into the secular realm. This final impact of the escalating church struggle and war on the congregation proved severe and lasting. It accelerated the Poor

\textsuperscript{798} Phayer, \textit{Protestant and Catholic Women}, 21.

\textsuperscript{799} Ibid.
School Sisters’ loss of candidates for sisterhood that began in 1936. The professional prospects of candidates vanished along with the congregation’s infrastructures and its educational mission at a time when the state organized girls and women on a large scale and offered them unprecedented access to the public sphere. Many young women simply could no longer imagine becoming a Catholic Sister in Hitler’s Germany.

5.2 1937 to 1939: Preparing for a Different Future

The looming loss of public and private schools in 1937 challenged the Poor School Sisters to redefine their mission. To give their new situation meaning, the sisters invoked familiar images of virtuous Christian suffering that had long sustained them in their fight against opponents. In the latter 1930s, the congregation’s leaders admonished sisters repeatedly that “now we must withstand the trial by fire…as we have so often and so full of enthusiasm promised the Lord.”800 Many sisters in fact welcomed the new challenges and changes.

Most Poor School Sisters could not remain in their communities. Even with the support of the local population, the women had to find employment elsewhere. For instance, of the nineteen sisters and candidates in Bad Tölz, only three remained behind.801 M. Corsina V. from Bad Tölz wrote to M. Almeda Schricker in 1937 that she looked forward to leaving the town and teaching “because nowadays one can no longer

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800 Schricker, Rundbrief, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

801 Bericht über den Abbau der Armen Schulschwestern an der Mädchen-Schule Bad Tölz, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
look forward to school.” M. Therese B. concurred. She remembered that “in the end one was glad no longer to work in schools.” M. Corsina and M. Therese joined the hundreds of Poor School Sisters in search for new employment.

The demand for laid-off Catholic sisters was strong. Although the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Nazi regime continued to worsen in 1937 with the publication of the papal encyclical *With Burning Concern* and commencement of the immorality trials against male religious, the Poor School Sisters faced few obstacles in their search for new employment. The Nazis never attempted to remove nuns from the people’s community as they did in the case of Jewish Germans. Within weeks of their dismissal, M. Almeda Schricker reported that all sisters either found new posts or had entered reeducation programs. Most Poor School Sisters retrained in four major areas: pastoral and social work, nursing, bookkeeping, and church organ playing. For instance, over one hundred sisters took bookkeeping courses and took positions in the offices of

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802 M. Corsina V. to Schricker, 22 April 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. The sisters in Mittenwald shared M. Corsina’s sentiment and called the loss of their schools and pending departure something akin to “salvation.” Bericht über den Abbaus Mittenwald, 15 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.


804 On the immorality trials, see Hockerts.

805 In 1937, the Nazis’ persecution of Jewish Germans continued unabatedly. An array of new laws forced Jews from German social and economic spheres. Ian Kershaw wrote that by autumn [1937], the climate was becoming more hostile than ever before for the Jewish population.” The notorious exhibit “The Eternal Jew” opened in November 1937 in the *Deutsches Museum* in Munich. The regime had longer-term plans to deal with the churches, and in 1937, Hitler had violent outbursts during which he declared that “Christianity was ripe for destruction (Untergang).” But the Nazis never accumulated sufficient political capital to follow through with these threats and in 1937, Hitler actually wished to tone down the church struggle in anticipation of a coming war. Kershaw, *Nemesis*, 39-42. See also: Friedländer, *Verfolgung*, 274 ff. In this climate of both aggression and restraint against the churches, the Poor School Sisters enjoyed a remarkable degree of mobility and opportunities in search of new employment.

806 Schricker, Rundbrief, 26 April 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
numerous Catholic organizations such as Caritas.\footnote{Between 1937 and 1939, 105 Poor School Sisters completed bookkeeping courses. Aside from the Caritas, sisters found employment in church tax office (Kirchensteueramt) of the archdiocese of Munich and Freising and with other German charitable organizations such as the Bonifatiusverein, and the Schutzengelverein. Schulung und Einsatz der Schwestern im Dritten Reich, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.} Retraining as nurses was also an obvious choice for unemployed Poor School Sisters. There was an acute shortage of nurses in Germany and the Nazis therefore left religious congregations dedicated to nursing in relative peace.\footnote{For instance, in July 1937, Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick expressed his concern about plans of some regional leaders to replace women religious nurses with secular NS-nurses. Frick feared that in light of the shortage of nurses, the results of such actions would be nothing short of disastrous and he therefore ordered the immediate scrapping of plans that would have led to the premature and overly hasty dismissal of women religious nurses from German hospitals. Frick to Landesregierungen, 30 July 1937, BArch B, R 5101, 23348, Bl. 229.}

The Bavarian Bishops’ Conference even suggested in 1937 that sisters transfer from teaching to nursing congregations.\footnote{The episcopate was of the opinion that it did not matter which congregation a woman belonged to and issued instructions to ease the transfer from one congregation to another. Bayer. Bischofskonferenz, Abbau der klösterlichen Lehrkräfte in Bayern, Beilage 1, 25 November 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.} The advice was perhaps well-meant but it also exposed the bishops’ lack of regard for the women’s professional training and for the strong ties most sisters had to their own congregation. Sisters often wrote that “being torn apart” from their fellow-sisters, whom they considered their family, was one of the most difficult consequences resulting from the loss of schools.\footnote{Although in the end, M. Corsina V. was not sorry to leave teaching, she was very sorry to leave her community. She wrote that “in a cloister community one is never alone and being torn apart is the most difficult part of the whole affair.” M. Corsina to Schricker, 5 February 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.} These familial ties were often strengthened when two or more biological sisters entered the congregation together.

Women also chose particular congregations and orders for their particular mission and for specific religious practices, most notably the observance of strict, limited, or no cloister.
Transferring congregations was therefore not a viable option for the women, and no Poor School Sister followed the episcopate’s call and joined a nursing congregation. M. Almeda Schricker also never encouraged them to do so.

A number of Poor School Sisters did, however, take nursing courses in Mallersdorf, Straubing, and Schweinfurt. But by 1942, only six sisters worked as certified nurses in hospitals.\(^{811}\) It was far more common for Poor School Sisters to take nursing courses to prepare for a new career as pastoral assistants in a parish that included in-home nursing care of sick parishioners.\(^{812}\) In addition to providing nursing services, a pastoral assistant’s task ranged from teaching in private Catholic Volksschulen, to attending to the needs of impoverished Catholic families, to decorating the local church and playing the church organ during mass.

Many sisters looked forward to their new and often challenging tasks. Pastoral assistantships in Protestant Prussia were among the most demanding positions the Poor School Sisters accepted, and in 1937, Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix responded with “youthful enthusiasm” to the call to labor “in the vineyard of our lord.”\(^{813}\) Following the loss of their teaching positions, both women volunteered to become pastoral assistants in Langensalza in Thuringia. The sisters left a detailed and often witty chronicle of their work in Protestant Germany that included the offering of nursing and pastoral services to

\(^{811}\) Statistics for previous years or of the number of sisters who took nursing courses were not available. Schulung und Einsatz der Schwestern im Dritten Reich, 1.8.1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{812}\) As of 15 September 1939, one hundred fifteen Poor School Sisters had taken positions as pastoral assistants in Catholic parishes. A number of sisters remained in their communities whereas others moved to new towns to take up their posts. Schulung und Einsatz der Schwestern im Dritten Reich, “Pfarreischwestern – Seelsorgehelferinnen, Stand vom 15 September 1939,” OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{813}\) Diasporabericht von Langensalza, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
the minority Catholic population in approximately fifty area villages. Although they looked forward to their new assignment, Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix were the first to admit that the “task was large, [and] our knowledge and skills” for it “very limited.”

The women therefore entered training programs alongside numerous Poor School Sisters to learn new skills for the work ahead.

The retraining of sisters differed in rigor and the women enjoyed varying degrees of success in their endeavors. Most women, like Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix, took their shortcomings in stride and reported about their failures and achievements with much humor. In addition to performing general social work in Langensalza, Sister Alfera was to act as the visiting nurse and Sister Mediatrix as the church organist. Both women were teachers and neither had ever touched a syringe or played a single note on an organ. Sister Alfera therefore became “a student in the hospital in Kösching and learned to bind wounds and to give shots with zeal; her transformation from teacher to nurse was to be completed within 14 days.”

Meanwhile Sister Mediatrix set out every evening to practice on a nearby church organ because in a few short weeks she was to play a high mass in Langensalza. Neither of them made much progress. Upon their departure from Munich to Langensalza in January 1937, the women reported that “in spite of the seriousness of the matter, the fact that all Sister Alfera knew of her new profession was

814 Ibid.

815 For instance, a number of sisters entered residential nursing programs in various hospitals owned and run by religious congregations. A group of sisters training in a hospital in Schweinfurt in 1938 wrote with much enthusiasm about the joy they were taking in their new tasks even though their day began at 5:45 in the morning and did not end until 9:30 in the evening. M. Georgia to Schricker, 11 September 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

816 Diasporabericht Langensalza, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
how to administer shots and all the organist knew about her organ and the high
mass….was the solemn Deo-gratias, caused much hilarity all around.”817 Undaunted, the
women set off for Thuringia in civilian clothing.

A music instructor and examiner for the diocese Munich and Freising was less
amused about some Poor School Sisters’ apparent ineptitude with the church organ. He
warned M. Almeda Schricker in a letter that he had refrained from giving one of the
students, the Poor School Sister M. Richildis, a negative evaluation because “due to her
advanced age she was hardly suitable for an organist’s position.”818 He urged M. Almeda
Schricker not to employ Sister Richildis as a church musician “because we don’t want to
make an enemy of the Reich music chamber!”819 Although the state at times interfered
with the reemployment of sisters, it was unlikely that a representative of the Reich music
chamber ever heard a Poor School Sister play organ.820 M. Ludmilla, who worked as a
pastoral assistant in Hecklingen in Saxony in 1937, had the proper perspective on her
lack of music skills. She wrote to M. Almeda Schricker that she did not fear playing the
organ during mass because the parishioners “scream [plärren] so loudly when they sing I
am certain they don’t hear any of my mistakes.”821 As for Sister Mediatrix, she too made
up in audacity what she lacked in ability but after hearing her play the organ for the first

817 Ibid.,

818 Diözesan-Cäcilienverein München und Freising to Schricker, 29 September 1938, OAAS M,
Drittes Reich.

819 Ibid.

820 In 1942, the Regierungspräsident in Ansbach forbade the Poor School Sister M. Bonita Stangl
from working as a visiting nurse in Schillingsfürst on account of her “political reliability.” Dippolt to
Landrat in Rothenburg o/T, 17 April 1942, BArch B, R 5101, 23348, Bl. 286.

821 M. Ludmilla to Schricker, 19 November 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
time, the local priest in Langensalza at once hired the most accomplished organist in the region to give her lessons.\textsuperscript{822}

Once they overcame their initial difficulties, the majority of Poor School Sisters performed their new tasks with skill and dedication. It was also not unusual for sisters to return to the classroom in private Catholic Volksschulen in the diaspora. For instance, the Poor School Sisters took over schools in Weida in Thuringia, in Schöningen and Schwanebeck, both in Saxony, and in Demmin, Pomerania. The work in these regions was challenging because many Catholics there were poor. For instance, M. Theresia D., a teacher from Bavaria, moved to Demmin in 1937. Most of the Catholics in the region were Polish workers attached to large estates, and for this reason M. Almeda Schricker also sent a Polish-speaking sister from Breslau along with her. M. Theresia reported that “the school work is almost like laboring in a quarry. Some of the children look very neglected, pale, and sickly, and they are often conscripted into agricultural work.”\textsuperscript{823} When M. Caritina G. made her first home visit to a Catholic family in Lemgo in Westphalia to inquire after truant children, she wrote that

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at first glance it became clear to me why [the children missed school] – Dirt and disorder…The stench made me nauseous. On
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{822} When Sister Alfera expressed doubts about her limited abilities as a nurse, the priest suggested she just pretend she knew what she was doing. Diasporabericht Langensalza, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{823} M. Theresia D., Demmin, ca. 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. The sisters usually thought their Bavarian schools superior to Prussian schools, and M. Ludmilla expressed the opinion of many of her fellow-sisters when she wrote to M. Almeda Schricker in November 1937 that “you simply cannot imagine how North German schools are run. It is a pity that we are so thorough in Bavaria. Here people make themselves much less work which makes things much nicer for them.” M. Ludmilla to Schricker, 19 November 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
the wall a cross, below it a picture of Hitler….the woman too, so dirty in dress and body. 824

The sister kept visiting Catholic families and in time she came to appreciate the difficult situation of mothers and children. M. Caritina’s extensive work in Lemgo is an excellent example of the success of the Poor School Sisters’ mission in Prussia. M. Caritina took considerable initiative in reviving the local branch of the Caritas to provide aid for needy families. She made it a point to visit and assess the needs of every family in her district. In addition to her work with school children, she also started a number of spiritual and support groups for girls, women, and young families and later for refugees and soldiers. In particular during the latter war years her management and leadership skills were impressive as she often organized the housing, provisioning, and spiritual care for countless refugees.

As pastoral assistants, the Poor School Sisters’ spheres of activity and influence actually widened. The in-home nursing, pastoral, and social work many sisters now performed in addition to teaching required the women to leave the confines of their schools and cloister on a daily basis. The Poor School Sisters also moved to regions in Germany where heretofore no sisters had been active and the arrival of women religious usually created a small sensation. For instance, M. Heriberta reported from Weida in Thuringia that “a walk through town is still like running the gauntlet for the sisters because they wear the order’s habit and women religious remain a rarity in Thuringia.” 825

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824 M. Caritina G., Diasporabericht, Lemgo, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

825 Diasporabericht, Weida, 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

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Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix caused similar commotions whenever they ventured outside in Langensalza in their habits, which was often. The women commented that it would have really been worth the effort to capture the scenes that occurred in the streets when we made an appearance….After all, we were the first women religious to be seen in this region…But at least we are still worth looking at.\textsuperscript{826}

The presences of Catholic sisters challenged Protestant and Catholic Germans in Prussia to adjust to the unfamiliar presence of women religious. At the same time, their experiences in the German diaspora also expanded the horizon of the Bavarian sisters.

Although the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame retained a remarkable presence in the German public sphere after 1937, they also moved deeper into the Catholic milieu. At that point, they often no longer defined themselves as agents of the state but \textit{vis-à-vis} the state. To the sisters, their Catholic mission had taken on a new urgency. The women’s continued and even heightened importance in local spiritual economies emerges from the chronicle of Ravensburg. It reveals that the Poor School Sisters’ traditional mission of preparing active and loyal Catholics was not in the least diminished with the closure of their schools. The sisters in Ravensburg began hosting regular retreats for large groups of youth, men, and women. For instance, in January 1940, the sisters hosted 165 young men \textit{(Jungmänner)}, in February that year, two hundred mothers of children preparing for first communion met in Ravensburg, and on 27 March 1940, ninety Catholic high school graduates spent the day in the cloister.\textsuperscript{827} With each retreat, the sisters expressed their

\textsuperscript{826} Diasporabericht Langensalza, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{827} Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 14 January 1940, 14 February 1940, and 27 March 1940, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

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hope that they were preparing “an advance guard,” “leaders,” and “missionaries” for their cause.  

The Poor School Sisters’ conviction of having entered the eternal battle of good against evil now becomes evident in their writing. For instance, on 21 January 1939, the chronologist for Ravensburg recorded: “Catholic Action! Our youth needs female leaders, who can capture the great masses and lead them into the camp of the good [das Lager des Guten].” In 1940, the sisters wrote that “the enemies are gnashing their teeth” over the success of the retreats for Catholic men, women and youth. The sisters were not imagining the opposition of the regime to their religious activities. Situation reports by the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) show that the Nazis viewed such activities as subversive, in particular after the outbreak of war in September 1939. In February 1941, the regional office of the Sicherheitsdienst in Würzburg wrote the following about the activities of the Catholic Church:

> The Catholic Church continues to secure a loyal following for itself for the Endkampf (final battle)...[For the church] war is but an episode...that must be exploited because of the widespread opinion that at the moment the government’s hands are more or less tied and ‘measures against the church’ (‘kirchenfeindliche Maßnahmen) create too much public unrest...The church works with great cunning by making it appear its primary concern is the maintenance of religious life. With the holding of missions, religious exercises, and get-togethers for religious edification they win women and with them the family. Without speaking explicitly

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828 Ibid. Michael Phayer argued that in Nazi Germany Catholic lay women moved deeper into the Catholic subculture and among other things expressed their disagreement with Nazi racial and sexual ideas of women by emphasizing the virginal “Marian ideal of womanhood. Phayer, Catholic/Protestant Women, 61.

829 Chronik von Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 21 January 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich

830 Ibid, 21 May 1940.
of politics or National Socialism, the strongest aversion to the National Socialist state is spreading in such circles.  

The Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg too received visits from the police but their missionary zeal remained undiminished. They wrote in May 1940 that the Nazis could not bear their success and “our cloister has been blacklisted on account of opening our doors for religious exercises.”  

The women dismissed the news and asserted that “it did not matter” [macht nichts], because “the Lord our God watches over us and always holds a protective hand over our house.” Still, even their enthusiasm and pragmatism could not obscure a number of difficulties the Poor School Sisters encountered in their new endeavors.

After the loss of their schools and later after the outbreak of war, the Poor School Sisters were in danger of losing much of their traditional institutional independence from the clergy. Many sisters now found themselves under the direct and unfamiliar supervisions of priests and bishops. The interactions between the sisters and the clergy reveal a number of deep-seated gendered assumptions the latter held about women in the church. The very job offers the Poor School Sisters received from the clergy and the laity reflected misogynist attitudes toward the women. Prospective employers consistently failed to acknowledge the sisters as educated professionals who needed to earn a living wage. They assumed instead that as women, the sisters were well-suited to perform all kinds of subservient and low-paying domestic work and other tasks.

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831 Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, Lagebericht, 28 February 1941, StA W, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.

832 Chronik von Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 21 May 1941, OAAS M, Drittes Reich

833 Ibid.
Many Germans were eager to employ an out-of-work woman religious teacher. Following the first wave of dismissals of Catholic sisters in 1937, interested clergymen as well as lay persons sent numerous inquiries to the motherhouse in Munich about hiring a Poor School Sister. In November 1937, the priest Rudolf P. of Gelbelsee asked for a sister to keep his house. He wondered if there was among the sisters “an idealist who would keep my house without pay”; he further wished for a sister with some musical talent. The rector of a missionary seminary in Freising sent a request in August 1937 for sisters to take over the seminary’s kitchen. He was in need of three to four persons, and “of those at least one has to be a perfect cook and housekeeper.” The rector hoped that unemployed women religious teachers would be amenable to his offer.

Their reputation of absolute trustworthiness added to sisters’ attractiveness as employees. For this reasons, a considerable number of aristocrats also requested to employ one or more Poor School Sisters as maids and governesses. Duchess Mengersen inquired on 13 June 1941 after “a parlor maid or a simple spinster,” adding that “above all, I look for a spotless and religious character because the person occupies a position of absolute trust.” The duchess further wished for a “healthy person from a good family” who was also willing to do the entire house cleaning. The nearly blind Freiin von Pfeufer too sought “an educated sister for a position that required the utmost trust.”

834 Probst to Schricker, 16 November 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
835 Missionsseminar der Pallettiner to Schricker, 24 August 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
836 Mengersen to Schricker, 17 June 1941, OAAS M, Drittes Reich
837 Ibid.
838 v. Pfeufer to Schricker, 7 April 1944, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
request reminiscent of the *Sound of Music*, the recent widower and businessman Julius Hänssler wrote to M. Almeda Schricker in May 1941 in search of a sister who could “replace the Catholic mother to my sons, loyally guard my home, and …act as my trusted counselor.” Mr. Hänssler hoped such a “creature” that “radiated warmth” and “possessed the strength to spur us on in our fight” could be found among the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame. Besides illustrating gendered presuppositions about sisters among the clergy and the laity, these requests once more reveal to what extent the Nazis’ efforts to exclude women religious from society had failed. Instead of practicing the exclusion of sisters, many Germans were instead compelled to invite sisters into their most intimate spheres, their private homes.

M. Almeda Schricker declined all of these offers of employment because in her view sisters should not live in private homes. Many women religious teachers also lacked the necessary domestic skills. Contrary to popular assumptions, the women were not “natural” cooks and housekeepers. Most had never learned to run a household because the very success of the congregation depended on the division of labor so that women religious teachers could dedicate themselves full-time to their jobs. The women relied on designated lay sisters to do the housework and cooking. When M. Caritina G. arrived

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839 Hänssler to Schricker, 6 May 1941, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

840 Ibid.

841 The royal school commission of Bavaria recognized this important division of labor as early as 1838 in an assessment about the nascent congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame when it wrote that “the female teacher can devote her full and undivided attention to her profession because it is her only task – she remains undisturbed by domestic matters and worries…She is not forced or inclined to divide her strength or time... Königliche Bayerische Lokal-Schulkommission München, 12 July 1838, Sta M, RA 56511.
in Lemgo in April 1941, she was at a loss when she saw her new apartment and asked herself: “How shall I suddenly acquire housewifely talents?” She pondered that if in another era women religious are once again sent out to do field work (*Außendienst*), would it not be better to first familiarize them with the earthly things of life? So that they can at least make coffee or cook cream of wheat for dinner? …Sisters living in community have no idea how much trouble earthly life is! Other sisters reported similar difficulties. When in 1937 several Poor School Sisters from Geiselnöring moved together to nearby Straubing they wrote that because none of them really knew how to cook, all their meals were very simple. The sisters managed in time.

The clergy’s mistaken belief about the Poor School Sisters’ aptitude to perform certain womanly tasks could strain the parties’ relationship. For the first time in the congregation’s history, many sisters now fell under the direct and unfamiliar supervision of the clergy. The sisters had always been adamant not to involve priests in their internal affairs but in the case of pastoral assistants, parish priests were in charge of most aspects of the sisters’ work. M. Caritina G. in Lemgo expressed how strange it was for Poor School Sisters to answer to a priest and not to a superior sister. She recorded her first impressions of the local priest, whom she referred to not by name but as her boss (*Chef*),

842 M. Caritina G., Diasporachronik von Lemgo, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

843 Ibid.

844 Bericht über den Abbau der klösterlichen Lehrkräfte in Geiselnöring, 1 March 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

845 It was contractually agreed on that “the parish priest stipulates the sister’s work.” The sisters could only take on tasks that were compatible with the position of a parish sister “with the explicit permission of the parish priest.” Vertrag zwischen dem Dompfarrer Johannes Kraus in Eichstätt und dem Generalat der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. F. in München, 1 December 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

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upon her arrival in Lemgo in April 1941. “I was just like a wire under high voltage,” M. Caritina wrote, because “until then I had only experienced priests at the altar or at the lectern.”

The strong personalities of the sister and the priest soon led to difficulties. M. Caritina called her new boss the best “teacher in humility” she had ever encountered. The latter soon became annoyed by the sister’s initiative and independence and tried to rein her in whenever possible. M. Caritina reported that he accused her of only wanting “to be seen in public,” and instructed her to work in silence [Stille], to leave the children to their parents … we must be careful because of the officials [Behörden]. Until now I always had peace – because the Gestapo does not want that we lead the youth, so just let it be. Besides, you are only here to assist me…

M. Caritina was indeed arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo in November 1941. The sister spent almost two months in prison in Bielefeld for assisting an acquaintance in the copying of sermons by Bishop von Galen.

Priests usually expected sisters to work quietly and invisibly in the background in accordance with their instructions. In 1943, K. Barthels, the priest of Mürsbach near Würzburg, complained to M. Almeda Schricker about M. Konradine “who showed herself very headstrong and accepted corrections only with difficulties.”

Even priests

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846 M. Caritina G., Diasporachronik von Lemgo, OAAS M, Drittes Reich

847 Ibid.

848 Ibid.

849 M. Caritina let an acquaintance use her copier to duplicate sermons by Cardinal von Galen. She insisted that she did not help in this endeavor and only granted the use of her equipment. Ibid.

850 Barthels to Schricker, 24 November 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. The small community in Mürsbach near Würzburg caused M. Almeda Schricker many headaches. Besides M. Konradine, who worked as a visiting nurse, one other sister by the name of M. Aqualina was assigned to the small town. M.
who held the labor of the Poor School Sisters in high esteem and resisted their recall in 1945 shared the sentiment that the women should work humbly in the background.\textsuperscript{851}

Most priests did not view the Poor School Sisters as professionals and colleagues whose social work and teaching constituted a full-time job. Instead, the clergy expected the sisters also to perform all kinds of menial work alongside their assigned duties. For instance, in 1937 the teachers M. Heriberta and M. Amanda took over the private Catholic Volksschule in Weida in Thuringia. Previously, teaching was the women’s full-time occupation but in Weida the sisters also had to take care of the mending of all church vestments (\textit{Kirchenwäsche}), play the church organ, and offer lessons in sewing and crafting (\textit{Handarbeitsunterricht}).\textsuperscript{852}

Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix were fortunate that the priest in Langensalza supported and encouraged their work and gave them free rein in the management of their

Almeda was well aware that the problems in Mürsbach were not just M. Konradine’s fault, and she wrote in 1943 that “the sisters are completely under the yoke [of the priest and his housekeeper] who jealously watch the behavior and work of the sisters. The latter cannot escape the surveillance and critique of them because they live in the rectory.” M. Aquilina found her new housekeeping and sacristan duties that included decorating and cleaning the church as well as the regular laundering of church linens monotonous and dissatisfying. The overbearing priest K. Barthels added to the woes of the sister who wrote to her general superior in 1943 that only “with trepidation do I start [decorating the church] every Saturday, because I know I do not satisfy.” M. Almeda Schricker expressed grave concern in 1943 about the heavy workload of both M. Aquilina and her fellow-sister M. Konradine and she recalled the sisters soon thereafter. Schricker to M. Austina, 27 October 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich and M. Aquilina to Schricker, 28 September 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{851} In July 1945, the priest of Wolfenbüttel near Hannover reflected on the five-year tenure of several Poor School Sisters in his parish. He wrote that only a Catholic sister who “understood how to remain in the background” even when she achieved noteworthy successes could attend to the important albeit “small and smallest things” in a parish that “must not be overlooked.” Kath. Pfarramt Wolfenbüttel to Schricker, 13 July 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{852} M. Amanda was actually an excellent organist who “delighted church attendees with her soft and flowing play.” Although the sisters wrote that in light of their workload they had little time for home sickness they had it better than many other pastoral assistants because after a while M. Almeda Schricker sent a lay sister to Weida, Sister Publia, who took care of the household and cooking. Bericht über die im Jahre 1937 von uns übernommenen Diasporastationen. Weida, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
The sisters’ workload too was heavy. They were responsible for the teaching of religious lessons and crafts to children and adults, ambulatory nursing services, the parish pastoral care that included home visits to nearly one hundred families, a monthly trip to a nearby prison, the organization of weekly social events for girls and women, and the running of the local Caritas chapter. The report also revealed that Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix had to perform sacristan duties that entailed the weekly cleaning of the church and laundering of the church linens. Every day, the sisters also had to take care of incidental clerical tasks in the parish offices. The new situations of many sisters were far from ideal, but despite the inevitable drudgery and recalcitrant clergymen, it appears that the majority of women made the best of things and even thrived in their new posts. They enjoyed both the challenge and variety of their social and pastoral work. When in 1947, M. Caritina was recalled from Lemgo to return to the classroom, she found it difficult to obey.

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853 M. Ludmilla in Hecklingen (Saxony) also had a very good relationship with the local priest, his mother, and his housekeeper that made her stay in the town and her teaching at the local Catholic Volksschule a pleasant and fulfilling experience. M. Ludmilla’s letters also reveal a rare insight into what the local priest in Hecklingen thought of Catholic sisters. He and M. Ludmilla had a good laugh when the former admitted that he feared the arrival of the sister. He thought: “What will the cloister woman look like [in civilian clothing]? She will probably be old fashioned in a long black skirt and all buttoned up…” The priest admitted that he was pleasantly surprised by M. Ludmilla’s fashionable appearance and worldliness. The sister further surprised the priest with the fact that she had a driver’s license and the latter was happy to regularly loan her his car. M. Ludmilla to Schricker, 17 December 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

854 Arbeitsbericht für Langensalza, 13 February 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

855 Ibid.

856 M. Caritina G., Diasporachronik von Lemgo, OAAS M, Drittes Reich
5.3 The Poor School Sisters in Time of War, 1939-1942

By 1939 the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame was an organization in transition. The outbreak of World War II added new challenges and accelerated the changes already underway since 1937 in the sisters’ communities. The sisters in Ravensburg mirrored the mood of many Germans when they wrote of their shock (Schrecken) on 1 September 1939 upon learning that Germany had invaded Poland “because the years of the world war remain too vivid in our memories.”857 After the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland and the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, Germans were used to swift and uncontested foreign policy successes.

The Nazis depended on the churches’ backing of the war effort. World War II also promised a new Burgfrieden and the easing of tensions between the Nazi state and the churches. Hitler indeed decreed that “no further action should be taken against the Evangelical und Catholic Churches for the duration of the war.”858 Goebbels in turn brought pressure on church leaders to declare their unconditional support of the war.859 In an often-quoted assertion of patriotism and support, the episcopate stated in September 1939 that, “in this decisive hour we encourage and admonish our Catholic soldiers in obedience to the Führer, to do their duty and to be ready to sacrifice their whole

857 Months earlier, on 23 May 1939, officers of the Wehrmacht inspected the Poor School Sisters’ facilities in Ravensburg and announced that should there be war the house would be a field hospital. The sisters were surprised and asked: “Will there be war? Only time will tell.” Ravensburg Chronik, 1938-1958, 1 September 1939 and 23 May 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. On 3 September 1939 in Berlin, the American journalist William Shirer observed that “in 1914 I believe, the excitement in Berlin on the first day of the world war was tremendous. Today, no excitement, no hurrahs, no cheering, no throwing of flowers, no war fever, no war hysteria. Qtd. in Jeremy Noakes, ed., Nazism, vol 4, The German Home Front in World War II (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998), #1260, 510.

858 Qtd. in Conway, Persecution, 232.

859 Ibid., 233
person. The bishops’ support of the war was consistent with their previous stance toward the regime. Historian Ernst Christian Helmreich observed that “a Catholic hierarchy that had given thanks and approval of Hitler’s major foreign policy moves ever since his assumption of power could hardly be expected to change course when the marching began.” The Poor School Sisters also declared their support of the war.

On 10 September 1939, M. Almeda Schricker announced her congregation’s readiness to assist in the German war effort “with the love for sacrifice and the willingness to do one’s duty” as prescribed by the tenets of the Christian faith. Catholics’ support of World War II raises difficult questions about their complicity with the Nazi regime. This conundrum was not lost on the historical actors. In 1939 M.

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860 Here quoted in Lewy, 226. See also Conway, Persecution, 234.

861 Ernst Christian Helmreich, The German Churches under Hitler. Background, Struggle, and Epilogue (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 347. Konrad Repgen wrote that although they were anything but enthusiastic about the war, both the hierarchy and the laity war equally far away from rejecting the war. The “fundamental right of the state of wage war was accepted.” Repgen, “Deutsche Bischöfe,” 427. Wilhelm Damberg found that, unlike in 1914, in its pronouncements in 1939 about Christians’ duty to support the war, the episcopate did not include “an ethic qualification of [the war] as ‘just.’” On Catholic theology and war, in particular the “just war,” according to church teachings see Damberg, “Krieg,” 204-215 (quote, 210).

862 Schricker, Rundbrief, 10 September 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

863 The episcopate’s support of the Nazis’ unjust war of aggression in particular remains a highly charged topic in the historiography. The contentious disputes center on interpretations of the Catholic hierarchy’s role in war as either allies or opponents of Hitler and the Nazis. Guenter Lewy argued that Hitler rewarded the church’s patriotism and support of the regime with a truce that led to an improvement of the relationship between the church and the state “despite occasional new seizures of church property.” Lewy also concluded that Hitler could not have waged without the Catholic hierarchy and laity’s support. Lewy, 252 ff (quote p. 254). Gordon Zahn concurred with Lewy, 198. Equally critical of the Catholic Church’s involvement in World War II was Heinrich Missalla. Heinrich Missalla, Für Volk und Vaterland. Die kirchliche Kriegshilfe im Zweiten Weltkrieg (Königstein: Athenäum Verlag, 1978). Konrad Repgen disagreed. He argued that the episcopate never formed an alliance with the regime even during the war. On the contrary, Repgen concluded that even in light of escalating attacks on the church by the regime, the hierarchy managed to keep its distance from the regime for the duration of the war and remained the “faithful custodians” (Wächter) of the church. According to Repgen, the episcopate’s responses to war and even to the Holocaust were prudent and defensible. The bishops’ were “constant witnesses to Christianity” in war and as a consequence, the totalitarian regime of Hitler viewed the “unavailability” of the bishops as resistance and fought it accordingly, “Weltkrieg.” Heinz Hürten concurred with Repgen’s central points.
Almeda Schricker distinguished between service to the Nazi regime and duty to Germany when she wrote that, "despite all the heavy burdens we have had to carry in years past, we are ready to do our duty for the fatherland." 864 Like the hierarchy, the Poor School Sisters were careful to phrase their commitment to the war in terms of loyalty and responsibility to the fatherland. 865 The often-made distinction between the Nazi regime and the German fatherland was of course problematic. Antonia Leugers has argued that Catholics’ conviction they were fighting for Germany and not for National Socialism created a “discrepancy between factual complicity (Mittäterschaft) and subjectively experienced innocence.” 866 Catholics’ belief in their innocence was heightened when the Burgfrieden proved a short-lived chimera and conflicts between the church and the state soon escalated during World War II.

864 Chronologische Notizen, 1939, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.


866 Antonia Leugers, “‘Opfer für eine grosse und heilige Sache’. Katholisches Kriegserleben im nationalsozialistischen Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg,” in Friedhelm Boll, ed., Volksreligiosität und Kriegserleben (Münster: Lit, 1997), 160. The patriotism Germans felt in 1939 even in the absence of enthusiasm and outright opposition to the regime is difficult to comprehend for modern readers. Victor Klemperer’s perplexing entry into his diary on 4 September 1939 perhaps illuminates this patriotism. Klemperer who was considered Jewish according to the Nuremberg laws wrote: “Terrible, [sic] that it’s war again – but yet one is so patriotic, when I saw a battery leaving yesterday, I wanted more than anything to go with them!” Victor Klemperer, I Will Bear Witness 1933-1941. A Diary of the Nazi Years (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 308
During the initial years of the conflict, the impact of war on the Poor School Sisters in Germany was both distant and immediate. In 1939 and 1940, Germans experienced World War II as a string of fast and seemingly easy victories over Poland, Norway, Denmark, and finally the Low Countries and France that catapulted Hitler to the height of his power and popularity. The fronts were far away and on the occasion of their first “war Christmas” in 1939, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg wrote that “one did not notice much of a difference,” and “the holiday passed full of joy and in quiet domestic peace.” When M. Thekla encountered wounded and disfigured soldiers in a German field hospital in 1942, she reflected on the early years of war and wrote that “until now we have only experienced war in fairy tales…Oh, the war is something terrible.” The Nazis made a concerted effort to minimize the impact of war on the home front. To keep up morale the regime kept rations high and did not mobilize the full labor potential of women. The Nazis’ reluctance to draw married women into the


868 Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 26 December 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

869 M. Thekla to Schricker, 1 February 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

870 The Nazis kept rations high by plundering the rest of Europe and relied on forced laborers to replace German men in the labor market. Weinberg, World at Arms, 471 ff. On the plundering of Europe for the benefit of Germans, see Aly, Hitler’s Beneficiaries. Matthew Stibbe made the point that German women took rationing in stride in 1939 because they were already used to certain shortages of consumer goods from years past. The Nazis also made sure that luxury items such as alcohol, tobacco, and cosmetics remained available. After the conquest of France in 1940, French cosmetics were in particular high demand. Matthew Stibbe, Women in the Third Reich (London: Arnold, 2003), 152-153. The Poor School Sisters feared that the introduction of rationing in October 1939 was an indication of a long war. They wrote: “One grows wise from past mistakes and learned from the World War. Now everything is being
workforce after 1 September 1939 has helped to sustain the myth of German women’s insignificant and apolitical contributions to the war effort.\textsuperscript{871}

New research shows that German women’s labor was important both in the war and in the implementation of Nazi racial policies. Franka Maubach found that their designation as “helpers” fed post-war clichés that the regime only mobilized reluctant German women as a last resort in 1943 when defeat was already near. In that scenario, women were poor and temporary substitutes for male labor.\textsuperscript{872} Maubach disagreed and argued that their status as “helpers” was a “euphemism and cover” for German women’s real and substantial participation in war.\textsuperscript{873}

Women, many of them young and single, contributed to the war effort from the start. Nazi organizations such as the League of German Girls and the \textit{Arbeitsdienst} (labor service) encouraged and mandated their participation in the conflict. According to Matthew Stibbe about 14.5 million girls and young women were part of the German war economy in some capacity by 1943.\textsuperscript{874} Although many young women volunteered, the Nazis had no intentions on relying solely on volunteerism and as early as 1935, the state rationed right away…Does one count on a long war?” Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 20 October 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{871} Richard Evans wrote the increase of the female workforce after 1 September 1939 was miniscule and that “the actual number of German women in paid employment only increased from 14,626,000 in May 1939 to 14,897,000 in September 1944. Employers simply found it much easier to rely on foreign labor.” Evans, \textit{War}, 361.

\textsuperscript{872} Maubach concluded that the fact that women in war were designated as “helpers” has long prevented serious research of women’s war work. The idea that German women labored mostly reluctantly in masculine occupations during the war also facilitated women’s post-war retreat into the apolitical private realm. Franka Maubach, “Expansion weiblicher Hilfe. Zur Erfahrungsgeschichte von Frauen im Kriegsdienst,” in Steinbacher, 95.

\textsuperscript{873} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{874} Stibbe, 120.
passed legislation that made women’s war service compulsory. Women did not just fill posts vacated by men called to the front, they also occupied specific feminine spheres in their own right in the health care system, the Wehrmacht, the police and SS, and in newly conquered territories.

Women religious Catholic congregations became an integral part of the German war effort almost immediately. Between 1939 and 1944, 69% or 69,862 of 101,125 women religious were employed in German field hospitals or in the health care system at large. The war work Catholic sisters performed illustrates to what extent the regime depended on the specialized labor of women from the onset. Women religious were not

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875 Historian Ursula von Gersdorff wrote that legislation passed in May 1935 (the Wehrgesetz) stipulated, however, that unlike during World War I, women’s participation in a future war was no longer just voluntary. The Wehrgesetz from 21 Mai 1935 read: “Im Krieg ist über die Wehrpflicht hinaus jeder deutsche Mann und jede deutsche Frau zur Dienstleistung für das Vaterland verpflichtet.” The Wehrgesetz was vague about the exact nature of women’s war service, but two implementation decrees from 1938 and 1939 allowed the regime to draw women into the workforce “zur Bekämpfung öffentlicher Notstände und zur Vorbereitung ihrer Bekämpfung.” A third and popular way to draw young, unmarried into the workforce during World War II was the “Erlaβ über den weiteren Kriegseinsatz des Reichsarbeitsdienstes für die weibliche Jugend” from 29 July 1941 that built on the decree for mandatory labor service of female youth from 4 September 1939. The initial six months of labor service could now be extended for an additional six months “Kriegshilfsdienst.” Ursula v. Gersdorff, Frauen im Kriegsdienst 1914-1945 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1969), 49-50.


877 Pressemittleilung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, 29 August 2000, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
replacements for men. They possessed specific skills, strategic facilities, and well-organized institutional networks that the state could mobilize without much effort.

Catholic sisters’ war work also went beyond their traditional roles as nurses. The Wehrmacht did indeed designate many congregational facilities as field hospitals in 1939. But during the blitzkrieg, the number of German casualties was much lower than anticipated and the Wehrmacht soon began closing field hospitals and redeployed the staff. For example, on 17 September 1939 the military opened a field hospital in the Poor School Sisters’ community in Ravensburg. Forty-two medics and three officers moved in before the Wehrmacht closed it again one month later without having housed a single patient. Even without the anticipated need of field hospitals, many of the Poor School Sisters’ communities were fully engaged in war work from 1939 onward.

The state used buildings owned by religious congregations for a variety of purposes. From 1 September 1939 to 31 December 1940 the state utilized thirty-nine of the Poor School Sisters’ larger properties in Bavaria. Only five of the sisters’ houses

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878 Maubach, “Expansionen,” 98.

879 The sisters welcomed the medics and officers and were sorry to see them go because “they were such dear people.” As there were no patients to care for, the men kept themselves busy in the sisters’ house and “painted, worked in the garden, repaired the roof of the glass house.” They did all kinds of carpentry work for the women. In anticipation of the conquest of France, the sisters in Amberg were instructed to open a field hospital within three days and the first patients arrived on 23 May 1940. But in this case too, the field hospital only remained open for a few months and closed on 25 October 1940 and on 10 November 1940, Hitler Youth groups from Hamburg marched in to the beating of drums. During this time, the facility in Amberg still housed the sisters’ former Lyzeum that was now in possession of the city of Amberg. (Amberg once again became a field hospital in January 1942.) One of the few of the Poor School Sisters’ houses that actually received a transport of wounded in 1939 where the sisters in Schillingsfürst who received notice to ready their house in three days to care for 120 wounded soldiers Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 17 September 1939 and 20 October 1939, and Chronologische Notizen - Amberg, 1940, and Chronologische Notizen, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, 1939, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

880 Annette Mertens wrote that the history of Catholic institutions in war was in large part a narrative of foreign usage (Fremdnutzung) of their facilities by party and state.” Annette Mertens, “NS-Kirchenpolitik im Krieg. Der Klostersturm und die Fremdnutzung katholischer Einrichtungen 1940-1942,” in Hummel and Kösters, 245.
became field hospitals. Twelve communities sheltered and fed German troops and command staff on the way to the front, and one house took over the feeding of prisoners of war. The Wehrmacht used the sisters’ school in Miesbach as a weapon’s chamber and chancellery and “the garden as a field kitchen where 200 to 300 men stood attention every day.”

A number of school rooms in Moosburg served as barracks for the guards of the nearby prisoner of war camp. The sisters sheltered resettled ethnic Germans in seven facilities, and fourteen houses served the Kinderlandverschickung (child evacuee program). In addition, the congregation listed over one hundred of its other smaller communities who performed a variety of “important military tasks” (wehrwichtige Aufgaben), such as the Poor School Sisters in Scheyern who manufactured crosses and rosaries for soldiers at the front.

It was difficult to determine where women religious’ voluntary service ended and coercion began. Germans were obligated to put their resources at the disposal of the state in times of war. The Reichleistungsgesetz from 1 September 1939 spelled out the “duties of the nation in war.” The law granted far-reaching powers to a number of state agencies besides the Wehrmacht to demand expansive services from civilians and corporate entities. Based on the Reichleistungsgesetz, the regime made extensive use of

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881 Chronologische Notizen 1939, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAA M, Drittes Reich.

882 Ibid.

883 Ibid.

884 Ibid. and Chronologische Notizen, 1942, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.


buildings owned by religious congregations. State agencies such as the Kinderlandverschickung (child evacuation program) and, of course, the Wehrmacht could confiscate private buildings even without consent of the owners. The state was obligated to compensate property owners and the latter had the right to retain for their own use the necessary living and work spaces. The regime’s demand for buildings was large, and by 1944 the state had lawfully confiscated 1,603 cloisters.\textsuperscript{887}

By 1940, the Poor School Sisters struggled to accommodate mounting demands for their facilities by the state. Competition among officials for space was fierce and it was not unusual for several agencies to occupy the same building. In 1942 the cloister in Würzburg-Heidingsfeld housed both a camp of over one hundred ethnic Germans from Poland and Lithuania as well as a facility for young German women from the labor service.\textsuperscript{888} At the same time, the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, Hitler Youth, Kinderlandverschickung, and Heinrich Himmler’s Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle all competed with each other for use of the Poor School Sisters’ building in Weichs.\textsuperscript{889}

The constant battle over their buildings added to the Poor School Sisters’ anxieties over their future. The chronicle of the sisters in Ravensburg reveals the unsettling effects of ongoing efforts by various Nazi officials to seize all or part of their buildings even after the Wehrmacht had moved in. In May 1940, the Germans invaded France, and military officers informed the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg that same

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{887} Pressemitteilung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, 29 August 2000, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{888} Chronologische Notizen 1942, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{889} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
month that their field hospital would reopen within three days. The women were not alarmed by the news and only commented on the large amount of work it entailed. The Wehrmacht hired the women to do the cleaning, cooking, laundering, and mending for the hospital. The first transport of almost one hundred wounded soldiers arrived on 13 June 1940. For the next five years, the Poor School Sisters lived, prayed, and worked alongside physicians, medics, Wehrmacht officers, and wounded soldiers. In the same building as the field hospital, the sisters also still ran their housekeeping and sewing schools as well as secretarial courses.

Despite the Wehrmacht’s presence, Nazi officials continued to attempt to confiscate the cloister in Ravensburg for different purposes. On 7 January 1941, representatives from the child evacuee program inspected the sisters’ buildings and declared that three hundred children would move in the next day. The Wehrmacht protested and confiscated the remaining rooms in the cloister. The sisters thanked God for having sent them the Wehrmacht and for the latter’s initiative, because “we are

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890 Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, May 17, 1940, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

891 Ibid.

892 The sisters noted that many of them were not used to such work but they had no choice and wrote that “need breaks iron.” Ibid., 13 June 1940.

893 The sisters commented that their remaining schools operated as before but wrote that the education of girls was made more difficult by the presence of soldiers. “Students and soldiers in the same hall!” wrote one sister but she added that everyone was behaving well. Ibid., 7 October 1940.

894 Until then, the Wehrmacht had not confiscated the sisters’ living quarters, dining facilities, and the school rooms where the sisters still conducted school.
allowed to remain and continue to serve God and our neighbor.” But efforts by state agencies to seize the congregation’s buildings in Ravensburg continued.

One week later, an official from the youth hostel association demanded the remaining free rooms in the cloister. The only unoccupied spaces were the chapel and the personal living spaces of the sisters, which were strictly off limits to outsiders. The Wehrmacht insisted that the women were needed to labor in the field hospital and therefore needed their living spaces. In May 1941, two women who refused to identify themselves inspected the buildings. Shortly thereafter an official from the Ministry of the Interior declared his intention of moving a public secondary school into the cloister. The Wehrmacht once again foiled the plans. After the war, the Poor School Sisters wrote that the German military “was favorably disposed toward us and we welcomed it when the Wehrmacht forestalled the [Nazi] party and confiscated our properties to use as field hospitals.” The sisters viewed the Wehrmacht as a trusted ally in maintaining their way of life.

Keeping the sacred separate from the profane was crucial to the Poor School Sisters for preserving their religious life. The seizure and occupation of religious houses by outsiders breached convent walls and threatened to disrupt and corrupt community life. The crowding of the Poor School Sisters facilities with hundreds of children or ethnic Germans in itself made the continuation of orderly religious life difficult. After the

895 Ibid., 10 January 1941.
896 Ibid., 15 January 1941.
897 Ibid., 4 May 1941.
Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle confiscated the congregation’s facilities in Mettenheim in 1942 and moved in ethnic Germans from Slovenia, the sisters had to move to a small, inadequate outbuilding that was hard to heat and made daily life, let alone communal religious life, challenging.899

Nazi officials often loathed having to share confiscated congregational spaces with women religious. After the child evacuee program confiscated an unnamed congregation in Salzburghofen in Upper Bavaria in 1941, for instance, a regional Nazi official wrote that “it was highly undesirable” to employ the Catholic sisters who owned the building because they formed a “constant, disruptive presence.”900 By “disruptive presence” most likely he meant the sisters’ continued practice of their religious way of life.

The Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg encouraged patients, Wehrmacht officers, and the staff of the field hospital to participate in their religious observances.901 The

899 Chronologische Notizen 1942, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

900 Kreisamtsleiter to Gau München, Erweiterte Kinderlandverschickung, 18 April 1941, Sta M, NSDAP 291. Much of the experience of the sisters depended of course on the personalities of both parties, the sisters and of the persons occupying their building. The women’s relationships with state agencies besides the Wehrmacht were not always antagonistic. For instance, in 1940, the Hitler Youth rented part of the complex in Amberg to house over two hundred Hitler Youth. M. Consolata wrote about the experience on 14 November 1940 to M. Almeda Schricker. She reported that “we have a very nice camp leader [and] fine teachers…. – We prefer this group over Bessarabians….The teachers are fully dedicated to their task and work for strict discipline and every day there is improvement.” M. Consolata to Schricker, 14 November 1940, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

901 The sisters in Ravensburg were particularly grateful to a circle of friends within the Wehrmacht who worked on the sisters’ behalf and kept the field hospital in good order to enable an orderly and even pleasant co-existence in relatively confined quarters. For instance, the sisters appreciated Oberzahlmeister Spachmann who led the hospital with “energetic, manly, soldierly leadership” and “discipline and order rein.” Upon his departure from the cloister to the Russian front on 17 June 1941, the sisters presented him with an oil painting by their resident artist, Sister Jadwiga. The sisters also noted that he was not at all religious and they prayed that his family would find their way back to God. A second champion of the sisters was the chief physician Dr. Hartmann. The sisters respected him as a superior and as “a benevolent friend of the house” who in the turbulent days of the storm stood up for our house with courage and determination…Our sincere thanks for everything.” Ibid., 13 June 1941, 17 June 1941, and 7 January 1942
women lived and prayed according to the Catholic calendar of holy days. For instance, following the “soldiers’ moving participation in festive evening prayers” during the observances of Lent and Easter in April 1941, the month of May was dedicated to the worship of the Virgin Mary. The sisters wrote that “every day we met in the chapel at a predetermined hour to greet and pay homage to Mary….even Protestants participated.” Soon after the May observances, “daily evening prayer services in honor of the sacrament of the holy altar began.” The highlight of June was the festive Corpus Christi procession that the sisters led through their house because it was officially prohibited in the town. The Poor School Sisters were not only grateful to the Wehrmacht for allowing them to practice their faith, they also credited officers for saving a number of their buildings from forced seizure during the notorious “storming of the cloisters” (Klostersturm) in 1940 and 1941.

5.3.1 The Klostersturm

The “storming of the cloister” was at the center of the escalating conflict between the Catholic Church and the state during the war. The Klostersturm entailed the illegal confiscation without compensation of Catholic institutions and cloisters and the expulsion of Catholic sisters and brothers. This last phase of the church struggle was part of an

902 Ibid., 31 May 1941.
903 Ibid.
904 Ibid.
905 The close relationship that developed between the wounded soldiers and the sisters is illustrated during the name day celebration of the mother superior of Ravensburg in September 1941 when one of the soldiers ordered a mass for her which most soldiers attended. The highlight of the year was the Christmas celebration. The observances throughout the year paled when compared to the festivities and pageantry during Christmas time when a child dressed as the Christ child went from bed to bed and kissed each soldier’s hand before giving him a candle. Ibid., 15 June 1941, 10 September 1941, and 24 December 1941.
overall radicalization of the Nazi state. In the East, the Nazis waged a systematic racial war of extermination that culminated in the genocide of Europe’s Jewish population. The situation of German Jews was becoming increasingly desperate, and the systematic transportation of Jews from Germany for killing in the East commenced in October 1941.

Under the cover of war, the Nazis also expanded the murder of handicapped children to include adults in 1939. The killings were well known among Germans. On the same day the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg first mentioned the Klostersturm, they also commented on the murder of the handicapped. The entry from 25 October 1940 reads:

Storm everywhere! In all cloisters the greatest fear reigns! The Benedictines of Weingarten already …had to leave their beautiful cloister! The entire religious community was scattered…The building is supposed to provide room for 700 returnees from Bessarabia….The insane asylums are also being cleared out to make room. The sick are being loaded into cars and are picked up. The death notice that follows tells the rest. Our Sister Walburga also went on this sad journey."

In this climate of radicalization, the sisters started to fear each visit by a state official.

Although they were spared, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg nonetheless felt the impact of the Klostersturm almost immediately. On 1 November 1940, the

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907 The murder of the handicapped led to the famous public protest of Cardinal Clemens von Galen, Archbishop of Münster, that led Hitler to order the stop of the gassings in August 1941. On the murder of the handicapped, see Henry Friedlander, The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to Nazi Genocide (Chapel Hill: The University of North Caroline Press, 1995).

women wrote that “the storm is gathering strength!” That same day, the abbess of the Abbey St. Ehrentraud in nearby Kellenried called to ask for temporary shelter for some of her nuns. Heinrich Himmler’s *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* had seized their abbey and gave the women four days to vacate the property. The Poor School Sisters agreed and the Kellenried nuns moved in. Mutual aid among women religious became commonplace during World War II. The sisters reported that many cloisters in Swabia suffered the fate of the St. Ehrentraud Abbey. The Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg were also convinced that Kreisleiter Rudorf would have loved to confiscate their cloister as well, “but just then our dear Lord closed the door in his [Rudorf’s] face and sent us the Wehrmacht.” What also emerges from the sisters’ writings during this time is the fact that the lines between legal and illegal confiscations soon grew blurry. After the commencement of the Klostersturm, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg and elsewhere perceived even lawful attempts to confiscate their facilities as acts of aggression and threats to their existence.

Nazi officials also took advantage of the new situation and began to use the possibility of outright seizure and expulsion to compel women religious to comply with their demands. When in July 1942, the Ministry of the Interior informed the Poor School

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909 Ibid., 1 November 1983.

910 Living together highlighted the differences in rituals and observances between different congregations and congregations and orders. The Poor School Sisters literally created a double convent after the Benedictine nuns from Kellenried moved in. The women prayed and attended mass separately. Due to space constraints they also could not eat together but they did work together. Despite the cramped living conditions, the Poor School Sisters enjoyed the residency of the Kellenried Benedictines in their cloister. The latter left on 2 April 1941 to take up residence with the Duke of Zeil. The Poor School Sisters commented: “We had to see them go into uncertainty and see in the unrest and homelessness of the women our own fate in the near or far future.” Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 14 November 1940 and 2 April 1941, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

911 Ibid.
Sisters that “in the near future negotiations would commence to convert the orphanage [in Wörth/Main] into a labor camp,” the women refused to sell the building. The ministry then threatened the community with forced confiscation and expulsion. The sisters credited the intervention by the Reichsstatthalter of the Steiermark Sigfried Uiberreither with saving the orphanage.

The congregation reported that at various points seven of their houses in Bavaria were subject to forced seizures. For instance, the nursing home for sisters in Dorfen, where one hundred old and sick sisters lived, was repeatedly threatened and at one point the congregation even received the order to vacate the house. Even when state officials confiscated Catholic properties under the Reichsleistungsgesetz, they sometimes tried to expel the residents. After Nazi officials confiscated the facility of an unnamed religious congregation in Salzburg, they inquired what “means they had at their disposal to compel the sisters to vacate the property.” In August 1941, the Gauleitung Südharbauer-Braunschweig confiscated the Poor School Sisters’ property in Herzberg, Westphalia, and ordered the sisters to leave. These examples illustrate the uncertainties,

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912 Chronologische Notizen 1942, Bayerische Provinz, 11, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

913 Although the sisters were convinced that Uiberreither saved the orphanage, it is unclear whether his actions actually had that effect. It is also uncertain whether his intervention was intentional or unintentional. According to the sisters, before the ministry could make good on its threat to seize the building, Uiberreither requested the admission of twelve children to the orphanage which apparently settled the matter in the sisters’ favor as they never heard back from the Ministry of the Interior. Ibid.

914 The sisters did not lose the house in Dorfen. With the help of a friend of the community, an unnamed Jesuit, the women preserved their house. Unser Orden unter der Gewaltherrschaft des Nationalsozialismus (1933-1945). Bayerische Ordensprovinz, 20 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

915 According to the Reichsleistungsgesetz, the confiscating agency had to allow the inhabitants of the building to retain adequate living space in the confiscated building.

916 Kreisamtsleiter to Gau München, Erweiterte Kinderlandverschickung, 18 April 1941, Sta M, NSDAP 291.
anxieties, and significant disruptions the constant threat of lawful and unlawful seizure of their properties caused the Poor School Sisters in the 1940s. But none of the Poor School Sisters’ properties actually fell victim to the Klostersturm.

The Klostersturm in 1940 and 1941 was perpetrated by Heinrich Himmler’s *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and the Gestapo and affected about three hundred Catholic institutions. 917 The Klostersturm usually involved immediate seizure and expulsion under the pretext of criminal violations. The confiscation of the facilities of the Ursuline sisters in Fritzlar in Hesse in 1941 illustrates how the Gestapo proceeded. Without explanation, the Gestapo seized the congregation’s extensive properties with all their contents on 1 July 1941 and expelled the sisters. Gestapo officials allowed the women to take their personal belongings and ten Reichsmark each. 918 Expelled nuns and monks usually had to leave the district or even the state immediately.

The Gestapo usually cited criminal activities of property owners as the reasons for its actions. On 12 September 1941, the security police asserted that the cloister in Fritzlar

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917 In his influential essay on the episcopate in Nazi Germany, Ludwig Volk wrote that Martin Bormann initiated the Klostersturm in January 1941 with a memo to Gauleiters in which he encouraged “the raid and plunder [Raubzug] of cloisters on a grand scale.” He concluded that in the first half of 1941, the Gestapo seized 123 cloisters and other church properties. Volk, “Episkopat”, 83. Annette Mertens substantially revised Volk’s conclusions in her important study on the Klostersturm. Mertens found that Heinrich Himmler and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and not Bormann and the Gestapo started the Klostersturm in the fall of 1940 when within a few weeks the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* forcibly confiscated twenty cloisters in the diocese of Rottenburg in Württemberg. In 1941, the Gestapo became a major player in the Klostersturm in 1941 and that year the agency seized about two hundred church properties. Mertens wrote that Himmler could emerge as a key figure in the church struggle in 1940 because Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl lost power and died in 1941 and because Hitler’s attention was taken up the war and he neglected internal affairs. Hitler’s inattention led to an escalation of the struggle as regional and national Nazis competed to fill the power vacuum and work toward the Führer. Martin Bormann was one of the Nazis who showed an increased interest in the church struggle but Mertens argued that he lacked the power to initiate a large-scale Gestapo campaign and attempted in January 1941 to influence events that were already well underway. Mertens, *Klostersturm*, 384 ff.

918 Dietz to Bormann, 30 July 1941, BArch B, R 5101, 23307.
was confiscated “because of ongoing violations of decrees regulating the war economy,” in particular the illegal hoarding and use of food.\footnote{919} The Bishop of Fulda, Dr. Johannes Dietz, called the confiscation “an unheard of violation of the law.”\footnote{920} He protested the confiscation of the sisters’ property without avail, and the regime began auctioning off the contents of the cloister in October 1941.\footnote{921} The Nazi state paid no compensation to the congregation for the property or its contents.

The Nazi state had long favored economic violence against Catholic congregations, and scholars emphasize the impact of the Klostersturm on the Catholic Church.\footnote{922} Wolfgang Dierker called the events of 1940/41 “the most significant injustice the Nazi state perpetrated during the war” against the churches.\footnote{923} Annette Mertens added that the regime “explicitly denied members of [religious] orders participation in the German war society and the people’s community by designating them as ‘enemies of the Volk and state’ and robbing them of their property.”\footnote{924} The injustices and hardships suffered by the men and women affected by the Klostersturm were real and must not be

\footnote{919} The security police wrote that in 1940 the sisters illegally continued to accept rent in kind from their tenant in the form of rye and wheat, held back milk produced on their farm, and fed their chickens bread grains which was forbidden. Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD to Reichsminister für die kirchlichen Angelegenheiten, 12 September 1941, BArch B, R 5101 23307.

\footnote{920} Dietz to Kerrl, 30 July 1941, BArch B, R 5101 23307.

\footnote{921} Kerrl to Bormann, 27 October 1941, BArch B, R 5101 23307.

\footnote{922} Wolfgang Dierker wrote that long before the outbreak of war the Sicherheitsdienst had compiled detailed lists of properties owned by cloisters and congregations throughout Germany. For this purpose the SD created forms that captured all necessary data for each building, including photographs. Wolfgang Dierker, Himmler’s Glaubenskrieger: Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS und seine Religionspolitik 1933-1941 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), 522-523. Annette Mertens wrote that with the Klostersturm, “the regime realized a central goal of its policy toward the church that they had formulated in the first years of the reign.” Mertens, Klostersturm, 385-386.

\footnote{923} Dierker, 522.

\footnote{924} Mertens, Klostersturm, 387.
diminished. Every crime is significant. At the same time, the impact of the Klostersturm on the Catholic Church must also be put into perspective and not be overstated.

The Klostersturm highlights once again the liminal status of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany between privilege and persecution. The storming of the cloisters was not, as Roman Bleistein called it, “a decisive and single-minded war of annihilation [\textit{Vernichtungskampf}]” against Catholic institutions.\textsuperscript{925} The Klostersturm affected about three hundred houses out of more than seven thousand male and female religious communities in Germany.\textsuperscript{926} Hitler also called a stop to the Klostersturm on 30 July 1941.\textsuperscript{927} The forced confiscation of church properties in 1940 and 1941 pales in comparison to the seizure of Jewish assets by the Nazis that began in earnest in 1938 and was nearly completed in 1941.\textsuperscript{928} Germans protested the economic violence against nuns but not the injustices perpetrated against Jews.

Public opinion and outrage once again restrained the regime’s actions against the Catholic Church. The Klostersturm caused much unrest among the Catholic population whose indignation was encouraged by priests and bishops’ public statements.\textsuperscript{929} The

\textsuperscript{925} Bleistein, 162.

\textsuperscript{926} Also, not all confiscated buildings belonged to religious communities. Some of the confiscated buildings belonged to other Catholic organizations.

\textsuperscript{927} According to the \textit{Kirchliches Handbuch}, in 1938, there were a total of 7,515 male and female religious communities of varying sizes in Germany. This means that less than 4\% of communities were affected by the Klostersturm. The number is even lower when considering that not all properties confiscated during the storming of the cloisters were in fact cloisters but included other types Catholic and even the rare Protestant institutions as well.

\textsuperscript{928} Aly, 194 ff.

\textsuperscript{929} A detailed discussion of the reaction of the episcopate to the Klostersturm goes beyond the scope of this work but Antonia Leugers argued that the episcopate was very reluctant in 1941 to protest the forced confiscation of cloisters and church properties. Following the seizure of the Abby Münsterschwarzach in May 1941, it was only at the persistent urging of the lawyer and advocate for
situation reports prepared by the Sicherheitsdienst in 1940 and 1941 make reference to the disruptive impact of the Klostersturm on Catholic Germans. On 18 April 1941, the Sicherheitsdienst in Würzburg reported that

more and more rumors are surfacing that cloisters and Catholic institutions will be systematically liquidated. Sometimes [these rumors are accompanied] by spine-chilling fairytales [Schauermärchen] that do not fail to make an impact on the Catholic population.\(^{930}\)

In her letters to friends in 1941, the Catholic teenager Christel Beilmann wrote about her indignation about the Klostersturm. In May 1941, she reported to her friend Gertrud:

cloisters Georg Angermaier that the still hesitant Bishop of Würzburg Matthias Ehrenfried read the first public protest against the Klostersturm by a bishop on 1 June 1941. The Bishop of Osnabrück, Wilhelm Berning, also preached against the Klostersturm that same month. During the height of confiscations in April 1941, the episcopate chose to remain silent. The episcopate did however send a petition to Bormann and others on 22 April 1941. After the confiscations had already ceased, Cardinal Clemens von Galen preached several famous protest sermons against the measures in August 1941. The episcopate took even these minimal actions only at the forceful and insistent urging of Angermaier, the Jesuits August Rösch and Lothar König and the Dominican Odilo Braun. In August 1941, the episcopate agreed to establish the Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten that was to formulate a more coordinated response to the grave threat the Klostersturm posed to religious orders and the church. Besides the above-mentioned padres, instrumental in the work of the committee were Bishop Konrad Graf von Preysing, Angermaier, the Bishop of Fulda, Johannes Dietz, and the Dominican Laurentius Siemer. Antonia Leugers found that the committee believed in active and “determined resistance” to the state’s anti-church measures. Angermaier suggested for instance to provoke the escalation of violence under certain circumstances rather than engage in future negotiations with the regime. The committee urged the episcopate to cease to cooperate with the state and to act rather than react and to threaten the regime with public pronouncements that would almost certainly give rise to large-scale unrest among the Catholic population. These were just some of the strategies and measures the committee suggested but the Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten accomplished little in the end. Cardinal Bertram refused to deviate from his ineffectual Eingabenpolitik (petitions). Antonia Leugers, Gegen eine Mauer des bischöflichen Schweigens. Der Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten und seine Widerstandskonzeption 1941 bis 1945 (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1996), quote 295. Annette Mertens concluded that the episcopate’s silence and ultimate feeble and ineffectual response to the Klostersturm was a question of priorities. For Bertram, Mertens argued, securing pastoral care was most important not the defense of congregations and orders many of which operated under papal approbation and therefore did not even fall within the realm of responsibility of the episcopate. Mertens, Klostersturm, 395. Konrad Repgen disagreed with such interpretations, in particular with Leugers’s conclusions about the behavior of the episcopate during the Klostersturm. Repgen presents an entirely different picture, namely that of a decisive and courageous hierarchy led by the uncompromising von Galen who was willing to risk his life to speak out on behalf of wronged male and female religious. Repgen, “Bischöfe,” 430 ff.

\(^{930}\) Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, Lagebericht, 18 April 1941, StA W, Stimmungsberichte 19.
The cloister of my aunt was dissolved three weeks ago. [The women] had to vacate it within one hour. The sisters were then put on buses and dropped off in unfamiliar locations. My aunt had to get off in Raderberg near Cologne.  

In an anonymous letter to Reich Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl, the writer expressed his outrage over the forced confiscation of cloisters. He wrote that

"Out there [on the front] our sons fight a gigantic battle against Russia. They also fight for the preservation of our culture of the German Reich and for their sisters and brothers, who in the role as nuns and monks perform their blessed tasks (segensreiche Arbeit) for the greater good of the German Reich."

The Nazis could not risk losing the support of Catholics during the war. In July 1940, Hans-Heinrich Lammers, head of the Reich Chancellery, made it known that Hitler wished for the duration of the war to avoid all unnecessary measures that could worsen the relationship between the state and the church. The Klostersturm ceased, and Hitler saved his “personal reckoning with the churches for after the war.” Although the reckoning was not

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931 In July 1941, Christel wrote to a friend “about the latest sensation in Bochum,” where the Gestapo searched and seized the cloister Christ-König. She reported that Padre Romanus Bange suffered a heart attack in the process. Beilmann, 15, 17.

932 Anonymous (“Müller”) to Kerrl, 1 Sep 1941, BArch B, R 5101, 23318, Bl. 209

933 Hürten, *Katholiken*, 386.

934 Germany’s loss of the war fortunately prevented this reckoning and it remains unclear whether the Nazis would have been satisfied to wait for Christianity to become irrelevant over time or whether they would have begun to outright persecute the Christian churches. John Conway showed how brutally the Nazis suppressed the Christianity in the occupied territory of the Warthegau and he wrote “that there is evidence to show that the often-proclaimed determination to wipe out Christianity altogether would have been extended beyond the Warthegau to the other areas of German-held territory, and would have ended in
immediate and never came, events in 1940 and 1941 convinced the hierarchy that the regime’s goal was the destruction of Christianity.  

Beside the Klostersturm, continued measures against Catholic schools added to the escalation of the conflict between the church and the state during the war. On 2 October 1939, Bernhard Rust, Reich Minister of Science, Education and National Culture, ordered the closure of all confessional higher schools by Easter 1940. Within days the state of Westphalia demanded that the city of Warburg take over the Poor School Sisters’ local secondary school for girls. In September 1941, the city of Brakel took over the Poor School Sisters’ flagship school in Westphalia, their Lyzeum in the motherhouse on the Brede. In Bavaria in March 1941, Minister of Education and Culture Adolf Wagner also reiterated the importance of closing private Catholic schools. The persecution of Christians by the same methods as had so effectively ‘dealt with’ the Jews.” Conway, Persecution, 331.


* 936 Other measures against the church during World War II included the further suppression of the Catholic press. Also indicative of the worsening conflict between the church and the state was the fact that 90% of all priests incarcerated in concentration camps were arrested and imprisoned between 1940 and 1945. Mertens, “NS-Kirchenpolitik,” 250 and v. Hehl, Terror, 136.


* 938 The city council of Warburg resisted taking ownership of the school but the Westphalian city of Meschede dutifully took over the Poor School Sisters’ school for girls in Meschede by Easter 1940.

* 939 In March 1941, the Bavarian Minister for Education and Culture called for the completion of the “dismantling of the private middle and higher schools and boarding schools…to further curb the influence of women cloisters in teaching and education.” Wagner added that any difficulties simply had to be overcome to achieve this goal. Wagner to Regierungspräsidenten und Reichskommissar für die Saarpfalz, 8 March 1941, OA, Drittes Reich The shortage of teachers due to war did indeed hamper efforts by the regime to replace women religious teachers. In Bavaria the acute teacher shortage made the dismissal of the remaining women religious teachers in Volksschulen almost impossible. For instance, the Poor School Sister in the Bavarian village Oberdolling was the only remaining teacher in town in the 1940s and had to teach a total of 137 children.” Chronologische Notizen, 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
regime’s announcements to continue the closure of private schools were in some ways anticlimactic, as the majority of the Poor School Sisters’ schools were already closed or in the process of being phased out. For those schools that remained open and were subsequently lost, like the sisters’ Lyzeum in Miltenberg, the news did not come as a surprise. Local Nazi officials also continued their petty harassment of women religious over private lessons.\textsuperscript{940} But in the end, war hampered the regime’s efforts to push sisters further to the fringes of the people’s community.

\subsection*{5.3.2 The Impact of War on the Congregation}

At the same time the Nazis attempted to further isolate women religious, they also offered them new ways to reintegrate into society through war service. The demand for skilled women religious was great and in September 1942, M. Almeda Schricker wrote “it was simply impossible to fulfill any further requests for sisters” and that “the shortage of personnel in all areas is becoming frightening."\textsuperscript{941} But it also presented the sisters with a frightful paradox. Whereas war service offered sisters a measure of security in the Nazi state, it also threatened the very existence of their congregation.

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\textsuperscript{940} For instance, In June 1942, the Regierungspräsident from Augsburg Dr. Schwaab informed the Landrat in Kempten that there was “no urgent” need for children of the eighth grade in the Volksschule attached to the orphanage in Lenzfried to learn typewriting, shorthand, and bookkeeping from the sisters and ordered that the permission to offer private lessons be withdrawn. Schwaab to Landrat Kempten, 27 June 1942, OA, Drittes Reich. In 1943, the mayor of Munich wrote to the sisters because he had learned that the sisters offered courses in shorthand and typewriting without the proper permits. He informed sisters that the penalty for operating without a license was a fine and imprisonment but in order to avoid a disadvantage to the participants of the course, the mayor made an exception and allowed the sisters to finish the courses but “new participants may not be admitted under any circumstances.” Oberbürgermeister der Hauptstadt der Bewegung to Klosterfiliale d. Arm. Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr. München, 14 December 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{941} Schricker, memorandum, 7 September 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
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The Poor School Sisters’ success as a religious congregation depended on their faith and mission, discipline and community. In their practice of religious life the women also insisted on a degree of separation from outsiders through the wearing of distinct habits and the observation of limited cloister. First the loss of schools and then the war threatened to loosen the crucial foundations of religious life because of the total or partial dissolution of numerous religious communities and the scattering of sisters across Germany.

Within months of the dismissals of the first women religious teachers in 1937, M. Almeda Schricker observed a certain loosening of discipline. Sisters began calling on relatives without permission, going on car excursions with outsiders, and inviting people into their homes.\(^{942}\) The general superior reminded sisters that “unlimited freedom in the interaction with outsiders” was only permissible when absolutely necessary.\(^{943}\) In 1938 M. Almeda Schricker noted with alarm that “sisters wavering in their vocations” ("berufsschwankende Schwestern") used the new situation to “try out secular life,” and she vowed to “work energetically against such disorder.”\(^{944}\)

The women’s new living and working conditions made a certain relaxation of rules and discipline inevitable and necessary. Sisters now lived in very small groups or by themselves and performed unfamiliar work that often required the wearing of lay clothing. Catholic sisters who did not wear the habit and did not live in regular

\(^{942}\) Schricker, Rundbrief, 30 June 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{943}\) Schricker, Rundbrief, 26 April 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{944}\) Ibid. She also decried a certain “disorder” (Unordnung) regarding the photographing of sisters and insisted that sisters should not allow themselves to be photographed. Schricker, Rundbrief, 30 June 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
community with other sisters lacked both visible and physical separation from the secular world. Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix commented on the comical scenes when they were fitted for a civilian wardrobe before their departure to Langensalza in Thuringia:

It is impossible to describe these scenes! Too tight, too wide, too short, too long! It took us a long time to find things that fit. 945

Church leaders viewed nuns in secular garb as a very serious matter. On the one hand, they welcomed Catholic sisters’ openness to wearing civilian clothing. Edith Denis from the Caritas wrote in 1942 that the social work many sisters now performed in the Catholic diaspora and in urban areas “necessitated personal encounters with people whom a sister in a religious habit could not reach.” 946 On the other hand, Denis was concerned that mother superiors should only select those sisters to wear civilian clothing who were secure in their vocation. Under no circumstances should they choose women who had already experienced difficulties in their vocations and would view the “diminished external link [to their communities] that civilian clothing represented as a concession” to their commitment as women religious. 947 These statements by Edith Denis convey the ambiguity of church officials toward sisters in civilian clothing.

The possession or wearing of civilian clothing came to symbolize the uncertain future of Catholic sisters in Germany. Already in October 1936, as news of the Spanish civil war spread through Germany, M. Almeda Schricker sent a confidential note to her

945 Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix travelled in civilian clothing but in Langensalza they usually wore their religious habit. Diasporabericht Langensalza, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

946 Denis added “what is at stake are human souls in need – in that case the religious habit should not be the determining factor…She continued that “when done right, our work [in the diaspora] requires civilian clothing.” Denis to Dietrich, 8 December 1942, ADCV, 544.

947 Ibid.
sisters to advise them to obtain civilian clothing to be worn in an emergency.\textsuperscript{948} Church leaders abhorred the initiative of mother superiors who acquired worldly dress for their congregations. During the storming of the cloisters in 1941, the directors of the Caritas asserted that nuns were succumbing to hysterics and panic and one after the other were obtaining secular clothing. They concluded that in these cases, “the female psyche fully asserted itself” and they ordered that such tendencies must be fought on all fronts.\textsuperscript{949} The Caritas officials offered a clue as to why the possession of civilian clothing was so alarming to them. It came to symbolize the disquieting independence and mobility of Catholic sisters and women in times of war. In the same statement Caritas officials observed that it was not permissible that mother superiors bypass the diocese or the Caritas and negotiate with state officials directly.\textsuperscript{950} On a different occasion, the directors noted with concern that the sisters were in danger of “slipping from the hands of the church into the secular realm.”\textsuperscript{951} To the Caritas directors, sisters in civilian clothing represented significant danger. The Poor School Sisters, however, were more concerned about the loss of community than the wearing of civilian clothing.

The vast majority of sisters remained steadfast in their vocation but the chaos of war made the practice of religious life difficult. As war continued, an increasing number of sisters were employed in non-congregational field hospitals. As of 4 January 1944, the Poor School Sisters in Bavaria partially staffed and housed twenty-two field hospitals in

\begin{footnotes}
\item Schricker, memorandum, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
\item Zentralratssitzung 1941, Addendum, Zur Lage des Schwesternwesens, ADCV, 111.
\item Ibid.
\item Bericht über die Zentralrats-Tagung in Mainz 9 – 10 April 1940, ADCV, 111.
\end{footnotes}
their own facilities and provided staff for twenty-eight outside field hospitals.\textsuperscript{952} It appears the Wehrmacht was not beyond coercion in their demand for sisters and in December 1941, M. Almeda Schricker wrote that the military had demanded an additional forty to fifty sisters knowledgeable in typing and shorthand and “refused to accept all my objections that our sisters are fully employed.”\textsuperscript{953} The general superior continued that officials indicated should she refuse to comply with the request “the resulting damage for us could never be remedied.”\textsuperscript{954} M. Thekla and M. Elmentraud were two of the sisters who responded to their general superior’s plea and took up work in field hospitals in Memmingen in Southern Bavaria in February 1942.

M. Thekla and M. Elmentraud’s experiences in Memmingen illustrate common difficulties many sisters performing war service encountered. Upon their arrival in Memmingen, the sisters found a city full of hundreds of homeless refugees seeking shelter. The sisters too found themselves without accommodation and appealed to the local Mallersdorf Franciscan sisters for help. The mother superior was sympathetic but her house was confiscated and she therefore suggested to the chief Wehrmacht physician to divide the nurses’ break room with a curtain to create a private bedroom for the Poor School Sisters. The irate physician replied that “the cloistering stops now,” and added

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\textsuperscript{952} Arme Schulschwestern v. U. L. Fr. In auswärtigen Lazaretten tätige Schwestern, Stand vom 4. January 1944, OA, Drittes Reich. The Poor School Sisters provided anywhere from one to ten sisters to outside field hospitals. For instance, nine sisters worked in the field hospital in Partenkirchen whereas only one sister worked in Würzburg-Heidingsfeld.

\textsuperscript{953} Schricker, memorandum, 2 December 1941, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{954} M. Almeda Schricker counted on the willingness of her fellow-sisters to make sacrifices and their understanding for the dire situation of the fatherland. She asked sisters wherever possible to volunteer so she could comply with the Wehrmacht’s request. She added that she could “not be responsible for the unpleasant consequences a refusal on your part might have.” Ibid.
\end{quotation}
that “unlike the Red Cross nurses who are employed here, we only suffer the presence of the School Sisters [sic].”\textsuperscript{955} The women found temporary housing with “blue sisters,” probably Franciscan sisters from the order of St. Elizabeth, but feared to become homeless again any time.\textsuperscript{956}

Within a week of their arrival in Memmingen, M. Thekla and M. Elmentraud asked for dispensation from prescribed religious observances. M. Thekla wrote to M. Almeda Schricker that “it has been impossible even to loosely observe the spiritual exercises.”\textsuperscript{957} The sisters lacked both time and privacy. They rose at five in the morning and tried to attend at least part of Mass before going to work.\textsuperscript{958} During the day they barely managed to utter a prayer at lunch, which was in part due to the teasing of the God-believing pagans (\textit{Gottgläubigen}) and Protestant nurses and aids.\textsuperscript{959} It was not until ten o’clock at night that the exhausted sisters found time for prayer.\textsuperscript{960} Often their duty lasted until after eleven at night.\textsuperscript{961}

\textsuperscript{955} M. Thekla to Schricker, 8 February 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{956} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{957} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{958} The attendance of Mass continued to pose a problem for the sisters in Memmingen and in March 1942, M. Luitgardis, who joined the sisters in Memmingen after M. Thekla broker her arm, wrote that “for several days now we have had no Mass because the gentleman who celebrated at 6 am is sick. The other Masses are too late. Recently I went directly from the communion bench in church to [the hospital] to type.” M. Luitgardis to Schricker, 5 March 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{959} M. Luitgardis added that she found no time for prayer during lunch because she preferred to spend what little time she had outside to catch fresh air. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{960} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{961} M. Elmtraud to Schricker, 29 July 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
Considering their workload, even measures implemented to help and uplift sisters could become a burden. M. Almeda Schricker charged sisters living and working outside of their religious community to “visit from time to time a nearby house [of Poor School Sisters] to participate for a few hours in religious life.” Exhaustion and physical limitations made such visits difficult for M. Pusizia who worked in a field hospital near Augsburg where the Poor School Sisters ran an orphanage. M. Pusizia regularly visited the sisters in Augsburg but in November 1943, she asked to be freed from the obligation to continue the visits. The sister wrote that she was often ill and suffered from dizziness. She could only complete her work with difficulty let alone travel to Augsburg. It is unclear whether M. Almeda granted the dispensation but she was well aware of the crushing workloads her sisters faced.

As war continued, the increasing demands on the Poor School Sisters started to exact a heavy toll. In June 1942 M. Almeda Schricker wrote that “the personnel shortages are getting worse and worse; many sisters die, become disabled, and I have no replacements.” In the field hospital located in the congregation’s house in Munich-Au five Poor School Sisters trained as nurses had to care for 365 wounded men. The general superior continued that the sisters’ workday “lasts until late into the night, until twelve, even one or two [in the morning],” and “the next day at five o’clock the sisters must be at

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962 Schricker to Bischöfliches Ordinariat Augsburg, 6 April 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

963 M. Pusizia R. to Schricker, undated, ca. 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

964 Schricker to Barthels, 20 June 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
their posts once again.”\textsuperscript{965} In many cases, the sisters’ popularity with patients and physicians only added to their workload.

The sisters in Memmingen soon found themselves well-liked and even came to enjoy their work. Within weeks of their arrival and after their first unfortunate encounter with a field hospital physician, M. Elmentraud wrote that once they recognized M. Thekla’s skills and work ethic, “there was among the physicians a terrible quarrel as to who was getting her as a secretary (\textit{Schreibhilfe}).”\textsuperscript{966} M. Elmentraud wrote about her own experience a few months later. She reported that the chief physician was “very well disposed toward me” and “sometimes I am quite ashamed in the face of so much kindness.”\textsuperscript{967} M. Luitgardis, who joined the sisters in Memmingen in 1942, took great interest in her work and after the war her boss wrote that she “enjoyed extraordinary popularity among administrators, physicians, and patients on account of her …diligence and her always friendly demeanor.”\textsuperscript{968} In Augsburg, after going through a period of

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965 Ibid.

966 M. Elmentraud to Schricker, 17 February 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. Unfortunately, M. Thekla fell and broke her arm after only a few weeks on duty and on the occasion she wrote to M. Schricker how sorry she was to leave the field hospital: “…es war mir tatsächlich ein grosses Opfer wegzugehen, wo man allgemeines Wohlwollen und Güte uns entgegenbrachte.” She reported that “wir beide im besten Rufe standen.” M. Thekla to M. Schricker, 25 February 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. M. Elmentraud too came to love her work in Memmingen and she wrote to M. Schricker in July 1942 that her boss, the chief physician, was very well disposed toward her. “Überhaupt sind alle Leute sehr gut zu mir. Manchmal bin ich ganz beschämt ob so viel Güte. Ich glaube mein Kleinsein trägt auch dazu bei, dass man mich nicht soldatisch rau behandelt.” M. Elmentraud to Schricker, 29 July 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

967 M. Elmentraud believed that her petite stature contributed to the fact that she was “not treated in a rough soldierly fashion.” M. Elmentraud to Schricker, 29 July 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

968 Kraemer to Schricker, 15 May 1945, OA, Drittes Reich. Such testimonies about the sisters’ work were common. The chief physician of the field hospital in Sträbing wrote immediately after the war that “women religious are the backbone of the field hospital.” He added that the Poor School Sister Caja was one of the “most highly regarded nurses among physicians and patients due to her excellent character and her nursing skills.” Reservelazarett Sträbing, Chefarzt to Generalat der Armen Schulschwestern v. U. L. F., 28 May 1945, OA, Drittes Reich. The chief physician of the field hospital Rosenheim wrote in August 1945 that the presence of sisters improved the entire operation. “One only had to compare

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depression and fears that she was incapable of doing her job due to her age and physical limitations, M. Pusizia too found that she was not only capable of doing the work but that she took great joy in it.\textsuperscript{969}

Some sisters could not withstand the stresses of reemployment and relocation. Sister Norbertine G. was already struggling with her vows when M. Almeda Schricker assigned her to teach in a boy’s school in Geissa (Röhn) in 1941. Within a year after her physical removal from her religious community she left the congregation.\textsuperscript{970} M. Norbertine’s decision strengthened M. Almeda Schricker in her conviction that “the exposure of sisters to worldly companies [and] lengthy dispensation from claustration poses a great danger to many of our sisters.”\textsuperscript{971} M. Almeda Schricker had every reason to be alarmed about the impact the loss of schools and war had on the congregation. Whereas the overwhelming majority of professed sisters stayed true to their religious vocation, many candidates for sisterhood left the congregation starting in 1937. The large loss of candidates proved to be the most devastating and far-reaching impact of Nazism and war on the congregation.

\textsuperscript{969} M. Pusizia R. to Schricker, undated, ca. 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{970} M. Norbertine G. to Schricker, 24 June 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{971} Schricker to Gärtner, 23 July 1942, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
5.3.3 The Impact of War: The Loss of Candidates

The success of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame depended on continued growth. The monastic spring occurred because young women joined congregations in large numbers every year. The growth of women religious congregations continued unabated after Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933. The total number of women religious in Germany increased from 69,644 in 1924 to 84,558 in 1935 and 95,248 in 1937. The number of novices also rose every year from 6,092 in 1924 to 7,488 in 1935. But in 1937, the number of novices in German congregations all of a sudden dropped sharply to 4,454, a staggering decrease of 45.5%. The Poor School Sisters did not keep exact statistics, however, immediately after the war, congregational leaders estimated that about 60% of candidates left religious life after 1936. These numbers convey in stark terms the Nazi regime’s success in dissuading young women from joining religious congregations. There was no single reason why women decided against religious life but aside from the regime’s outright prohibition in 1940 to join religious congregations, it is possible to pinpoint two major factors in the women’s decision: the disappearance of professional prospects for women religious teachers and the destruction of congregational infrastructures crucial in preparing young sisters for their vocations.

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972 Amtliche Zentralstelle für kirchliche Statistik des katholischen Deutschlands Köln, Kirchliches Handbuch für das Katholische Deutschland Band XX 1937/1938 (Cologne: Verlag J. P. Bachem), 262.

973 Ibid.

974 Ibid.

The extensive loss of candidates that the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame suffered after 1936 reveals the inextricable link between the women’s professional and religious identities. M. Clodwigis S. entered the congregation at the age of fifteen. She recalled that after the state announced the dismissal of women religious teachers from Bavarian public Volksschulen in 1936, “many parents fetched their daughters home because they no longer believed in the future of cloisters.” M. Therese B. wrote that in 1936 over one hundred postulants requested to enter the novitiate in Munich. But as the first dismissed women religious teachers arrived in the motherhouse later that year, “six novices left the novitiate in short order,” often on behest of their parents.

The example of Resi B. illustrates the high premium many families placed on the education and professional prospects of their daughters entering congregations. Resi was a teenager and candidate in Munich in 1937. Because her future as a women religious teacher was bleak, M. Almeda Schricker suggested that Resi give up her studies and emigrate to the United States. But Resi’s father refused to let his daughter take such a step and remain in the congregation without finishing her teaching degree. In the months and years following the closure of their schools, the Poor School Sisters’ leaders issued repeated appeals to “candidates who are being harried from all sides” and pleaded with parents not to ask their daughters to leave religious life, “because every loss eases

976 M. Clodwigis entered the congregation as an aspiring lay sister in her home village of Ergoldsbach, Bavaria. After the Poor School Sisters lost their school in Ergoldsbach, M. Clodwigis moved to the motherhouse in Munich where she remained for the duration of the Nazi regime, including World War II. Gespräch mit Schwester M. Clodwigis im Dezember 1995, AKB.

977 The vast majority of novices, 90 out of 98, did complete the novitiate in 1936 and took their first vows in 1937. M. Therese B., “Nazizeit im Mutterhaus München,” OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

978 Resi B., 23.
the opponent’s fight against Catholic congregational schools, grants them a triumph.∗979 It was not unusual for candidates to feel torn between their obligations to their families and the congregation.

Hedwig K. feared the disadvantages her family could suffer on account of her religious vocation. She too was in her teens and a candidate for sisterhood in Munich in 1936.980 Hedwig later called 1936 “the year of decision for Poor School Sister candidates.”981 Her parents were under much pressure to prevent their daughter from entering the congregation. Although her father never forbade Hedwig to become a sister, she never wore her habit on visits to her family to ease their discomfort with her decision.982 Elizabeth L. was also concerned about the potential impact her decision to enter religious life had on her parents. She had “heard of cases how fathers of nuns or candidates would lose their government positions if they could not persuade their daughters to abandon religious life.”983 Elizabeth added that she was very worried because her father was a civil servant in the employment of the Nazi state and had to provide for a family of six.984

979 M. Liboria, Rundbrief, 19 March 1937, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

980 Hedwig K. entered the Poor School Sisters’ boarding school in Weichs near Munich in 1929 at the age of twelve and was among the last students to graduate from the congregation’s teacher seminary in 1935. Erinnerungen von Sr. Bonavita K., aufgeschrieben in Freising – Beginn 24. Oktober 2008 – im 67. Ordensjahr, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

981 Ibid.

982 Ibid.

983 Wiethaler, 17.

984 Ibid.
Young women did not abandon religious life only under pressure. They also left on their own accord. The prospects of a higher education and entering a profession were also crucial considerations for aspiring women religious teachers. As the professional prospects of candidates disappeared along with Catholic schools, the regime’s offers to young women religious to enter into state service as secular teachers all of a sudden seemed very appealing to some.

The state made considerable efforts to sway candidates and sisters to leave religious life. These efforts had an impact, and M. Clodwigis observed that many young women “struggled against the inducements of the National Socialist Party.” Even before 1936, the National Socialist Teachers’ Association attempted via questionnaires to acquire information about young women planning to join congregations. Once the dismissal of women religious teachers was underway in 1936, Nazi officials stepped up their pressure on candidates and sisters. Sister Mary-Cordis I. was a candidate and a student teacher in Rosenheim in 1936 when two officials from the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture came to her Volksschule and “interviewed each teacher [in her religious community] privately in order to persuade them to leave the congregation and enter state service.” Sister Elizabeth L. too recalled that in 1937 she and her colleagues “were promised immediate und permanent [teaching] positions if we would leave the

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985 Gespräch mit Schwester M. Clodwigis im Dezember 1995, AKB.

986 According to M. Almeda Schricker, the NSLB sent routine questionnaires to numerous communities of the congregation to determine the names and intentions of candidates. The general superior prohibited sisters from completing any such questionnaires. Schricker to Putz, 20 February 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
convent and join the public school system.”

Sister M. Bonavita K. recalled that even some members of the clergy advised candidates to take this step to assure that at least some Catholic teachers remained in German schools. Sisters Mary-Cordis and Elizabeth both rejected the regime’s offers and emigrated to the United States.

Congregational leaders viewed all of these developments with growing concern. M. Almeda Schricker warned sisters on more than one occasion “not to listen to the enticing siren song that promises you a carefree future, freedom, and honor before the World [as a secular teacher], and thereby lures you away from the cloister.” But the inducements were strong and Sister Victoria W., who taught in Stadtamhof in 1936, admitted that “every so often a girl would say to me: ‘Become a lay teacher and you can stay with us,’ [and] since I loved the girls this was a powerful temptation.” Sister Hildis H. received her teaching certificate in February 1936. She lost her teaching appointment in October 1936. Although she found teaching in nazified schools difficult, she was still taken aback when M. Almeda Schricker suggested she move to the United States. Sister Hildis recalled:

Then followed days of bitter battle within. I loved school passionately. Should eleven years of study and worry have been in vain? For to go to America meant for me to become a homemaker,

987 Wiethaler, 24.
988 Ibid.,17.
990 The general superior asked sisters if they could in could in good conscience work outside of the cloister in the current political situation and under prevailing conditions Schricker, Rundbrief, 24 October 1936, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
991 Wiethaler, 10.
as I did not know one word of English and had a terrible horror of foreign languages.\footnote{Wiethaler, 47.}

Although Sister Hildis feared the loss of her professional and fulfilling occupation, she emigrated to the United States and after mastering the language once again became a teacher.

Candidates who had not completed their teacher training by 1936 faced the most dismal professional prospects. Aside from leaving Germany, these young women had two choices. They could abandon their studies, complete their novitiate early, and pursue an alternate career still open to Catholic sisters such as social work or nursing. A second option was for candidates to delay their entry into the congregation indefinitely and complete their teacher training as a secular person. M. Almeda Schricker warned against taking this second path, “because of the grave test it posed for the religious vocation of the candidate.”\footnote{Schricker to Parents of Candidates, 18 December 1939, OA, Bestand: Drittes Reich.} She did relent, however, and in 1939 and allowed young women to continue their education in state colleges if they promised to remain loyal to the congregation.\footnote{Ibid.}

M. Almeda Schricker’s fears were justified. Very few candidates who pursued their teaching degrees in public institutions in Nazi Germany stayed true to their vocation. In 1937 the congregation lost complete control over every aspect of the education of its candidates when the Nazi regime closed all Catholic Aufbauschulen. Aufbauschulen were secondary schools that prepared aspiring teachers for university.

\footnote{Wiethaler, 47.}
\footnote{Schricker to Parents of Candidates, 18 December 1939, OA, Bestand: Drittes Reich.}
\footnote{Ibid.}

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The loss of this crucial part of the congregation’s infrastructure accelerated the loss of candidates.

The case of Resi B. reveals the enormous difficulties aspiring women religious teachers faced after 1937. Resi was among the last students to graduate from the congregation’s Aufbauschule in 1938. She and her fellow-classmates did not share their general superior’s apprehensions about a public education and were excited about the prospect of entering university. Resi’s graduating class illustrates the serious attrition the congregation suffered in the 1930s. Resi entered the Poor School Sisters’ boarding school as an aspirant for sisterhood in 1932 at the age of twelve along with fifty-seven other girls. By 1938, the class had shrunk to sixteen students. The odds were heavily stacked against the girls, and every year the class became smaller as young aspirants for sisterhood wavered in their vocation or their parents demanded that they leave. Resi was devastated when her best friend left in the mid-1930s after her parents insisted she transfer to a public school.

Fearful of losing even more candidates, in 1938 her superiors offered Resi to train as a bookkeeper rather than pursue a degree in education. She refused and decided instead to defer her entry into the congregation indefinitely and finish her studies. Thereafter, Resi remained a candidate for sisterhood in name only. While she pursued her

995 Resi B., 22. Before the Nazis reorganized teacher training in Bavaria, teachers training for a career in the Volksschule would have completed a teacher seminary rather than attend university. The Poor School Sisters, like all teaching congregations, maintained their own teacher seminaries.

996 Ibid., 22, 23.
education, she no longer lived in community nor did she wear the traditional habit of candidates. 997

Before she could enter university, Resi had to complete six months of mandatory labor service. In 1938, Resi and her fellow-candidate Berti completed the labor service together. The “work maidens” all lived together in a designated camp and their days were framed by the ceremonial raising and lowering of the swastika flag. Camp life stressed the ideals of the National Socialist people’s community. Practicing religion was not welcome and Resi struggled to attend church and find time for silent prayer. 998

In Nazi Germany, elaborate labor schemes aimed at committing youth more fully to the state. These programs were often so effective because they removed young men and women for long periods from the influences of their familiar surroundings and immersed them in strict camp life that was supposed to mimic the ideal National Socialist people’s community. In 1934, Nazi officials acknowledged that education was only effective “if it is of longer, uninterrupted duration.” 999 Resi actually enjoyed many aspects of the labor service, and her experiences illustrate the attractiveness of certain aspects of National Socialism to full members of the imagined people’s community. In particular, she enjoyed the camaraderie in the camp and opportunities for travel. During her time in the labor service, Resi formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. She and her friends

997 While Resi attended university in Munich, she did live in a building bordering the Poor School Sisters’ motherhouse that belonged to the congregation but she and her fellow-candidates could not participate in communal life. Ibid., 42.

998 Ibid., 29 ff.

concluded that “both the labor service and camp life included positive aspects,” but they also wished there was less ideology and agreed that three months of service would have sufficed.  

After completing labor service, Resi entered university. Between semesters, she and her fellow-students were sent on harvest details to East Prussia. Historian Götz Aly wrote that for “most young Germans, National Socialism did not mean dictatorship, censorship, and repression; it meant freedom and adventure.”

As a candidate for sisterhood, Resi was well aware of the repressive aspects of National Socialism. But her contemporary recollections from August 1939 about her experiences in East Prussia still convey this sense of adventure and enjoyment. For instance, Resi wrote about the train ride to East Prussia in 1939:

We students were all a bit apprehensive when our…train left Munich in the direction of East Prussia; but before long we felt at home in “our” train and the great expectations, the feverish anticipation broke through: Where will they take us?

About the journey through the Polish Corridor, Resi noted “the slower tempo of the locomotive” and “the completely disciplined comportment of the students;” she added that “an understanding of the severity of the loss of this land rose in all of us.”

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1000 Resi B., 29.
1001 Aly, 14.
1002 “Zurück vom Ernteeinsatz in Ostpreussen,” 26 August, 1939, Resi B., OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1003 About the free Polish city of Danzig that was taken over by National Socialists in 1939, Resi remarked that there were swastika flags everywhere, and people everywhere waved to them. Ibid.
time in East Prussia made a deep impression on Resi, and she vowed never to forget its people who occupied this “harshest of [German] border posts” to the East.\footnote{1004}

Resi’s writings and experiences convey the strong temptations Nazism offered young German men and women. These seductions coupled with the increasing distance to religious life proved too strong for Resi’s fellow-candidate Berti B. who left the congregation within weeks of completing her six-month labor service. Resi graduated together with sixteen candidates. In 1939, only three candidates continued their university courses, and all three finished their studies in April 1940.\footnote{1005}

Resi and her classmates, Anne H. and Anni W., now had the choice of giving up teaching and entering the novitiate. Hedwig K., who completed her teaching degree the year before, chose that path when she left public service and teaching and entered the novitiate in Munich in 1939.\footnote{1006} Along with her decision fully to commit to religious life, Hedwig also consented possibly never to return to teaching. Resi, Anne, and Anni decided not to take this step in 1940 and entered the teaching profession in the German civil service. The three women became “candidates in secular service,” whose ties to the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame were nominal. The women worked for the state, wore secular clothing, and did not live in community with other sisters. Neither Anne H. nor Anni W. ever returned to religious life.\footnote{1007}

\footnote{1004} Ibid.

\footnote{1005} Ibid., 42.


\footnote{1007} Anni W. was transferred to the Generalgouvernement in Poland. Resi was fortunate to stay in her home district near Munich and was able to participate in annual retreats at her congregation. Resi B., 55.
Resi remained loyal to the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, but, as time wore on, she too wavered in her vocation. She made occasional visits to the candidature in Munich but feared to die an “old rumpled maid” without ever achieving her goal of becoming a Poor School Sister. Resi persevered against incredible odds, and she was the only Poor School Sister candidate who returned to the congregation in 1945 after completing her education in public university and entering civil service in Nazi Germany.

Although the Poor School Sisters lost the majority of candidates along with their educational mission and infrastructure, not all young women were dissuaded from entering religious life. When Hedwig K. entered her Poor School Sister’s novitiate in Munich in 1939, she did so along with forty-six other young women. This number was a far cry from previous years when the novitiate routinely numbered more than one hundred, but it was still impressive considering the dismal future of teaching congregations in Hitler’s Germany at the time. The Nazis took note and stepped up their efforts to prevent women from choosing a religious vocation. War offered the state new opportunities to achieve this goal.

Compulsory labor service became a favored tool of the regime to keep young women from joining religious congregations. According to a 1943 situation report, the “employment office has become the least popular government agency in all of Germany.” After the outbreak of World War II, a six months tour of service became

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1008}}\text{Ibid., 79.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1009}}\text{Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, Aussenstelle Lohr, 16 April 1943, StA W, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.}\]
mandatory for all young, unmarried women aged seventeen to twenty-five.\textsuperscript{1010} Only students and employed persons were exempt. Cardinal Bertram noted with alarm in November 1939 that under the new decree thousands of candidates, novices, and sisters could be drafted into the labor service because no formal employment contracts existed between women religious and their congregations.\textsuperscript{1011} The Reich Ministry of Labor confirmed Bertram’s fears and responded that only women religious who had taken their permanent vows would be exempt from the new provisions.\textsuperscript{1012}

The regime usually did not use labor laws to draft professed sisters into service but used them to stop women from joining congregations.\textsuperscript{1013} In 1940, M. Clodwigis S. wanted to enter the novitiate. At the time, the twenty-three-year old candidate was formally employed by the Poor School Sisters in Munich.\textsuperscript{1014} Prior to entering the novitiate, M. Clodwigis severed her employment relationship with the congregation. To do this, she had to close her official work book (Arbeitsbuch) at the local employment

\textsuperscript{1010} The Law for the Reich Labor Service from 29 June 1935 mandated that both young German women and men complete six months of labor service, usually on farms. Although labor service was technically compulsory in 1935, the law was not universally applied until September 1939. Heinz Schreckenberg, \textit{Erziehung, Lebenswelt und Kriegseinsatz der deutschen Jugend unter Hitler. Anmerkungen zur Literatur} (Hamburg: LIT, 2001), 136.

\textsuperscript{1011} Bertram to Hierl, 24 November 1939, BArch B, R 5101, 23348, Bl. 246.

\textsuperscript{1012} Decker to Bertram, 30 November 1939, BArch B, R 5101, 23348, Bl. 248.

\textsuperscript{1013} Kerrl warned the Reich labor office in May 1939 not to apply the new labor decrees too heavily to cloisters because the success in generating labor would stand in no relation to the negative political consequences, the unrest it would cause among the Volk. Kerrl to Seldte, 26 May 1942, BArch B, R 5101, 23311, Bl. 148.

\textsuperscript{1014} Her formal employment as a receptionist at the motherhouse of the congregation in Munich shielded M. Clodwigis from mandatory labor service because women employed full-time were exempt. Gespräch mit M. Clodwigis im Dezember 1995, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
When M. Clodwigis presented her Arbeitsbuch for closure at the employment office in Munich her request was denied. She recalled that when she stated her intentions of entering religious life, officials told her she had better marry and “give the Führer children because in future there will be no cloisters.” Officials then drafted M. Clodwigis into mandatory labor service and sent her to work in a family with seven children.

It was the regime’s official policy since May 1939 to prevent women from joining religious congregation through labor service and the denial of requests to close Arbeitsbücher. The Reich Labor Minister Franz Seldte sent a confidential letter to Reich Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl in May 1939 that suggested ways “to prevent young people from joining cloisters through the application of laws regulating the use of the work force” in the German economy. The passing of the “decree of the extended war service of the labor service for female youth” (Erlaß über den weiteren Kriegseinsatz des Reichsarbeitsdienstes für die weibliche Jugend) prolonged the six months of labor service to a full year. The state made use of the new decree in the case of M.

1015 The Arbeitsbuch was an important personal document that the Nazi state introduced in 1935 to capture and control the labor force in Germany. The employment office (Arbeitsamt) issued work books and no one could enter into an employment contract without one. Employers recorded the employee’s type and duration of work and had to inform the employment office prior to every entry they made into any work book. The work book allowed the state to both control employment and unemployment or, as in the case of M. Clodwigis, persons wishing to leave the work force. “Arbeitsbuch,” in Jugendlexikon Nationalsozialismus, ed. Hilde Kramer and Elisabeth Bartsch (Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 2007), 18-19.


1017 Seldte to Kerrl, 9 May 1939, BArch B, R 5101, 23311,Bl. 128.

1018 Von Gersdorff, 50.
Clodwigis, and in 1941 extended her commitment for an additional six months with a different family. 1019

M. Clodwigis was determined to return to the cloister. Her only way back was through further war service. In 1941, a sympathetic Wehrmacht official requested the candidate as an aid in his field hospital housed in one of the Poor School Sisters’ buildings in Munich. M. Clodwigis worked in the hospital until August 1942 before she finally entered the novitiate. She had to complete her novitiate in secret and for its duration, her work book remained officially open in the field hospital. She recalled that she “always had to be ready for inspections.” 1020 M. Clodwigis had every reason to be careful. At the time she entered the novitiate in 1942, the regime had officially forbidden young women from entering religious congregations and cloisters.

In 1940, Rudolf Hess emphasized the importance of preventing young Germans from entering religious life. He lamented that thousands of young people, 6,000 in 1938, still joined congregations. Hess concluded that “these numbers show it is less important to capture persons already part of religious communities, but to instead ensure that young people do not have opportunities in the first place to turn toward life in a cloister and thereby get lost to the whole Volk.” 1021

1019 The first family M. Clodwigis worked for was poor but the second family was that of a lawyer and his wife and their four children. She had a good relationship with the family. Gespräch mit M. Clodwigis im Dezember 1995, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

1020 Ibid.

1021 Hess asked the Reich Labor Minister Seldte to determine how existing labor regulations could be used to prevent young people from joining congregations and cloisters. Seldte to Kerrl, 28 May 1940, BArch B, R 5101, 23311, Bl. 158.
The state issued a decree that forbade Germans from joining religious congregations and cloisters on 29 September 1940. It stipulated that the acute shortages of workers made it necessary “to prevent able-bodied Germans from entering orders and cloisters.” This prohibition made it difficult but not impossible for the Poor School Sisters to accept and train new members. Both the sisters in Bavaria and Westphalia held novitiates for the duration of the war, except for 1944. To bypass the new decree, the congregation kept the work books of novices open for the duration of the novitiate. But the situation was far from ideal and the decree, along with the realities of war, and the congregation’s deteriorating infrastructure, made it increasingly hard for the congregation to train aspiring sisters.

The purpose of the candidature and the novitiate was gradually to introduce and train young women for religious life. During the novitiate, young women were shielded from all outside influences and spent much time in prayer, contemplation, and meditation. But the congregation’s changing and worsening situation in Hitler’s Germany and war made an ordered life of contemplation and prayer almost impossible.

Novices faced a number of tangible and intangible obstacles. A pervasive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty permeated the novitiate in Munich during the war. Long before the outbreak of war, Sister Victoria W. recalled the disruptive impact such an atmosphere had on her own novitiate in 1936. In light of the news from Spain, she recalled that “it was necessary to be alert day and night,” and “our suitcases containing

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1022 The decree formalized existing practices such as the refusal of closing the work books of young women and men intending to enter religious life. The decree also charged local chapters of the NSDAP to immediately report the names of young persons intending to join congregations and cloisters to the local employment office. Seldte to Reichsarbeitsämter, 29 September 1940, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
secular clothing were packed and placed next to our beds.” 1023 At the sound of a certain signal, the novices were told to disperse in Munich and find shelter wherever they could. 1024 Sister Gerlinda C. added that “ordinarily the long braids of the novices were cut early in the novitiate, but this was delayed and delayed, a sign that the political situation was uncertain and that the young women might have to be sent home.” 1025 These anxieties increased exponentially after September 1940 when Hedwig K. entered her novitiate. She and her cohort also lived in fear of being discovered and conscripted into war service. As a cover and in order to obtain ration coupons for the young women, the congregation’s leaders enrolled all novices in a bookkeeping course. 1026

   Keeping the novitiate secret was made more difficult because the walls of congregations everywhere had been breached with the widespread confiscations of buildings during the war. Sister Agape completed her novitiate in secret in Brakel, Westphalia, in 1941. She escaped the labor service by working for the city of Brakel as a nurse in a temporary home for evacuated children housed in Poor School Sisters’ cloister on the Brede. By 1941, the cloister was becoming an increasingly public and profane space. It was both a field hospital and a public school, and the sisters were subject to constant surveillance from outsiders. To complete her novitiate and to hide the fact that

1023 Wiethaler, 12.

1024 Ibid.

1025 Ibid 13. This increasingly hectic and unsettled atmosphere in the congregation had an effect on candidates and novices. M. Almeda Schricker commented on the alarming disintegration of the spiritual and physical welfare of candidates. In June 1938 she noted with dismay that although prayer was needed more than ever “unfortunately it appears that in some communities common prayer has become a rarity. How else can it be that out of thirty-five house candidates, only two know our sacred prayer in honor of the heart of God?” Schricker, Rundbrief, June 1938, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

she had taken vows in December 1942 when it was prohibited, Sister Agape often had to resort to wearing civilian clothing.\textsuperscript{1027}

The sisters’ fears of discovery were not exaggerated. The regime indeed conducted searches for illegal novitiates. In April 1941, a local Gauleiter approached the employment office in Nuremberg to ask for a search of Franciscan cloister in Mallersdorf to determine the legitimacy of the workforce.\textsuperscript{1028} He added that the deputy of the Führer desired that “the cloisters are subjected to the sharpest controls on this subject.”\textsuperscript{1029} The constant fear of discovery along with the exhausting labor novices now performed soon took a toll.

By 1940 Hedwig K. and her cohort were exhausted. In addition to attending book-keeping courses, the women also sewed habits and sorted ration coupons for a local bakery.\textsuperscript{1030} A weapons manufacturer, the Firma Zettler, opened a production facility in the motherhouse in Munich in the 1940s and novices “wound metal reels for…the Luftwaffe.”\textsuperscript{1031} Even religious exercises became grueling when Hedwig had to prepare weekly typewritten copies of instructions sent by their Franciscan spiritual advisor who was at the front. Hedwig wrote later that her novitiate was more of a continuation of her

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\item Bericht von Schwester Agape, 26 February 2002, AKB, Drittes Reich.
\item Ritter to Seldte, 3 April 1941, BArch B, R 5101, 23311, Bl. 181.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
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candidature, and when the novice mistress asked her afterward if it had all been too much, she answered “yes.”\textsuperscript{1032} The stresses of war and fear of discovery were just two of the reasons why the congregation of the Poor School Sisters steadily lost candidates in Hitler’s Germany. This enormous loss is illustrated by Resi B.’s return to the congregation after the end of World War II. Resi B. entered the novitiate of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Munich in 1945 along with fifteen other women, a stark contrast to the 140 novices in 1937.\textsuperscript{1033}

In Nazi Germany, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame lost a generation of sisters. It was the regime’s success in dissuading or stopping young women from entering religious life that proved the most lasting impact on the congregation. It was only the defeat of Germany in 1945 that stopped the drastic decline of novices, and the Poor School Sisters did recover some of their losses after the war. Some historians have contemplated what Hitler’s plans were for the church after a victorious war.\textsuperscript{1034} Would there have been a “final solution” for Catholicism after the war or would the Nazis have stayed on their set course and continued to chip away at the institutions? Outright persecution seems unlikely.

\textsuperscript{1032} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1033} Ibid., 110.

\textsuperscript{1034} John Conway wrote “that there is evidence to show that the often-proclaimed determination to wipe out Christianity altogether would have been extended beyond the Warthegau to the other areas of German-held territory, and would have ended in the persecution of Christianity by the same methods as had so effectively ‘dealt with’ the Jews. Persecution, 331. See also: Heinz Hürten, ‘‘Endlösung für den Katholizismus?’ Das nationalsozialistische Regime und seine Zukunftspläne gegenüber der Kirche,’’ in Katholiken, Kirche und Staat. Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1963-1992, ed. Hubert Gruber (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994).
The history of the Poor School Sisters in Hitler’s Germany shows that the oppression of the churches can never be compared with the persecution of other groups, in particular with that of Jews. The Nazis lacked the necessary preconditions and the political capital to move more aggressively against the church and in particular against Catholic sisters. Most Catholics were also full members of the imagined “racial community,” which made their exclusion less crucial to the Nazis.

The liminal position Catholic sisters occupied in Hitler’s Germany enabled the Poor School Sisters to redefine their mission and find new employment after the loss of their schools. The women moved deeper into the Catholic milieu in the latter 1930s, which speaks to the continued strength and presence of Catholicism in people’s lives. The sisters’ success in retraining for new positions varied but many women found fulfilling and challenging work as pastoral assistants in Protestant regions of Germany.

The conflict between the church and the state escalated after the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. In the historiography, the Klostersturm came to symbolize the Nazis’ intentions to destroy religious institutions. Placed in the proper perspective, however, the Klostersturm once again illustrates the inability of the regime to move with impunity against the churches and points to the continued privilege of the latter. The events also become less significant when compared with the complete dispossession of Jewish Germans.

War worsened the displacement and deterioration of communal structures the Poor School Sisters experienced since 1937 and contributed to the ongoing loss of candidates. Yet war also offered sisters new opportunities for reintegration into the German state, as the latter extensively utilized both the labor and facilities of women
religious congregations. The importance of Catholic sisters increased further in the final years of war when Allied air raids, the advancing fronts, and collapsing infrastructures came to dominate life on the home front. During the crisis of the final years of war, many people now looked to Catholic sisters to live up to their image of selflessness and render assistance to Germans.
CHAPTER 6:
DEATHBLOWS: FROM STALINGRAD TO CAPITUALTION

6.1 Argument and Historiography

On 3 February 1943, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg wrote:

Heavy is the storm and hard the hour...Stalingrad has fallen! Millions of people speak this word and thousands upon thousands are filled with fear...with bitter pain. There died brother and father, husband and friend. Lord, accept all these sacrifices as atonement for the sins of our people! 1035

Stalingrad marked Germany’s decline in World War II. 1036 The Sicherheitsdienst in Schweinfurt noted on 23 April 1943 that “the people ask themselves how it shall continue on the Eastern front,” and “whether a new winter...will perhaps mean our final annihilation.” 1037 From 1943 onward, the Soviet juggernaut pushed west toward the

1035 Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 3 February 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

1036 Adam Tooze argued that Germany’s military fortunes turned much sooner, namely in December 1941 with the Wehrmacht’s failure to take Moscow. Hitler’s gamble that the Wehrmacht could sustain a war on two fronts proved a “strategic catastrophe.” He wrote that “it is commonly said that the Wehrmacht ‘failed’ to take Moscow. But this does not do justice to the immensity of the shock delivered by the Red Army in the winter of 1941-42,” Tooze, 486, 501, 590. Doris Bergen cautions that “even after the battle of Stalingrad, the outcome of the war was far from a foregone conclusion,” and the Germans launched a successful counter assault shortly thereafter. Doris Bergen, War & Genocide. A Concise History of the Holocaust (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 167. See also, John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Penguin, 1989), 458 ff.

1037 Bericht des Reichssicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, Außenstelle Schweinfurt, 16 April 1943, StAW, SD-Hauptausussenstelle Wbg. Ian Kershaw wrote that after Stalingrad “the ‘Führer myth was now plainly on the defensive...Deep shock, dismay, and depression were recorded everywhere.” Ian Kershaw, The Hitler Myth. Image and Reality in the Third Reich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Kershaw, 187, 192.
eastern borders of the German Reich. Not long after Stalingrad, in May 1943, American and British forces defeated the Africa Korps in Tunisia. Italy collapsed in 1943, and on 6 June 1944, the Allies opened a second front in the west in Normandy. In August 1944, the Allies liberated Paris. All this time, British and American forces flew countless air raids on German cities with the goal of destroying Germany’s war industry and breaking the population’s morale. The almost normal life Germans had enjoyed on the home front during the early part of the war came to an abrupt end in late 1942 with increasing food shortages, the approaching fronts, and the displacement, fear, and devastation caused by Allied air raids.

Despite its waning military strength, Germany remained a formidable enemy. On 18 February 1943, Joseph Goebbels made his most famous speech in the Berlin Sportspalast in which he called for total war and the mobilization of all available resources to ensure victory. Through the brutal exploitation of foreign slave labor, German war time production reached its zenith in 1943 and 1943. With each year of the war, the regime became more radicalized and the final years of the war were also the most deadly. German resistance was bitter until the very end and killing frenzies escalated on the front and in the occupied territories. In 1943, the genocide of Jews also reached its apex in the death camps in the East.

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1038 Things also looked dismal in the naval war and “by May 1943, Admiral Doenitz was losing U-boats and crews at a rate of one per day.” Tooze, 592, 593.

1039 Christopher Browning wrote that “in mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly reversed.” Christopher Browning, Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), xv.
This final chapter analyzes the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame on the German home front in the final years of the war. The historiography on the Catholic Church and Catholics in wartime sometimes gives short shrift to the later war years, favoring instead events that occurred during the early war years such as the murder of the handicapped, von Galen’s sermons, and the Klostersturm. For instance, Jonathan Düring ended his account of the monks of Münsterschwarzach with the Klostersturm in 1941.\textsuperscript{1040}

Omitting the final years of the war poses the danger of ignoring the Catholic Church’s role in the radicalizing and disintegrating war economy and society. Thomas Mengel showed that in 1944 and 1945, the lives of Catholic sisters in Silesia were marked by the advancing Soviet front, social dissolution, and the flight west. The lives of Catholic clergy and religious also intersected more frequently with Nazi crimes and the Holocaust during the final war years. In 2008, Joseph Hummel and Christoph Kösters focused attention on the employment of forced laborers in Catholic institutions. In a different piece, Christoph Kösters pointed to the new challenges the church faced in the final chaotic war years. In particular, reaching the laity and providing pastoral care became increasingly difficult for the church.\textsuperscript{1041} The worsening war and the Holocaust also impacted Catholics on the front in significant ways. Doris Bergen revealed that

\textsuperscript{1040} Heinz Hürten also focused his discussion of Catholics in war on the early years, Hürten, \textit{Katholiken}, 479-501.

\textsuperscript{1041} Christoph Kösters offers a comprehensive overview of everyday lives of Catholics during war in Germany. Aside from pastoral care, he touches on charitable services by the Caritas and congregations, the situation of priests, forced laborers etc. Christoph Kösters, “Kirche und Glaube an der ‘Heimatfront’. Katholische Lebenswelt und Kriegserfahrungen 1939-1945,” in Hummel and Kösters, 363-398.
military chaplains faced terrible dilemmas in the field when perpetrators of mass killings asked for forgiveness. 1042

In the final years of war, the Poor School Sisters’ reintegration into the state continued through their labor on the home front in field hospitals and refugee camps. The experiences of Catholic sisters often did not differ significantly from that of ordinary German women. The Poor School Sisters’ lives too came to be dominated by the disorder, destruction and danger that came with air raids and the approaching fronts. Homelessness, displacement, and food and fuel shortages made life miserable for almost everyone in 1944 and 1945.

At the same time, these shared hardships of war also sharpened the differences between women religious and ordinary Germans. Catholic sisters became an important source of aid as they reverted to their traditional roles as providers of charity and comfort to refugees and the homeless in bombed cities. People were grateful for the sisters’ help but they also made it clear that in this landscape of human destitution, they expected women religious to live up to their image as bearers of sacrifice and suffering for the common good.

The post-war narrative of German suffering as a result of Allied air raids and occupation obscured Germans’ complicity in National Socialist rule and crimes. The Poor School Sisters’ accounts confirm once again that the vast majority of Germans witnessed and even participated in Nazi crimes. The sisters too had frequent contacts with inmates of the concentration camp Dachau, forced laborers, and prisoners of war. Their proximity

to victims of Nazism proved the final and most important test of the Poor School Sisters’ conviction that they had managed to maintain a separate sphere in Hitler’s Germany.

6.2 Frictions with the Wehrmacht

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame became an important source of both material and spiritual comfort to many Germans in times of war. In the absence of countless priests and after the loss of most Catholic organizations and schools, the Catholic sisters who worked as pastoral assistants in many ways became the church during the war. Christoph Kösters and Werner K. Blessing argued that during this time, the Catholic Church reverted back to a localized “Sakristeichristentum.”

Thousands of priests were at the front, leaving many communities without (male) pastoral care at a time when demands on the church increased significantly. Women pastoral assistants like M. Caritina in Lemgo and Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix in Langensalza in some ways came to replace absent priests. M. Caritina articulated her awareness of her new role in the Catholic Church, albeit in a somewhat dramatic fashion:

When the church collapsed, when priests bled to death on the battlefield or wasted away in prison or concentration camps...when the need of the church cried to heaven – then things turned! ...[and ] wherever great things happened in the church, holy women with motherly concern also stood nearby.

1043 Christoph Kösters cited Werner K. Blessing who argued that during the war the Catholic Church reverted back to localized ‘Sakristeichristentum.’ Kösters also pointed out that thousands of priests were at the front, leaving many communities without (male) pastoral care as demands on the church increased significantly Kösters, “Heimatfront,” 366, 369. See also: Werner K. Blessing, “‘Deutschland in Not, wir im Glauben...’ Kirche und Kirchenvolk in einer katholischen Region 1933-1949,” in Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland, ed. Martin Broszat, Klaus Dietmar Henke, and Hans Woller (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 30, 45.

1044 M. Caritina G., Diasporabericht Lemgo, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
For M. Caritina and her fellow-sisters, their Christian mission took on a new urgency in the midst of social disintegration, in particular as the countryside was flooded with refugees trying to escape the bombing of cities. In 1943 and 1944, trains full of refugees arrived in Lemgo. Chaos reigned, and M. Caritina wrote that “in the streets mothers, dirty and in ruined clothing, begged for some milk for their infants.” The sisters were concerned about refugees’ material welfare but they worked even harder to incorporate the new arrivals into the Catholic community.

The Poor School Sisters also continued to bring both physical and spiritual relief to wounded soldiers in field hospitals. The women took special note when they reached members of the SS and “God-believing” pagan (gottgläubige) soldiers with their message. M. Luitgardis wrote from Memmingen in December 1944 that she and a Red Cross nurses made the rounds in the hospital and gave each soldier an image of Christ and a cigarette. She reported that “everyone took the picture, including ss and gg (Gottgläubige) [sic].” On 26 December 1943, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg recorded in their chronicle: “An unbeliever – very ill – demands with much energy for mass at midnight [sic].” In the past, the Wehrmacht usually did not interfere with the sisters’ missionary work, but from 1943 to 1945, the women all of a sudden found

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1045 Ibid.
1046 In times of heightened distress, many Germans turned to religion for comfort, including popular religion. A brief note in the chronicle of the Poor School Sisters in Dachau in August 1944 speaks about “recent reports of miracles.” M. Bettina Schaidl, M. Almeda Schricker’s assistant, advised the sisters to react in a cool and calm manner to the local population spreading such rumors. Chronik Dachau, 17 August 1944, OAAS M.
1047 M. Luitgardis to Schricker, 27 December 1944, OAAS M, Drittes Reich. The sisters in Ravensburg also took note when they reached non-believing soldiers.
1048 Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 26 December 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
themselves embroiled in a number of ideological conflicts with military officials over the practice of religion in field hospitals.

The military as an institution was not separate from the Nazi state, and the radicalization of the regime in the final years of war also manifested itself within the ranks of the Wehrmacht. The Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg always viewed the Wehrmacht as an ally that protected them from the reach of the Nazi state. A cornerstone of the women’s relationship with the military was the latter’s tolerance of the community’s religious observances. But starting in 1943, some Wehrmacht officials became much less tolerant of religious practices and symbols in the Ravensburg field hospital and they began to insist on the ideological tenets of National Socialism. On 20 January 1943, the chief physician Dr. Strauß ordered the removal of crucifixes from the operating room. Not long thereafter, Strauß ordered soldiers desiring pastoral care to first register their request with hospital officials. That only one soldier had the courage to make such a request speaks to the tense and changed atmosphere in the hospital.

Things only became worse. In March 1943, the sisters prayed with fervor to be spared from two grave dangers, Allied air raids and Dr. Reifferscheid:

How many prayers have we sent to heaven to avert the looming danger: Dr. Reifferscheid! And still he came! Proud, overbearing, arrogant, the heart full of wishes: An egotist!

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1049 Ibid., 20 January 1943.
1050 Ibid., 27 February 1943.
1051 Ibid.
1052 Ravensburg Chronik, 1938-1958, 10 March 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
Following the arrival of the new physician, the relationship between the sisters and the new leaders of the Ravensburg field hospital, Drs. Reifferscheid, Strauß, and Eccarius became antagonistic. Dr. Reiffersheid accused the sisters of producing subpar meals in May 1943. The sisters accused him of dishonesty.\footnote{Ibid., 31 May 1943.} Drs. Reifferscheid and Strauß then forbade the holding of the Corpus Christi procession in June.\footnote{Ibid., 9 June 1943.} The sisters protested to no avail. Dr. Eccarius assembled all nurses ten days later, on 19 June 1943, and asked them no longer to speak about religion with patients; he also forbade the sisters to ring the bell for mass.\footnote{Ibid., 19 June 1943.} At the height of the conflict, in February 1944, Wehrmacht officials demanded the removal of all crucifixes from the patients’ rooms.\footnote{The removal of crucifixes from public spaces has become symbolic of the antagonism between the church and the regime. In the case of Ravensburg, the leaders of the field hospital relented and allowed the return of the crucifixes to patient’s rooms after a week, provided the soldiers themselves requested it. Chronologische Notizen, 1944, Bayerische Provinz, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.}

The experience of the sisters in Ravensburg was not an isolated case. M. Luitgardis and M. Elmentraud in Memmingen encountered similar difficulties. The women had worked in field hospitals in Memmingen since 1942 and had enjoyed excellent relationships with their superiors. But in February 1945, M. Elmentraud wrote that the hospital’s chief physician tried to force the sisters to participate in a National
Socialist schooling session (*NS-Schulung*). The sister wrote to M. Almeda Schricker that “you have no idea what this means for me.”\(^{1057}\) She added that

I had to take a position…I negotiated for almost twelve hours with the chief physician and I cannot write to you what I went through. And yet I am glad to be able to endure it even if I feel terribly weak…I have great hopes that we will soon return to our own profession (*Beruf*)…and to no longer have to serve the lords of this world. Even if I should die before then, I am content because I know what I believed.\(^{1058}\)

The defense of their faith has been alternately described as resistance and as evidence of the “milieu egotism” of Catholics, who cared more about the removal of crucifixes than the persecution of their neighbors.\(^{1059}\)

### 6.3 The School Sister and the Holocaust

The failure of the hierarchy to speak out on behalf of Jews after 1933 has come to symbolize the moral bankruptcy of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany.\(^{1060}\) The hierarchy did not protest the boycott of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the November Pogrom in 1938, or the deportations of Jews from Germany in the fall of 1941. Church leaders were well informed about all of these events. The testimonies of Poor School Sisters reveal that the persecution and deportation

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\(^{1057}\)M. Elmentraud to Schricker, 13 February 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\(^{1058}\)Ibid.


of Jews became public and inescapable realities in Germany before and during the war. Sister Agape was sixteen and not yet a Catholic sister in November 1938 when she witnessed the pogrom against Jews in Warburg, Westphalia. She described the pogrom in Warburg as “especially terrible” (besonders schlimm).\textsuperscript{1061} According to Sister Agape, “the whole synagogue was engulfed in flames and clothing and food was taken from the Jews and thrown in the streets where it was burned.”\textsuperscript{1062}

One Poor School Sister described her encounters with Jewish children wearing the Star of David in Munich. The unnamed sister saw the children every day in the Nußbaumstrasse on her way to work:

They [the children] almost always came to me, marveled at the large rosary on my belt and sometimes one of the little ones reached for the large cross…After a while, the children were forever gone.\textsuperscript{1063}

The sister’s testimony confirms on the one hand that knowledge about the persecution of Jews was unavoidable.\textsuperscript{1064} On the other hand, the statement implies ignorance about the fate of Jewish Germans. Scholars debate what Germans knew or did not know about the persecution and genocide of Jews. Studies by Eric A. Johnson and Peter Longerich argued that knowledge about the Holocaust was widespread among Germans and that

\textsuperscript{1061} Bericht von Schwester Agape, 26 February 2002, AKB, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{1062} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1063} Anonymous, “Krieg! (1939-1945),” OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{1064} The Barmherzigen Schwestern vom hl. St. Vinzenz von Paul in Berg am Laim near Munich became direct witnesses to the deportation of Jews from Munich and the surrounding areas when the Gestapo opened a transit camp for Jews in their house. For a discussion of the SS transit camp located in the property of the Sisters of Mercy in Berg am Laim, see: Maximilan Strnad, \textit{Zwischenstation ‘Judensiedlung’: Verfolgung und Deportation der jüdischen Münchner, 1941-1945} (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011).
over time, the regime became less and less concerned with keeping the mass killings of Jews a secret.\textsuperscript{1065}

Many learned about the atrocities perpetrated by Germans from relatives serving on the front. Rumors also began to circulate in Germany in the early 1940s about the mass killings of Jews. For instance, the Sicherheitsdienst in Würzburg reported in April 1943 that people did not believe German propaganda about the discovery of mass graves of 12,000 Polish officers killed by the Soviet Secret Service. The report continued that “in church circles, the opinion reigns that these could be mass graves dug by Germans for murdered Polish and Russian Jews.”\textsuperscript{1066} Victor Klemperer frequently wrote about Jewish deportations, camps, and the mass murder of Jews. In an entry in October 1944, he expressed his fear about the impact of air raids on Dresden on his own situation:

Now Dresden may become a transport junction behind the front…Then we shall get heavy air attacks…Then there will be an evacuation, and at the same time the mixed marriages will be separated, and the Jewish parties gassed – who knows where?\textsuperscript{1067}

The Catholic hierarchy was also reasonably well informed about the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{1068}

Many Germans probably did not have detailed information about the extent of the genocide of Jews in the East but most had at least some knowledge. The Poor School

\textsuperscript{1065} Peter Longerich, “Davon haben wir nichts gewußt!” Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945 (Munich: Siedler, 2006).

\textsuperscript{1066} Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, 17 April 1943, StaW, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.


\textsuperscript{1068} For instance, Thomas Brechenmacher wrote that the papal nuncio “Orsenigo was among the first who learned in July 1942 …’of catastrophic transports and even mass killings of Jews.’” Brechenmacher, “Die Kirche und die Juden,” 138.
Sisters, for instance, had extensive knowledge about the concentration camp Dachau, but based on entries the sisters in Dachau made in their chronicle on 18 May 1945, they had limited information about the camp system as a whole:

The Reverend Neunzig from Dortmund ... illuminated us about the conditions in the camp... There were 224 camps – Dachau belonged to [class] I – (the lowest – and yet so horrible). Buchenwald belonged to class II (worse). Many women and children were killed in Auschwitz in Poland, 600,000 human beings were murdered in Mauthausen near Linz, in Dachau 100,000.  

Despite their more extensive knowledge, the Catholic hierarchy remained silent about the genocide of Jews.

Historian Konrad Repgen defended the church’s stance during the Holocaust. He pointed to various Catholic organizations aiding Christian “non-Aryans,” where women like Dr. Margarete Sommer “risked their lives to accomplish the utmost under the prevailing circumstances.” Repgen explained that the hierarchy did not speak out in the 1940s for two main reasons: The bishops were concerned about a backlash against the

1069 Chronik Dachau, 18 May 1945, OAAS M.

1070 Repgen also pointed to the postwar memorandum by the archbishop of Cologne who rejected the notion that the church was obligated to protest all injustices perpetrated by a state. Repgen, “Bischöfe und der Zweite Weltkrieg,” 437. The Catholic Church opened aid offices for baptized Germans of Jewish descent in Freiburg, Breslau, and Berlin. All of these offices were led by women. The “Hilfswerk beim Bischöflichen Ordinariat Berlin” under the directorship of Monsignor Bernhard Lichtenberg and under the leadership of Dr. Margarete Sommer is perhaps the best-known of these aid organizations. Jana Leichsenring analyzed the “Hilfswerk beim Bischöflichen Ordinariat Berlin.” Until the summer of 1941, the Hilfswerk worked to help baptized Jewish Germans to emigrate. Thereafter, the organization engaged mostly in the pastoral care of persecuted baptized Jews, because Dr. Margarete Sommer rejected illegal actions to rescue the former. Jana Leichsenring wrote that Sommer worked to prepare people to accept their fate and viewed efforts by some to go into hiding a weakness. Jana Leichsenring, *Die katholische Kirche und “ihre” Juden. Das “Hilfswerk beim Bischöflichen Ordinariat Berlin” 1938-1945* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2007), 272.
church that could have endangered its pastoral mission, and public protests could also
have destroyed any hope of rescuing at least some victims in danger of deportation.\footnote{1071}

Repgen did not acknowledge that Christian antisemitism was in part responsible
for Catholic leaders’ ambivalence in the face of Jewish persecution. Thomas
Brechenbacher argued that the silence of the hierarchy about injustices Jews suffered at
the hand of the German state must be in part be attributed to historical prejudices against
Jews and Christian antisemitism.\footnote{1072} But Brechenbacher agreed with Repgen when he
wrote that during the war, Pope Pius XII believed the time for talk had passed and what
was needed was action.\footnote{1073} The fate of Dutch Jews in 1942 showed that public protests
could be counterproductive. Dutch Protestant and Catholic bishops publicly objected to
the deportation of Jews in the summer of 1942. The Gestapo retaliated by deporting even
those Jews they had promised to spare, including converts to Christianity; among them
was the Carmelite nun Edith Stein.\footnote{1074}

In the end, rendering aid to Jews was an individual choice only few German
Catholics made. In his work on the clergy in Berlin, Kevin Spicer showed that “except
for the heroic efforts of the \textit{Hilfswerk}… and the work and efforts of Monsignor

\footnote{1071} Repgen argued that a public protest would have been ineffective and would have endangered
individual aid efforts, in particular efforts to save Germans of “mixed blood” under the Nuremberg laws

\footnote{1072} Brechenmacher, “Juden,” 129.

\footnote{1073} According to Brechenmacher, although the church leaders did not protest specific anti-Jewish
measures, they were not silent. He cited pronouncements of both Pius XI and XII against antisemitism and
racism in 1928, 1938, and 1942. As far as rendering specific aid to Jews, Brechenmacher wrote that aside
from the already mentioned Hilfsbüros in Germany, the Vatican’s efforts, along with other organizations,
resulted in the saving of about one third of Slovakia’s Jews, Ibid., 131, 132, 139.

\footnote{1074} Ibid., 136.
Lichtenberg, no other priests in the recorded documents reached out to Jews in a significant way during their time of persecution, isolation, and ultimately deportation, and murder."\textsuperscript{1075}

Nuns have largely escaped accusations of moral failure during the Holocaust. Women religious are in fact often linked to the rescue of Jewish children. The association is so familiar, it seems not to require explanation. For instance, the announcement of a conference in December 2010 at Yad Vashem with the theme “Hiding, Sheltering and Borrowing Identities as Avenues of Rescue during the Holocaust” featured an unidentified photo of nuns posing with several children, presumably Jewish children hidden in a convent during the war. Holocaust survivor Marion Myburgh, who fled to South Africa in the 1930s, testified in 1996 that the pope never “did anything for the Jews, but a lot of Catholic nuns in Germany did, because they were in it,… they knew what was going on.”\textsuperscript{1076} There is little evidence to substantiate what Marion Myburgh heard about German nuns.

The research on women religious’ role in the rescue of Jews is very small and focuses on occupied Europe, not on German sisters. It is not possible to reach general conclusions regarding how many women religious engaged in saving Jews in Europe during the Holocaust. In her pioneering study on the rescue efforts by Polish sisters, Ewa Kurek estimated that about 12.5% of 643 women religious communities in occupied

\textsuperscript{1075} Spicer, \textit{Resistance}, 138.

\textsuperscript{1076} Marion Myburgh, Shoah Foundation, Interview, 10 February 1996.
Poland hid Jewish children.\textsuperscript{1077} Suzanne Vromen detailed the role of Belgian nuns in the Jewish resistance network Committee for the Defense of Jews. It remains unclear, however, how widespread their participation was among religious congregations in Belgium.\textsuperscript{1078} Determining the extent of Catholic sisters’ engagement in the rescue of Jews is very difficult due to the lack of records, but the evidence suggests that each community decided individually whether or not to engage in rescue and did not act at the behest of the Catholic hierarchy.\textsuperscript{1079}

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame did not hide any Jewish children or adults in Nazi Germany. Some German sisters and congregations, however, did make the decision to rescue Jewish children.\textsuperscript{1080} There is only one account of a Poor School Sister who testified that she assisted Jews prior to the war. Even before M. Agape witnessed the November pogrom in Warburg in 1938, she was involved with the Catholic women’s group Heliand Bund, whose members rendered aid to impoverished Jews in Warburg. M. Agape, who was not yet a candidate for sisterhood in 1938, acted on the behest of the Poor School Sister M. Majella B. at her school in Warburg. She testified that the local

\textsuperscript{1077} Ewa Kurek writes that in the case of Poland, the rescue of Jewish children by nuns “more often than not has been a source of controversy, unsupported by concrete facts, in the unrelenting Polish-Jewish disputes about the war years and the holocaust of Polish Jews.” Kurek, 105, 123.

\textsuperscript{1078} The small historiography in English and German also includes the account of the Swiss Catholic nun Hildegard Gutzwiller of the Order of the Sacred Heart, under whose care 70 refugees, including 38 Jews, survived the Holocaust in her convent in Budapest, Hungary. Jörg Gutzwiller, Sanfte Macht: Hildegard Gutzwiller, eine mutige Christin, die Juden rettete (Freiburg: Kanisius Verlag, 1998).

\textsuperscript{1079} Thomas Brechenmacher’s brief note about Italian sisters contradicts these conclusions. He indicated that the Vatican instructed congregations to hide Jews when he wrote that “nicht wenige Klöster öffneten auf Anweisung des Staatssekretariats die Klausuren, um Verfolgte aufzunehmen.” Brechenmacher, “Juden,” 141.

\textsuperscript{1080} The Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute contains several examples of German women religious congregations who rescued Jews.
Heliand Bund, under the supervision of Sister Majella and a local woman by the name of Frau Stern, sewed clothing and collected food for local Jews. M. Agape and her fellow-students secretly distributed the items to designated Jewish families.\textsuperscript{1081}

The best-known Poor School Sister who aided victims of Nazi persecution was the candidate for sisterhood M. Imma Mack. For the assistance she rendered inmates of the concentration camp Dachau, M. Imma Mack received numerous honors after the war, including a knighthood in the French Legion of Honor and the Bundesverdienstkreuz.\textsuperscript{1082}

In 1944 and 1945, M. Imma Mack entered the concentration camp Dachau many times to deliver food and medicine and to carry illegal letters for inmates. The accounts of both Imma Mack and the Poor School Sisters in Dachau and Freising reveal to what extent the camp was incorporated into the surrounding area and the local economy. The lines between the camp and the town were often quite fluid, as both civilians and inmates crossed in and out of it.\textsuperscript{1083}

The sight of concentration camp inmates was familiar to many Germans. M. Edwiga K. wrote that residents of Mühlhausen, where a sub-camp of Buchenwald was located, were used to seeing concentration camp prisoners in public, whom they called “zebras” on account of their striped uniforms. The sister described an incident in early 1945 when inmates had to fell trees along a country road in Mühlhausen to provide fuel

\textsuperscript{1081} Bericht von Schwester Agape, 26 February 2002, AKB, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{1082} M. Imma Mack also received the honor cross “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” from the Vatican and the Bayerische Verdienstkreuz along with special recognition from the city of Munich.

\textsuperscript{1083} Gellately, 51 ff.
for the local population. The sisters in Dachau also wrote that they “sometimes saw prisoners in their zebra uniforms on their way to work,” and “it was possible here and there to give tea and bread with the permission of the SS guard.” In 1944, the SS briefly established a field hospital in the sisters’ community in Dachau. Inmates from the camp worked in the kitchen washing dishes. The women recorded in their chronicle that “the inmates were nice and calm people.” Such recollections and encounters are neither new nor surprising. They also constituted a fairly insignificant part of the contact between inmates, SS guards, and the sisters.

The concentration camp Dachau was open for retail business to the local population. The twenty-year-old M. Imma Mack first entered the camp on 16 May 1944 to purchase plants from its nursery. At the time, Imma was a candidate for sisterhood in the congregation’s community in Freising. For reasons that are unclear, a certain Herr Dür, an acquaintance of the mother superior of Freising M. Saba, asked the latter to send


1085 Bericht über die letzten Kriegsjahre. Filiale Dachau u. das Konzentrationslager, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

1086 The SS opened the field hospital in July 1944 but closed it in September 1944 because the facilities were inadequate. In particular, it was too difficult to transport the wounded to the cellar during frequent air raids. Immediately after the war, the sisters recorded in their chronicle that former prisoners from Poland came to visit them to thank them for kindnesses they received from the sisters during their work in the field hospital. Chronik Dachau, 7 July 1944, 27 September 1944, and 5 May 1945, OAAS M.

1087 Imma Mack was born in February 24, 1924 into a Catholic family in the small Bavarian village of Möckenlohe near Eichstätt. Her given name was Josefa. After graduating from the public Volksschule in 1937, Imma took a position as a layperson in the kitchen of the Poor School Sisters’ community in Pfaffenhofen where her aunt was a sister. Imma wrote in her memoir that in the religious community she found “uncompromising rejection of National Socialism.” After some time, Imma decided to join religious life and the congregation sent the candidate to school to train her as a sewing and craft teacher. Because in 1942, she could no longer take her state examination as an aspiring sister, M. Imma Mack joined the community in Freising where she perfected her sewing skills under the tutelage of M. Warina B. Josefa Maria Imma Mack, Warum ich Azelen liebe. Erinnerungen an meine Fahrten zur Plantage des KZ Dachau vom Mai 1944-April 1945 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1988), 13 ff.
two young women to pick up plants from the nursery located inside the Dachau concentration camp.

Imma described her impressions of the camp on her first visit in May 1944. Plans of Dachau confirm that the nursery, also called “plantation” (Plantage), was located in the rear of the camp. To reach the sales office, Imma passed the well-tended housing tract of the SS before crossing the Eikeplatz and walked along the “Street of the SS.” She described the foul stench that pervaded the camp and the terrible condition of the prisoners.¹⁰⁸⁸ Dr. Ferdinand Schönwälder, a priest inmate, assisted Imma in the camp nursery. After she identified herself as an aspiring sister, he asked her to return and bring hosts and wine so that imprisoned priests could celebrate mass. An different inmate asked for food for Russian and Polish prisoners who suffered the worst hunger. The young candidate agreed and returned to the camp many times before the end of the war.

Years later, M. Imma Mack explained what inspired her to take risks to aid inmates in Dachau:

As a child I devoured martyrs’ legends from early Christendom. I was especially impressed by the mutual aid Christians rendered to each other without regard for their own safety. Back then the quiet yearning rose in me to aid persons persecuted for their faith in a similar manner. I never lost this desire over the years. On the contrary, it grew stronger. I thought: What happens in Dachau is like the ancient church, it is like the persecution of early Christians (Christenverfolgung).

Imma explained to her mother superior that she wished to return to Dachau.

On her subsequent weekly trips to the nursery, she carried packages that

¹⁰⁸⁸ Imma Mack wrote that upon seeing inmates she was shocked: “Hundreds of men in zebra-striped trousers and jackets or shaby civilian suits, with shorn heads and pale, bloated faces.” Mack, 34, 35.
contained hosts, food, medicine, and letters. The young candidate took her last trip on 28 April 1945, one day before U.S. forces liberated the camp.

M. Imma Mack did not act alone. In fact, what is remarkable about her story is how many people were involved and knew about her activities. Besides the enigmatic Herr Dür, the mother superior of Freising M. Saba and several sisters gathered food and medicine and prepared packages.\textsuperscript{1089} Imma and the sisters in Freising also worked with a local woman in Dachau, Frau Steinbüchler.\textsuperscript{1090} A civilian bookkeeper employed by the camp, who had easier access to the inmates, allowed Imma to drop off larger packages at his home for distribution.\textsuperscript{1091} The Poor School Sisters’ in Dachau also knew of Imma’s weekly trips, and they too collected and distributed food to inmates in Dachau.

Late in the war, the Poor School Sisters in Dachau became a sort of clearing house for persons trying to send parcels to prisoners. Sometime in 1944, the sisters responded to the call of an unnamed local priest in Dachau and “took over the sending of mail and the secret delivery of medicine and other things” to the camp.\textsuperscript{1092} The mother superior of Dachau, M. Rudberta, coordinated the activities. When possible, the sisters took the legal route and posted the parcels. This way, some postmen in Dachau became part of the sisters’ network. As a precaution, the postal carriers often mailed packages

\textsuperscript{1089} For instance, during a typhus epidemic in the camp, M. Saba sent several sisters to a number of pharmacies in Freising to purchase medicine, 68.

\textsuperscript{1090} According to Imma Mack and the Poor School Sisters in Dachau, Frau Steinbüchler’s two young daughters, Christl and Anneliese, also delivered packages to Dachau, 70.

\textsuperscript{1091} Imma identified the bookkeeper as Herr Beer. He took care of the delivery of packages for a while until he refused to be part of the scheme any longer and forbade Imma to set foot in his house. Imma was devastated because she had befriended Herr Beer’s daughter Toni, 76, 77.

\textsuperscript{1092} “Bericht über die letzten Ereignisse,” Filiale Dachau und Konzentrationslager, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
from Munich and affixed different return addresses.\textsuperscript{1093} But using the postal service was not always an option.

Although German prisoners were allowed to receive mail, the SS sometimes arbitrarily instituted \textit{Packetsperren} (prohibitions to receive packages). During such a \textit{Packetsperre} in Dachau in 1944, the sisters’ parcel operation expanded considerably. Besides sending food from their own stores and that of sister communities, they now received money and ration coupons from relatives of prisoners from across Germany with the plea to purchase food and deliver it to certain inmates. Others dropped off food with the same request. For instance, on one occasion, three women from nearby Waldsee dropped off one hundred kilograms of potatoes. From the prior of nearby Scheyern, the sisters received two hundred kilograms of potatoes. Packing such large amounts of food in smaller parcels proved a challenge due to the shortages of cardboard boxes. A local SA man provided the sisters with paper bags.\textsuperscript{1094}

To deliver the packages, the sisters in Dachau also used the camp nursery. There, like M. Imma Mack, they contacted inmates. The women wrote after the war that “of course it was a risk but even among the SS there were true helpers.”\textsuperscript{1095} The sisters also formed a most unlikely friendship with the capo Ladislaw Hübel. In the winter 1944/45, the capo visited the sisters along with an SS guard and two other inmates. Immediately after the war, on 15 May 1945, the sisters wrote that

\textsuperscript{1093} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1094} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1095} Ibid.
late this afternoon Ladislaw Hübel came. He sometimes visited us [during the war] along with a Russian [and] an Italian [prisoner], and a ‘good’ SS guard to carry diverse messages for inmates. He is a communist, but never treated an inmate badly. He even supported priests. But he stubbornly clings to the idea that only communism can make mankind happy; the church poses a problem for him. May the Savior’s words find fulfillment in him: ‘Blessed are the merciful!’ 1096

On his first visit to the Poor School Sisters in the winter of 1944/45, Hübel asked the women to contact the mother superior of the Sisters in Mercy in Tutzing, who might have information about the whereabouts of the father of a fellow inmate. 1097 The sisters contacted the Sisters of Mercy and “besides being the bearer of good news, they [the Sisters of Mercy] also obtained medicine” for prisoners at Dachau. 1098

After the war, the sisters in Dachau tallied the items that passed through their house to Dachau in 1944 and 1945 to the camp. The sisters sent a total of 450 kilograms of black bread (Schwarzbrot), 125 kilograms of white bread, 270 Rohrnudeln, a kind of yeast pastry, 10 kilograms of cookies, 30 kilograms of cured meats, 7.5 kilograms of smoked meats, 12.5 kilograms of butter, 2 kilograms of honey, smaller quantities of sugar, 2.5 kilograms of salt, as well as fruit, wine and cigarettes. 1099 Sending the parcels was an effort that involved numerous individuals and even more people knew about the activities. Imma Mack spoke about her trips to Dachau to acquaintances the point of indiscretion. She alarmed her parents, who learned of her activities from “several persons

1096 Chronik Dachau, 15 May 1945, OAAS M.
1097 The name of the inmate was Dr. Otto who had not had a message from his father in a long time. “Bericht über die letzten Ereignisse,” Filiale Dachau und Konzentrationslager, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1098 Ibid.
1099 Ibid.
who met her on the way to Dachau.” Imma’s father was concerned, but according to the sisters, none of the persons involved suffered any ill consequences from their activities in Dachau.

Besides M. Imma Mack, none of the other women and men explained what moved them to assist inmates. Was it the proximity of Dachau and the knowledge of the suffering of the prisoners that compelled people to act? Was it because most of the prisoners were German, Christian, or members of the clergy? Would the priest in Dachau have encouraged the sending of parcels had many of the inmates not been fellow clergymen but Jews or communists? Resolving these questions exceeds the scope of this work and necessitates further research. It does appears, however, that the Poor School Sisters did not make distinctions between German and foreign inmates. Indeed what is striking about the chronicle of the Poor School Sisters in Dachau is the close and frequent contact the women had with foreign nationals during and immediately after the war."

6.4 The School Sisters of Notre Dame and Forced Labor

Nazi Germany caused the displacement of millions of people during World War II. The presence of foreign forced laborers, prisoners of war and resettled ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe became a familiar sight in Germany in the 1940s. In

1100 Mack, 87.

1101 After the war the sisters in Dachau granted temporary shelter to many discharged prisoners and refugees. Many, but far not all of the women’s guests were priests. On 8 May 1945, for instance, the sisters invited two women Jehovah’s Witnesses to stay after their release from prison. On 15 May 1945, the women extended hospitality to the former camp inmate Heinrich Wollheim, a Protestant opera singer from Berlin who was considered Jewish under the Nuremberg laws. The women described him as “a noble human being who no longer fears anything but hate.” Chronik Dachau, 8 May 1945 and 15 May 1945, OAAS M.
September 1944, imprisoned Muslim Albanians dismantled the SS field hospital in the Poor School Sisters’ community in Dachau. One month later, the sisters wrote that “one meets Latvians, Hungarians, Lithuanians; four nuns from Riga are being housed in the Russian camp.”¹¹⁰² The sisters in the motherhouse in Munich reported that following heavy air raids in September and October 1944, numerous British, French, Russian, and Indian prisoners of war repaired the worst damage to their building.¹¹⁰³ The Catholic Church also employed forced laborers and prisoner of war in its institutions.

The employment of forced laborers and prisoners of war by the Catholic Church indicates to what extent the latter was incorporated into the German war economy. It was only through the exploitation of foreign slave labor that German war production could reach its peak even as manpower losses on the front became critical in June 1941.¹¹⁰⁴ By the end of 1941, over two million foreign laborers, civilians and prisoners of war, were already in Germany, many of whom worked in agriculture. After his appointment as general plenipotentiary for labor mobilization, Fritz Saukel employed increasingly brutal methods to bring more foreign forced laborers from Eastern Europe to Germany. By June 1943, 2.8 million additional workers had arrived in Germany.¹¹⁰⁵ The number of foreigners grew steadily and at its peak, the regime exploited the labor of about 8.4

¹¹⁰² Ibid., 4 October 1944
¹¹⁰³ Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
¹¹⁰⁴ Adam Tooze wrote that “in the three years between June 1941 and May 1944, the average rate of loss for the Wehrmacht was almost 60,000 men killed every month on the Eastern Front,” Tooze, 513.
¹¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 517.
million civilian workers, 4.6 million prisoners of war, and 1.5 million concentration camp inmates.\footnote{Hummel and Kösters, \textit{Zwangsarbeiter}, 69.}

In light of the ruthless recruitment methods and treatment of forced workers, it is important to ask what role the Catholic Church played in this system. In 2000, the German Bishops’ Conference began to document the employment of foreign laborers in Catholic institutions during World War II.\footnote{The Bishops’ Conference initiated the project in light of a wider discussion in Germany about forced labor in Nazi Germany and restitution. On the relatively recent debate about restitution, see: Ulrike Winkler, ed., \textit{Stiften gehen. Zwangsarbeit und Entschädigungsdebatte} (Cologne: PappyRossa, 2000).} The findings were published in 2008 by Karl-Joseph Hummel and Christoph Kösters. Two questions of primary interest were how widespread the use of foreign labor was in Catholic institutions and how foreign laborers were treated. Hummel and Kösters concluded that although it was not possible to determine the exact numbers of workers, it is certain that “the employment of foreign laborers in Catholic institutions during the second World War was not the norm.”\footnote{Ibid., 72.} Approximately five to ten percent of Catholic establishments used foreign workers; less than one percent of the total forced labor force was employed by the church.\footnote{In total, Kösters and Hummel found that foreign laborers were employed in 776 Catholic institutions, a number that is probably on the lower end. For instance in the Erzbistum Freiburg, 55 of 300 Catholic establishments used foreign laborers, in the Bistum Limburg, 44 of 613 institutions used foreign workers, Kösters and Hummel, \textit{Zwangsarbeiter}, 72.} These estimates approximate the use of foreign workers by the Poor School Sisters in Bavaria.
Out of sixty-three of the congregation’s larger houses in Bavaria, six communities employed one or more foreign laborer.\footnote{1110}

Most forced workers employed in Catholic institutions worked in agriculture and hospitals.\footnote{1111} Kösters and Hummel concluded that the overall number of foreign laborers in Catholic institutions was small because church-owned farms, hospitals, and rest homes were usually not major operations that required large numbers of workers.\footnote{1112} It could also be difficult for Catholic institutions to obtain permission from the state to employ foreign laborers. It was only in March 1945, “when the enemy had already advanced as far as the Rhine,” that the employment office in Ravensburg approved the Poor School Sisters’ request for an Italian laborer for their “garden because the work is getting too heavy for the exhausted sisters.”\footnote{1113} Forced laborers often suffered under appalling work and housing conditions, and the pressing question arises how Catholic institutions treated foreign forced laborers.

The sisters in Ravensburg were well aware of the misery of Italian workers in the nearby camp Weingarten where hunger “was so bitterly felt.”\footnote{1114} As Germany’s infrastructure collapsed and food grew ever scarcer, prisoners of war and forced laborers

\footnote{1110} Of the 63 houses, 38 found no evidence of employing foreign laborers and in 19 cases the evidence was inconclusive due to lack of sources. Fragebogen: Ausländische Arbeitskräfte (“Zwangsarbeiter”). Filialantworten – Dez. 2000, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\footnote{1111} Kösters and Hummel determined some regional differences. In Bavaria, foreign workers were far more common in agriculture whereas in Rhineland and Westphalia, the majority of forced laborers worked in hospitals and similar institutions, Kösters and Hummel , Zwangsarbeiter, 73.

\footnote{1112} Ibid., 72.

\footnote{1113} Before March 1945, the sisters had occasionally employed Italian laborers housed in the nearby camp for day work “but now we are getting a specific man for our work.” Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 18 February 1945 and 17 March 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\footnote{1114} Ibid., March 17, 1945.
suffered the effects disproportionately. Following the last major bombardment of Munich on 26 April 1945, M. Therese B. commented on “the bad medical treatment and the hunger of Russian prisoners of war.” Hummel and Kösters argued that the rate of foreign workers’ survival in Catholic institutions was greater in part due to the type of tasks people performed such as agricultural labor.\textsuperscript{1116}

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame took pride in their own accounts of how well they treated the forced laborers in their employ. The sisters in Ravensburg wrote that

\begin{quote}
The Italians look forward to the cloister like small children. Everyone wants to come to us because they know we have bread and food for the hunger…[At the end of the day] the workers beg for food for their sick and starving comrades.\textsuperscript{1117}
\end{quote}

In their brief chronicle, the Poor School Sisters in Dorfen wrote in 1943 that the eighteen-year-old Ukrainian women Marie, who worked on their farm, was “quite willing, good-natured…everyone protects her.”\textsuperscript{1118} In 1944, the sisters wrote that Marie “feels like the child of the estate; she likes to be here and we suffer her gladly.”\textsuperscript{1119} The sisters in Dorfen employed four Ukrainian women and one man at different times during World War II, but they only described their relationship with Marie.\textsuperscript{1120}

\textsuperscript{1115} M. Therese B. – Nazizeit im Mutterhaus München – Erinnerungen, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
\textsuperscript{1116} Hummel and Kösters, Zwangsarbeiter, 92.
\textsuperscript{1117} Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 17 March 1945, OAAS M.
\textsuperscript{1118} Chronik Dorfen, 1943, OAAS M.
\textsuperscript{1119} Chronik Dorfen, 1944, OAAS M. Marie, whose last name the sisters did not record, left the sisters in Dorfen in June 1945. On the occasion, the sisters wrote: “The ‘little Marie’ became restless and yearned to return home to her mother.” Chronik Dorfen, 1945, OAAS M.
\textsuperscript{1120} Fragebogen, Ausländische Arbeitskräfte ("Zwangsarbeiter"), OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
The sisters often commented on the positive attributes of foreign workers. In 1942, the Poor School Sisters in Freising wrote that “Paul [Cannier], a French prisoner of war, and ‘Michl’ [Kowalzyk], a Ukrainian, willingly and energetically tackled all work in the stables and the field.”\textsuperscript{1121} In 1940 and 1941, the Poor School Sisters in Weichs received the unexpected help of ethnic Germans living in a camp in their cloister. Resettled ethnic Germans were not forced laborers but nonetheless contribute to the understanding how the sisters treated and viewed foreign workers. The sisters in Weichs employed the Bessarabian Eduard Geissler, the father of ten children, as a farm hand. They wrote that he was “a loyal and hard worker.”\textsuperscript{1122} During the potato harvest in September 1942, the Slovenians living in the cloister in Weichs “proved very faithful helpers, even without an invitation.” The sisters added that they even refused payment but were grateful for proffered clothing and shoes.\textsuperscript{1123} The Poor School Sisters in Weichs also developed a close relationship with the French prisoner of war Robert Lohe who worked on their estate. According to the sisters, he protected them from plunderers in May 1945 and kept in touch with the sisters. Years later, he visited the Poor School Sisters in Weichs together with his family.\textsuperscript{1124} In a report she wrote in May 1945, one week after the American occupation of Munich, M. Bettina Schaidl also commented on the often close relationship that developed between the sisters and prisoners of war:

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\textsuperscript{1121} Chronik Freising, 1942, OAAS M.

\textsuperscript{1122} Chronik Kloster Weichs, December 1940, OAAS M.

\textsuperscript{1123} Ibid., September 1942.

\textsuperscript{1124} Fragebogen, Ausländische Arbeitskräfte (“Zwangsarbeiter”), OAAS M, Drittes Reich
Today I sent a letter with homeward bound American prisoners of war...who...became well-acquainted with M. Celine...[A group of] Indians (our workers) also came by to say farewell; they fly to England on Sunday; I gave them a letter for M. Leontine Sch.\textsuperscript{1125}

Notwithstanding the many positive comments about forced laborers and prisoners of war, the Poor School Sisters were not free from common prejudices against foreigners. Many Germans looked with disdain on laborers from Eastern Europe. A situation report from November 1943 indicates that Germans viewed forced laborers, in particular Poles, as cheeky (\textit{frech}), dangerous, devious, dishonest, and lazy.\textsuperscript{1126} Although the Poor School Sisters in Dachau opened their doors to many people from numerous nationalities in the 1940s, they nonetheless commented that a group of imprisoned Muslim Albanians, who came to clear out the closed field hospital in 1944, were “lazy and underhanded fellows.”\textsuperscript{1127} The chronicle of the sisters’ community in Lenzfried offers an unexpected insight into the writer’s view of Poles and the war. An unnamed sister recorded in 1940:

\begin{quote}
The Poles came. However, they came not as proud lords to defeat the hated Greater Germany (\textit{Großdeutschland}) and to divide it amongst the nations of Europe, but as poor seekers of work, who needed to earn their daily bread and shelter.\textsuperscript{1128}
\end{quote}

The sisters in Lenzfried prepared the “daily, simple meals” for the nearby camp that housed Polish workers.\textsuperscript{1129} A young Polish man of twenty-one soon joined the sisters in

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\textsuperscript{1125} Schaidl to Schricker, 5 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
\textsuperscript{1126} Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, Aussenstelle Würzburg, 9 November 1943, StA W, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.
\textsuperscript{1127} Chronik Dachau, 4 October 1944, OAAS M.
\textsuperscript{1128} Chronik Lenzfried, 1940, OAAS M.
\textsuperscript{1129} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Lenzfried. The women felt lucky when he gave “the impression of a hard-working, understanding, and good human being, who was moreover eager to fulfill his religious duties.” For unknown reasons, the Polish woman Stanislawa Bakocinska, who worked in the gardens of Lenzfried, did not wish to remain with the Poor School Sisters and after repeatedly requesting a transfer, she left the cloister in October 1944.

6.5 Experiencing the Bombing War

As the situation on the home front deteriorated, Germans’ resentment of foreign workers grew. In March 1943, the Sicherheitsdienst in Nuremberg reported that the large numbers of prisoners of war and foreign laborers were causing considerable anxiety among the local population. People feared reprisals from foreign prisoners and workers, in particular in the face of new military crises and the worsening of the bombing war.

The German Luftwaffe set the precedent for the bombing of cities and civilians in 1939 in Warsaw and in 1940 in Rotterdam and London. During the Blitz on England, 40,000 civilians died. In part as a response to German air attacks, the British started

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1130 Ibid.

1131 Ibid., 1944.

1132 Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Nürnberg, 15 March 1943, Sta W, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.


1134 Richard Evans wrote that neither the Germans nor the Soviets “set much store by large-scale, strategic bombing. Both used bombers tactically, either in support of ground forces or to prepare the way for them,” Third Reich at War, 436. Jörg Friedrich added that although records do not point to the deliberate bombing of civilians during the Blitz, the bombardments nonetheless “crossed a threshold into the modern age from where there has been no return,” Evans, 69.
flying sporadic raids on Germany as early as 1940 and 1941.\textsuperscript{1135} These initial bombings caused little unrest among Germans. Sisters Mediatrix an Alfera in Langensalza in Thuringia wrote that in November 1941,

the first 5 bombs fell in a distance of 500 m[eters] from the rectory. Until now, we always heard the siren located in our neighborhood but we never heeded its warning call. Even this evening, Sister Alfera stood at the window and looked in the direction where the bombs were falling, not knowing that death had just passed by her. The next day, we found a bomb splinter the size of a fist very near our front door.\textsuperscript{1136}

In March and April 1942, the British commenced the bombing of German cities in earnest under the new command of Arthur Harris with raids on Lübeck and Rostock.\textsuperscript{1137} Within a year, the Poor School Sisters in Munich wrote that the “population was gripped by a veritable fear psychosis because of the increasing and approaching dangers from the air.”\textsuperscript{1138} The bombing raids on Munich began in September 1942 and lasted until the end of April 1945.

As was the case for most Germans, Allied air raids came to dominate the Poor School Sisters’ lives in 1943. Many of the sisters’ houses suffered serious damage or were destroyed. The sisters in Giesing reported in 1944 that their “house shook … when a

\textsuperscript{1135} Churchill ordered the first British air raid on Berlin on 26 August 1940, after a German plane dropped bombs on London. Jörg Friedrich wrote that this mission accomplished little and brought the British heavy losses, Friedrich, 65-69.

\textsuperscript{1136} Diasporabericht von Langensalza, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{1137} Friedrich, 182.

\textsuperscript{1138} The congregation’s Chronological Notes from 1943 state further that “while the young generation of our Volk bled to death on the front…in bitter battles, our beloved heimat suffered under the horror war, namely under the terrible air raids.” Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Provinz, OAAS M.
high explosive bomb detonated nearby."\textsuperscript{1139} Four fire bombs caused damage to the building’s roof. The Poor School Sisters in Augsburg described the harrowing scenes in the basement of their orphanage during a raid in October 1944. About forty children and a number of sisters took shelter in the cellar when the building was hit and destroyed by bombs. M. Fabiola H. wrote that the ensuing air pressure ripped the door from its hinges and stirred up so much dust, “the children screamed for air.”\textsuperscript{1140} The orphans and sisters were trapped by the rubble of the destroyed building above them. But large pipes connected the orphanage’s basement to the bunker next door and M. Fabiola led the way as she and the children crawled to safety.\textsuperscript{1141} The sisters and the children endured one more severe attack the next day before they left Augsburg. Not everyone escaped alive. In January 1945, M. Bettina Schaidl received word that four Poor School Sisters were killed during a raid on Augsburg.\textsuperscript{1142}

In December 1944, the congregation’s motherhouse was destroyed during an Allied air raid. The building was located in the center of town and even before December 1944, the complex had at times sustained serious damage during the frequent attacks on the city. Already in April 1944, following a “veritable hail of bombs,” large tracts of the motherhouse caught fire that was extinguished only through the fast response of the congregation’s firewomen.\textsuperscript{1143} In July 1944, two separate raids caused more fires

\textsuperscript{1139} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{1141} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1142} Aufzeichnungen von M. Bettina Schaidl, Generalassistentin (1945), OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

\textsuperscript{1143} Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
damage to the school building. Following the attack in July 1944, central Munich was without running water and electricity, which meant no radio and no siren. The sister wrote that

the lack of the latter [siren] was especially nerve-racking. In our windowless rooms we could hear the official and illicit ‘alarm criers’ (Alarmschreier) very well. They caused many scares among our sisters at all hours of the day and night.1144

On 17 December 1944, Allied bombers destroyed the already damaged motherhouse completely. The last sisters had just entered the air raid shelter, when the women heard and felt the impact of bombs in the immediate vicinity. The air pressure pushed open the reinforced doors in the cellar and filled the room with dust and smoke. The sisters wrote afterward that these “were moments of terrible and mortal fear.”1145

M. Clodwigis experienced the air raid on Munich on 17 December 1944 as a young candidate. She recalled that as the sisters emerged from the cellar, “the church burned like hell – phosphorus bombs!...High explosive bombs fell into the school house – a large crater formed in the stairwell.”1146 The sisters depended on their own resources to fight the spreading fires. M. Clodwigis recalled that “for three weeks after the attack we did not get out of our firefighting uniforms.”1147 The sisters had their own efficient and well-trained fire brigade. The air raid warden M. Laurentine oversaw three troops of twelve sisters trained as firewomen. M. Clodwigis was in charge of one of the firefighting

1144 Ibid.
1145 Ibid.
1147 Ibid.
troops and she remembered one particular task that filled them all with fear: “Every two and a half hours we took our big dog and went to check the ruins for unexploded bombs (Stabsbrandbomben).” The women feared both live bombs and looters because “everything was open, without doors.” The situation in the motherhouse was becoming untenable and some of the sisters moved to less damaged houses in the area. These sisters joined the large exodus in the 1940s to the countryside.

The air raids caused large population movements from urban to rural areas. M. Caritina in Lemgo described the chaos caused by the arrival of people fleeing destroyed German cities. Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix also reported the arrival of refugees in Langensalza, among them six hundred children from Aachen, “who were sent here to recover from the terrible air raids.” There were indeed regions in Germany that remained relatively unaffected by Allied bombings. In 1944, the Poor School Sisters in Brakel in Westphalia wrote that “at the beginning of the new year we could still celebrate in all calmness (in aller Ruhe) the profession of vows of two novices and the clothing of two postulants.” In early 1945, the Poor School Sisters in Beuthen in Upper Silesia wrote that the fifth year of war had ended and the sixth has started, but “in our house, we barely noticed any of the events taking place at the front.”

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1148 Ibid.
1149 Ibid.
1150 Diaspora-Bericht Langensalza, undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1151 The province was not free from air raids, however, and the Westphalian communities in Elbersfeld and Neviges-Dönberg suffered serious damage from the attacks in the 1940s. Chronologische Notizen 1944. Westfälische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
1152 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Schelsische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
(Wartheland) too had the occasional air raid alarm, “but the city and surrounding area was always spared the horror and mortal fear of an attack.” At the time the sisters were writing these lines, the Soviets were poised to cross over the East Prussian borders into the German Reich.

In 1944, the Poor School Sisters received alarming news from their communities in Hungary about the advancing Red Army. That year, the sisters in Derecen fled the approaching front. Two sisters who remained behind were killed by Red soldiers. An eye witness claimed that in Makó, Hungary, the Soviets shot five Poor School Sisters in the market place on their way to church. Such reports and other rumors fed Germans’ fears about their fate under Soviet occupation. Already in November 1943, the Sicherheitsdienst in Würzburg reported that

> the majority of the people torment themselves with the consequences of a lost war. It means the invasion of Bolshevism and with it the perpetration of gruesome deeds against the civilian population, as it is always portrayed in the press and on the radio. This strikes people as a most terrible of prospects…The fear of this horror…impels people to continue to endure the war.

In June 1944, the Soviet army arrived north of the Memel on the East Prussian border. That fall, the Soviets crossed into Germany but the Wehrmacht pushed them back one last time and months of relative quiet followed. The Nazi state did not evacuate civilians

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1153 The sisters in Tscheschen in the Wartheland also wrote at the end of 1944 that they had not yet noted the nearness of the front. “The nights are calm and the days free from alarms. We continue to trust in the protection of God.” Ibid.

1154 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Ungarische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.

1155 Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS, SD-Abschnitt Würzburg, 2 November 1943, StA W, SD-Hauptaussenstelle Wbg.
from the region during this time. When in January 1945, the Soviets once again crossed the border and subsequently cut off East Prussia from the rest of Germany, it was almost too late for Germans to escape.

In January 1945, a number of Poor School Sisters in Upper Silesia joined the large treks west. Like most Germans, the sisters panicked in light of rumors of the approaching Soviet front and wrote at the end of 1944 that “the truths and rumors spreading about the behavior of the advancing Russian war hordes (Kriegsmeute)…make one’s blood run cold and takes one’s breath away.” M. Almeda Schricker designated the Bavarian community in Weiden as a collection point for sisters fleeing Silesia. Between January and April 1945, about 180 Silesian sisters arrived by themselves or in small groups in Weiden, often after weeks on the road. Although the Poor School Sisters endured the same hardships as the general population, the latter nonetheless began to look to religious congregations for aid.

In the final year of the war, the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame increasingly reverted to their traditional role of providers of charity and comfort to Germans. The courage and commitment of most sisters did not go unnoticed. In January 1945, Anne Goeken from the Caritas visited religious congregations in the Rhineland. She reported that

all houses take the view that the sisters must hold out in their posts for as long as possible. Through their work (nursing, pastoral care, children’s and nursing homes etc.) they are so closely connected with the population, it is unthinkable they should prematurely leave the people in such a difficult situation. Even in imminent

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1156 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.

1157 Chronologische Notizen 1945, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M
proximity to the front the sisters remain in their posts and for as long as they have a roof over their heads, they perform astonishing feats for the people whose lives are in constant danger...[the sisters] are working in basements and render significant aid to the embattled population.\textsuperscript{1158}

Even in Silesia, many sisters remained behind or took their charges with them when they fled.

In 1945, eighteen sisters in Schweidnitz (Upper Silesia) fled west along with two hundred old and frail people. When the staff of the state-run nursing home in Schweidnitz simply left in February 1945, they advised the Poor School Sisters working there to do the same. The sisters refused and took it upon themselves to evacuate the home. The large group left in February 1945 and after eight days arrived unannounced in Vilsbiburg in Bavaria.\textsuperscript{1159} Almost everywhere in Silesia, a number of sisters stayed to care for the sick and old people, who could not join the grueling trek west. In Breslau, the provincial superior M. Sigrid remained along with twenty-seven sisters in their motherhouse when the “Fortress Breslau” closed in 11 February 1945. From their air raid shelter, the sisters awaited defeat and the arrival of the Red Army.\textsuperscript{1160}

Increasing numbers of Germans came to depend on the charity of the sisters. In 1944 and 1945, numerous of the Poor School Sisters’ houses in Germany provided

\textsuperscript{1158} Anne Goeken, Bericht über die Verhandlungen mit den rheinischen Mutterhäusern über den Schwesterneinsatz in den süddeutschen Provinzen, 16 January 1945, ADCV 544.

\textsuperscript{1159} Chronologische Notizen 1945, Schlesische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.

\textsuperscript{1160} Ibid. Although the situation became more dangerous by the day, the Poor School Sisters working in numerous field hospitals across Germany also could not abandon their charges. M. Pusizia worked in a hospital near Augsburg where she experienced numerous air raids. The sister wrote that in April 1943, long before the wounded were safely in the shelter, “the impact of a heavy bomb seemed to shake the house in its foundation,” and “it felt like the house was going to collapse the next moment.”\textsuperscript{1160} She reported that “some patients lost their nerve and screamed like little children.” M. Pulsizia to Schricker, 22 April 1943, OAAS M, Drittes Reich
services for displaced persons. The sisters in Dachau housed refugees from nine nations. The community in Lichtenfels opened a soup kitchen and “day and night provided for many refugees passing through.” The sisters filled gaps left by the collapsing regime. In 1945, Nazi officials opened a shelter in the sisters’ house in Kümmersbruck in Bavaria. When they left the refugees to their own devices, the sisters took over the care of the people on their own accord. In 1944, the community in Ravensburg increased by over two hundred homeless domestic and foreign refugees. The Poor School Sisters reported that in these final years of the war, numerous people came to their gates everywhere begging for food and shelter.

Germans were grateful to Catholic sisters for their work and aid in the final war years, but they also expected it. Throughout the Third Reich, Germans defended and supported Catholic sisters because they believed in the latter’s selflessness, benevolence, and readiness to suffer and sacrifice for others. Germans now looked to sisters to live up to this image. The notion of suffering did indeed take on heightened importance in the sisters’ lives in times of war. In their own accounts, the women stressed their readiness and ability to endure hardships and dangers with greater composure than most. In October 1940, the mother superior of the Westphalian province, M. Alix, reminded sisters of their vow of poverty, and wrote that “we will gladly suffer privations” as a castigation from God.

1161 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
1162 Chronologische Notizen 1945, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
1163 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
1164 M. Alix, Rundbrief, 11 October 1940, AKB, Drittes Reich.
In their writings, sisters often drew a distinct line between their own superior fortitude and that of ordinary people. For instance, during the air raid on Munich on 17 December 1944, civilians joined the sisters in their bomb shelter. M. Therese B. wrote that the people “whined (jammerten) like little children; men wailed: ‘Must everything collapse on top of us?’”¹¹⁶⁵ In contrast, M. Therese remembered that the Poor School Sisters “mostly prayed silently” and kept their composure throughout the heavy raid that destroyed the motherhouse.¹¹⁶⁶

An undated postwar account describes the calm and resignation with which the mother superior M. Bonosa P. faced death at the hands of a Soviet soldier. After their encounter with Soviet forces in 1945 in Neiße (Upper Silesia), M. Bonosa stood before her sisters and said: “Sisters, nothing remains for us but death. We will accept it as atonement for our sins for the sins of the entire world.”¹¹⁶⁷ When Soviet soldiers broke into the sisters’ room in the evening, the mother superior stood before her sisters in an attempt to protect them from sexual assault and a soldier shot and killed her.¹¹⁶⁸ This postwar account exemplifies the Poor School Sisters’ congregational culture and history that encouraged the women to bear suffering and even death with equanimity.¹¹⁶⁹

¹¹⁶⁵ The Generalassistentin, M. Bettina Schaidl, told her fellow-sisters that during the air raid she made plans in her head of how to rebuild the motherhouse. M. Therese B., Zur Zerstörung des Mutterhauses am 17 Dezember 1944. Das Schicksal der Schwestern des Kirchensteueramtes, April 1996, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

¹¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁷ “Bericht über das Sterben unserer Neisser Mitschwestern,” undated, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁹ M. Caritina G. articulated this attitude in a letter in March 1945 to M. Almeda Schricker that alongside the many cruelties and hardships of war, it also allowed for the growth of real faith in God and brought her a “wonderful serenity. We in the West must always be ready. We have almost always alarm –
It appears that most sisters indeed endured the dangers and hardships of war with admirable courage. At the same time, the women were not beyond feeling terrible fear and did not necessarily look to become martyrs. Contemporary records offer a glimpse of the psychological impact of war on the sisters. The frequent air raids, intended to break German morale, also began to take a toll on the sisters. After leaving Augsburg in 1944, M. Fabiola H. found herself outside when low-flying enemy planes circled overhead. The sister wrote that after the alarm sounded, she was overcome by such weakness, she could not move despite the danger. In March 1945, M. Pusizia admitted that “the gruesome pictures of the horrible catastrophe [air raid] have very much affected me in body and soul.” She admitted that she was now very afraid during every alarm and it was only with reluctance that she worked in the field hospital in Augsburg because it was hit in almost every raid.

In the final years of war and during the immediate postwar period, Germans objected when they noted behavior among women religious that contradicted the ideal image of sacrifice. The sisters themselves admonished what they perceived as the unbecoming behavior of fellow-sisters. After the war, M. Caritina wrote from Lemgo about the stream of refugees arriving in the town. Among them were four Borromean day and night. The refugees let us know what is yet to come. I am ready… “M. Caritina G. to Schricker, 23 March 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.


1171 M. Pulsizia added: “I wish the end of it [war] was near. It makes such immense demands on the strength of one’s nerves… that it seems impossible, at least for me, to bear it any longer.” M. Pulsizia to Schricker, 22 March 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

1172 Ibid.
sisters (Sisters of Mercy of St. Borromeo). M. Caritina noted with disapproval on more than one occasion that

our sisters would not have behaved in this [egregious] manner. I mean, especially sisters should be able to best endure the exertions of the transport and the poverty that comes with it. After all, they took the vow!1173

In the immediate postwar period, M. Almeda Schricker admonished sisters that it was prohibited for them to scrounge (*hamstern*) for food, even for their relatives, because “it very much damages the reputation of the cloister.”1174 The general superior wrote on a different occasion that

I forbid it in particular that sisters accept meals on these occasions [on their hunts for food] and eat in stranger’s houses; people are getting very resentful about this. Just recently, I received a letter from two well-meaning women with the demand that I transfer two sisters so that ‘they once again learn…real cloister discipline and so that the food hunting, that upsets people so much and causes so much gossip, stops… ‘ Is that not shameful? This was not the only incident of the kind involving our sisters that outraged the laity.1175

With the collapse and defeat of Germany, the plunder that had long sustained the German home front also stopped. Germans now watched each other jealously for what they viewed as undeserved privilege. While they endured worsening hardships, it was unacceptable to many Germans that sisters should enjoy better or even the same standards of living as they did.

There were indeed times in 1945 and thereafter when sisters were better off than ordinary people. With the exceptions of the Soviets, the Allied occupying forces usually

1173 M. Caritina to Schricker, 31 September 1946, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1174 Schricker, Rundbrief, 20 December 1946, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1175 Schricker, Rundbrief, 4 June 1948, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
viewed Catholic sisters as untainted by National Socialism and treated the women with courtesy. The sisters did not know this as the Allied forces approached, and on 23 April 1945, the Poor School Sisters in Ravensburg “looked with trepidations toward the future” as they anxiously awaited the arrival of the enemy.¹¹⁷⁶ That day the Wehrmacht opened their stores to the sisters and provided the community with plenty of food for the foreseeable future.¹¹⁷⁷ On 28 April 1945, the women raised a white flag, and around two in the afternoon American tanks arrived. The city surrendered without incident and was occupied by the French.¹¹⁷⁸

American forces liberated Dachau on 29 April 1945 and entered Munich on 30 April 1945. That day, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin. M. Bettina Schaidl reported on 5 May 1945 about the ensuing chaos, looting, and the sporadic fighting that continued in the city for days thereafter.

The threat of the death penalty [for looters] is justified. Many stores were looted by both Germans and foreigners. Sister Alonsa also suffered a break-in by thieves. For that reason we now stand guard during the night; it is like 1919.¹¹⁷⁹

During the first week of the occupation, the Poor School Sisters in Munich suffered multiple break-ins. One was led by an American soldier who entered the sisters’ house

¹¹⁷⁶ Chronik Ravensburg 1938-1958, 23 April 1945, OAAS M.

¹¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 28 April 1945.

¹¹⁷⁹ Schaidl to Schricker, 5 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
with his gun drawn. When he realized where he was, he immediately adopted a friendly
tone toward the sisters and the resident priest.\textsuperscript{1180}

For the Poor School Sisters in Brakel in Westphalia, the war ended weeks earlier
on 5 April 1945. Already in March, the sisters in Brakel awaited with trepidations the
arrival of Allied forces. Paderborn fell on Good Friday, 30 March 1945. The next day, the
sisters received word that the Americans had taken Warburg; Germans forces took it back
the next day. Fighting was fierce throughout the region. Allied forces retook Warburg on
4 April 1945. The same day, approaching American forces bombarded Brakel.

Wehrmacht soldiers and SS troops assembled in the town. The sisters feared the worst
and spent the night in their cellar. After a brief firefight, the Americans occupied the city.
Part of the American forces set up camp in the sisters’ courtyard. One soldier introduced
himself to the sisters as a nephew of a School Sister in the United States. Thereafter, the
relationship between the women and the US troops became very cordial.\textsuperscript{1181}

The pastoral assistant M. Theresia D. was in Demmin in Pomerania when Soviet
troops occupied the town on 29 April 1945. The Soviet occupation of Germany is
associated with the mass rape of German women. The sister too reported about the
widespread sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated by Soviet troops:

\begin{quote}
The Russians had complete freedom to plunder and to satisfy their
lusts…In particular during the night, the fearful cries of women
and girls echoed through the city…In the third week, the
commandants issued strict orders to put a stop to it [rapes]…[but]
the suffering of the women was not yet at an end….all
\textit{Diakonissinen} [Protestant sisters] in the hospital and seven
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1180} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1181} \textit{Aufzeichnungen einer Schwester aus den Kriegstagen in Brakel}, undated, AKB, Drittes Reich.
Catholic sisters working in the children’s home [became victims of rape].  

M. Theresia D. wrote that she and her fellow-sisters were spared sexual assault. It is difficult to know whether or not that was the case, because none of the Poor School Sisters in the Soviet zone admitted to becoming the victim of rape although most reported it in their writings. Almost thirty Poor School Sisters were barricaded in their bomb shelter when Russian forces took Breslau in the night of 6 May 1945. The women reported that soldiers tried in vain to break into their cellar and none of the sisters came to any harm.

Not all sisters escaped. In Neiβe in Upper Silesia, an eye witness testified that numerous Catholic sisters became the victims of rape. On 24 March 1945, Soviet forces entered the town and broke into the cellar where the small community of Poor School Sisters was hiding. A Soviet soldier approached the sisters and told them that Germans had killed both his mother and sister. He attempted to rape one of the women, but according to the postwar account, she resisted and he killed her instead. The sexual assault and brutalization many German women suffered at the hands of Allied forces was real and no woman deserves to be victimized in this manner. It is, however, also important to remember that these mass rapes occurred in a world the Germans made.

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1182 M. Theresia D., Bericht über das Kriegsende in Demmin,” May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1183 Chronologische Notizen 1945, Schlesische Provinz, OAAS M.
1184 Bericht über das Sterben unserer Neisser Mitschwestern,” Das Leiden von M. Balda (Anna) G., und M. Bonosa (Luzia) P., OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
1185 Ibid.
1186 Ibid.
Historian Norman Naimark wrote that after years of brutal occupation by Germans and following an extremely blood war, the final directive from the Main Political Administration of the Red Army to Soviet troops before they crossed the East Prussian border stated that “‘on German soil there is only one master – the Soviet soldier, that he is both the judge and the punisher for the torments of his father and mothers, for the destroyed cities and villages…”

Sisters Alfera and Mediatrix, along with a number of other Poor School Sisters, also found themselves under Soviet occupation. The records did not reveal what happened to these women in the days and weeks following Germany’s defeat. It was only months later, in December 1945, that they managed to flee to the American zone in Bavaria and rejoined their fellow-sisters.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame called 1944, the last full year of war, “the bitterest year” of the congregation’s existence. The hardships many Germans, in particular women, endured in 1944 and 1945 very soon gave rise to a narrative of victimhood that obscured Germans’ knowledge of and complicity in Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. The Poor School Sisters’ writings are a testament to how quickly tales of German suffering obscured the shared responsibility for the past. The sisters in Munich recorded in their chronological notes for 1945 that “our soldiers…went to war only with reluctance; they were demoralized by the knowledge that they should sacrifice their life for the ambitions of a despot” and succumbed to the enemy after six years of exhausting


1188 „Von Russland nach Amerika im Dezember 1945,” OAAS M, Drittes Reich.

1189 Chronologische Notizen 1944, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.
fighting. Following the truce on 8 May 1945, the women wrote that “the tyranny of National Socialism under which the Volk has suffered since 1933 came to an end.” On 10 May 1945, the sisters in Ravensburg commented on the confiscation of goods by the French and wrote “the poor Volk is now being enslaved (geknechtet) for the second time.” This distinction between Nazis as perpetrators and Germans as victims concealed not only the complicity of Germans but also the considerable powers the latter possessed in the Nazi state. It was through popular support that the Poor School Sisters were able to maintain most of their communities in Germany.

In the final years of war, the experiences of the sisters often did not differ significantly from that of the general population. Frequent air raids, food shortages, displacement, and looming defeat also dominated the lives of the sisters. But war also sharpened differences between Catholic sisters and ordinary Germans. Women religious increasingly filled gaps left by the collapsing regime and offered charity to refugees and the homeless. Germans were grateful but also expected sisters to live up to their image of sacrifice and service to others.

Germans continued to look to the sisters for aid in the immediate postwar period. The Poor School Sisters’ role in German society further increased in importance following German defeat in 1945. Within weeks of Germany’s collapse, numerous mayors and citizens asked the Poor School Sisters to reopen their schools. The women

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{1190} Chronologische Notizen 1945, Bayerische Ordensprovinz, OAAS M.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{1191} Ibid.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{1192} Chronik Ravensburg, 1938-1958, 10 May 1945, OAAS M.} \]
were now considered to belong to the minority of Germans who emerged untainted from the Third Reich.
CONCLUSION

In April 1871, the foundress of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame wrote to her novices in Breslau that “even if only one-fourth of our labor bears fruit – as it is told in the Gospel – it will be enough, because our successes do not always depend on us alone.” In this brief statement, M. Theresia Gerhardinger expressed her understanding of the liminal position Catholic sisters occupied in modern Germany as both insiders and outsiders.

The many new women religious congregations that emerged during the nineteenth century were modern organizations that arose in response to particular socio-economic and political conditions. In the history of Catholic sisters, the most important trends and movements of the nineteenth century converge. Aspects of the Enlightenment, the Romantic Movement, the women’s movement, secularization, and religious revival all manifested themselves in some form in the congregation’s history. In particular, the experiences of Catholic sisters add to the growing body of literature that challenges the master narrative of secularization and linear progress in modern Europe.

The monastic spring was a strong manifestation of religious revival in the nineteenth century. At the same time, it was the concurrent trend of secularization that

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created crucial preconditions for the growth of women religious congregations. It was only after the patriarchal Catholic Church found itself in a position of profound weakness in the wake of the Enlightenment and Napoleonic conquests that the hierarchy looked to women to restore its prominent place in the state and society. The church now offered women a viable alternative to marriage and opportunities to advance their education, enter a profession, and escape poverty. The new free spaces for women in the Catholic Church took on heightened importance at a time when their legal and social position contracted in the modernizing nation state.

The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame formed close partnerships with the state and opened schools throughout Germany. The position of Catholic sisters in nineteenth-century Germany remained precarious, however. Throughout the history of the Christian church, the place of chaste women living in community outside of male supervision was contested, and vicious rumors about nuns often expressed common anxieties about female religious life. At times, prejudices about the Poor Schools Sisters’ work and intentions led to conflicts with officials and citizens. But it was within the church where the sisters faced their most serious challenge. Attempts by members of the hierarchy to check the growing power of women in the church threatened to destroy the congregation in the nineteenth century. The women endured, but in response to continued challenges the Poor School Sisters developed a particular institutional culture that emphasized the nobility of suffering and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Suffering and victimhood are central, yet also problematic, aspects of the history of women religious. Within the congregation, the Poor School Sisters recast notions of female weakness and suffering as key strengths that encouraged the women to overcome
difficulties and endure hardships. Outside the congregation, the association of nuns with victimhood reached a zenith in the twentieth century with the rise of communism, World War I, and the Spanish civil war. The perception of sisters as quintessential victims was linked to the women’s new and central positions in modern society as selfless caretakers of children and the sick. In other words, in the course of the nineteenth century, old prejudices about nuns began to compete with, and were in time overtaken by, new images of sisters as women who sacrificed their life for the common good. It was this changed view of the women that rendered images of their victimization so powerful and that also helped to obscure and distort the history of Catholic sisters in the scholarship. Nazi ideologues could not overcome these popular and very positive views of women religious.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, the Poor School Sisters could look back on a one-hundred-year history that had shaped how they addressed difficulties and solved conflicts. But in Nazi Germany, the women’s traditional strategies of compliance and professionalism did not work. Although the congregation continued to thrive and grow in the 1930s, it quickly became apparent to the sisters that the state wished to remove them from schools and the public sphere.

The history of the Poor School Sisters allows for a reassessment of the roles of the concordat and the hierarchy in preserving the church’s place in Nazi Germany. Scholars continue to defend the effectiveness and central role of the concordat in protecting Catholic schools and organizations. The experiences of the sisters, however, cast serious doubts on the efficacy of the concordat. The Nazis did not feel bound by contractual agreements but by popular opinion and financial constraints. The importance of
Germans’ support of the Poor School Sisters is a central argument in my work, and the historical actors themselves recognized the significance of popular backing.

The postwar narrative of universal German victimhood in Nazi Germany obscured the crucial fact that the regime depended on Germans to practice the exclusion of specific groups from the people’s community. The history of women religious reveals to what extent Nazi ideologues relied on preexisting prejudices to render the persecution of perceived enemies, most notably Jews and communists, plausible to Germans. The Nazis also routinely criminalized opponents to convince Germans of the prudence to exclude specific groups of people.

Via the foreign exchange trials in 1935/36, the regime tried to convince Germans of the necessity to expel Catholic sisters from the people’s community. Although the regime used many of the same stereotypes against sisters as against Jews, such as greediness, internationalism, and dishonesty, Germans’ reaction to the accusation of sisters was by and large very different. Attempts by the Nazis to criminalize and ostracize women religious gained little traction with most Germans, in part due to the lack of crucial preexisting prejudices that would have rendered such actions believable.

But popular support did not prevent the regime from moving against the Catholic Church and religious congregations. The church struggle was real in Nazis Germany, and despite widespread protests, the state removed most Catholic sisters from public and private schools by the early 1940s. Although Germans’ support did not prevent the church struggle, it redirected its course as it often forced the Nazis to retreat. It was in part the regime’s alternating policies of aggression and restraint toward the Catholic
Church that created the latter’s position between privilege and oppression in Hitler’s Germany.

In the case of the Poor School Sisters, the state removed the women from schools but was unable remove them from the public sphere. Measures against sisters prompted many Germans to increase their support of the women. Catholic sisters never suffered a “social death” in Nazi Germany and they retained sufficient privileges and free spaces to redefine their mission and maintain their communities. The women retrained as pastoral assistants, nurses, or bookkeepers and took positions within the still vast and strong Catholic milieu in Germany.

World War II offered women religious new possibilities for reintegration into the German state. The Catholic Church and religious congregations supported the war and put their vast material and human resources at the disposal of the regime. Sisters’ reasons for participating in the war effort ranged from patriotism to coercion. Whereas war offered the Poor School Sisters new possibilities for reintegration into the state, it also accelerated alarming processes of disintegration within their religious community. The loss of the congregation’s schools revealed how strongly the teaching profession was tied to religious vocations, and with the loss of professional prospects, many young women could no longer see a future as a Catholic sister after 1937.

The congregation also lost the crucial infrastructures necessary to prepare and train candidates for both teaching and religious life. During war, this process was accelerated when state agencies occupied many of the congregation’s buildings and numerous sisters lived outside of their communities. Although most professed sisters stayed true to their congregation, many candidates for sisterhood did not. Scholars cite
the Klostersturm as one of the most significant injustices perpetrated against religious congregations and the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany. But viewed in a prudential light, the Klostersturm was much less significant when compared to the dispossession of Jews. It also did not have as lasting an impact on religious congregations as the efforts by the regime to stop or dissuade young women from joining religious life.

The contest over German youth was fierce in Nazi Germany. The regime viewed women religious as subversive and their influence over girls as pernicious. Whether or not this was the case becomes, of course, a central question. The very appearance of a chaste Catholic sister in a distinct religious habit personified a contradiction to National Socialist ideology which valued motherhood above all else in women. It is more complicated to assess the impact of women religious’ behavior in Hitler’s Germany.

The Poor School Sisters adopted a stance of compliance in their schools, where the lines between religious practice and Nazi rituals sometimes became blurry. Through their labor in the classroom, the sisters also legitimized aspects of Nazi ideology and freed Catholic girls to participate in the National Socialist regime. The experiences of Jewish students in Catholic schools further complicate the picture. Although more research is required, it does appear that violent antisemitism, so prevalent in public schools after 1933, was not practiced in many Catholic schools. The testimonies of former Jewish students of Catholic schools indicate that at least a number of Catholic sisters were able to keep some of Nazism’s worst aspects at bay, namely violent racial antisemitism. The Poor School Sisters’ stance in the face of Jewish persecution did not differ, however, from that of the Catholic Church. The women showed compassion to
individual victims of National Socialism when their paths crossed, but they did not reach out to their Jewish neighbors in their time of greatest need.

The Jewish Austrian Bruno Bettelheim once said that “above all it was the silence that condemned the Jews to death.” The history of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Hitler’s Germany lends further credence to this assertion. Germans did not protest the persecution and murder of Jews but they repeatedly spoke out against much lesser injustices inflicted on Catholic sisters, which significantly improved the latter’s position in Nazi Germany. The Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame emerged from the Third Reich bruised and diminished but intact. The women never had to doubt their place in German society, and on 5 May 1945, even before Germany’s capitulation, the Poor School Sisters purchased building materials to reconstruct their bombed houses in Munich.  

1195 Qtd. in Johnson, 433.

1196 Schaidl to Schricker, 5 May 1945, OAAS M, Drittes Reich.
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