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Introduction

NATION AND RELIGION IN THE GERMAN ENLIGHTENMENT: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism tells the story of how eighteenth-century German Catholics rethought the church. They imagined a church independent of, though still in communion with, Rome. Led by educated, "Enlightened" German Catholics in partnership with the state, the church they envisioned would solidify the link between religion, civilization, and morality. The reform program of this cohort of educated bourgeois Catholics represented the culmination of several generations of pious renewal and religious reform. As such, it was part of a broader Catholic Enlightenment throughout Europe. But reform Catholicism in Germany had its own dynamic and set of problems that distinguished it from other such programs in the Catholic world. The most important of these were the political fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire, the vitality of popular Baroque Catholicism, and the biconfessional nature of German society. Educated German Catholics sensed that the church needed to be strengthened against a series of interrelated threats. Religion's "cultured despisers" (in Schleiermacher's terms) were increasingly vocal in their attacks on revealed religion. The political structure of the Holy Roman Empire – which provided the institutional guarantee for the Catholic church in Germany – was menaced by the rise of Prussia. Protestants were constructing a powerful narrative that emplotted German nationalism as a rejection of Roman Catholicism. Finally, educated German Catholics felt that the expressive forms of devotion and traditional piety of the baroque church had become outmoded, and they worried

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about the persistence of "superstition" among the common people.[1] German Catholic intellectuals rethought the church and its devotions in the idiom of their age, and in so doing sought to create a new form of religiosity that they saw as both appropriate to modern times and faithful to the traditions and doctrines of the church.

German Catholic thinkers sought to forge a unified German church that was at once national and universal. They did not want to cut all ties to the Roman church, but instead to assert the rights of the German church within the larger communion. In their bid for autonomy, Enlightened Catholics asserted the "liberties" of the German Catholic church against Roman encroachments. Educated German Catholics' claim of intellectual and moral supremacy in the church entailed a rejection of many of the practices and attitudes of baroque Catholicism. As was true for much of Europe in the eighteenth century, bourgeois Catholics were forced to confront their growing sense of alienation from the beliefs and practices of a large segment of the population. German Catholics did not abandon the church, but instead sought to remake it in their own image. German Catholicism was thereby recast by its Enlightenment in a manner similar to the creation of a national German literary culture by a relatively restricted circle of writers and the reading public in the age of Goethe and Schiller.

This book's subject is German Catholicism's rethinking of itself and the world in the eighteenth century, but its argument forces a larger revision of our understanding of the German Enlightenment and its place in modern German history. Looking back on a century that had only recently concluded, Karl Friedrich Stäudlin, a professor of theology at Göttingen, noted in 1804 that

> The Germans are still on the whole a very religious nation [*Nation*], and true religious formation [*Bildung*] and Enlightenment have attained a higher level among them than among any other nation. Just as it was among the Germans that the Reformation had its beginnings, so too among them in the eighteenth century there began a new revolution in religious knowledge and in the theological sciences, only this time without disturbance, violence, and war.[2]

[1] Rudolf Schlögl, *Glaube und Religion in der Säkularisierung: Die Katholische Stadt – Köln, Aachen, Münster – 1700–1840* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 237–8 and Wolfgang Altgeld, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum: über religiös begründete Gegensätze und nationalreligiöse Ideen in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus* (Mainz: Mathias-Grünewald Verlag, 1992).

[2] K. F. Stäudlin, *Kirchliche Geographie und Statistik*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: 1804), 324.

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Stäudlin's observation is significant not only because it expresses a typical Enlightenment conviction of the essentially moral character of religion, but also because of his further comment that his statement applies to a "very significant portion of clergy and laity of all religious parties in Germany, and can be put forth as a general characteristic of the nation."[3] Catholics, as well as Protestants, were active participants in this religious revolution, as Stäudlin recognized, and this book will rectify an imbalance in the historical literature by shifting our view of eighteenth-century Germany to a new perspective.

Defining the nation has long been a central problem in German history, and by emphasizing that religious innovation stood out as a marked feature of the German character, Stäudlin pointed to the central place of theological controversy and religious division in postmedieval German history. At the same time, Stäudlin's observation also emphasized that, for all their divisions, Germans possessed a shared history. To Stäudlin, Christianity was the glue that held German society together – a somewhat surprising observation when one reflects on the fact that the division of Christendom into competing confessions served as the motor for German history in the early modern period and played a prominent role in German politics, culture, and society at least until 1945. "To us alone among nations," the Catholic historian Ignaz von Döllinger remarked in 1863, "has fate ensured that the sharp blade of ecclesiastical division would continually cut through us. We are carved into almost equal parts, but can neither separate from one another, nor really live properly together."[4]

In providing the first full account of the German Catholic Enlightenment, *Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism* gets to the heart of this long-standing German problem by looking at the ways in which eighteenth-century Germans rethought the relationship between religion, society, and the state.[5] The book argues that confessional identities in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries grew out of the religious establishments of Old Regime Germany and that, more importantly, these identities survived the collapse of the legal and institutional underpinnings

[3] Ibid., 325.

[4] Quoted in Georg Schwaiger, ed., *Zwischen Polemik und Irenik. Untersuchungen zum Verhältniß der Konfessionen im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 5.

[5] To date, the most comprehensive attempt to outline the contours of the Catholic Enlightenment in Germany is the series of essays edited by Harm Klueting et al., *Katholische Aufklärung: Aufklärung im katholischen Deutschland*, Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert, vol. 15 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1993).

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that had been worked out in the Reformation settlements of the sixteenth century. Moreover, the book demonstrates how the Enlightenment was the agent of this transformation: in rethinking the relationship of Christianity to the state, to civil society, to notions of progress and human nature, and to history, Germany's religious Enlightenment enabled the transition from the "Holy Roman Empire of the two churches" to the modern dilemma of competing Protestant and Catholic ideas of what it meant to be German.[6] The result was the creation of overlapping ideas of the nation that would play off one another for the next 150 years.

Much of the previous paragraph will sound unusual even (or perhaps especially) to readers familiar with the historiography of early modern and modern Germany. German history – and with it the German Enlightenment and ideas of German national identity – have for so long been written as if Protestants were the only historical actors of any significance that the ways in which German Catholics rethought their church in the eighteenth century has been almost entirely ignored. Moreover, the very notion of a Catholic Enlightenment will strike many as oxymoronic, given the ways in which Western modernity has so often been predicated on a putative rejection of Catholicism.[7] This book seeks to overturn these views.

The underlying assumption of the book is that the Protestant and Catholic Enlightenments in Germany proceeded along parallel paths and

[6] The phrase is from Christopher Ocker, *Church Robbers and Reformers in Germany, 1525–1547: Confiscation and Religious Purpose in the Holy Roman Empire* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006). Protestants had their own divisions among themselves as well, not only between Lutherans and Calvinists, but within these confessions.

[7] For an overview of recent attempts to bring religion back to the Enlightenment, see Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003). Also important on this topic is David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000). The most recent intervention on behalf of a thoroughly secular understanding of the Enlightenment has been Jonathan Irvine Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Against Israel's strongly argued view that a "radical Enlightenment" – inspired by Spinoza's demolition of received justifications for religious power and authority – motivated the response of a moderate (or religious) Enlightenment across Europe, this book argues that the German Catholic rethinking of the church was rooted in a deep legal and theological tradition with little reference to a unitary philosophical or radical opposition. Jonathan Sheehan's *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), on the contrary, has demonstrated how attention to practices and institutions in the eighteenth century can show us how religion was transformed by an Enlightenment that was not, as the older literature would have it, always opposed to revealed religion. The implications of these different approaches is nicely summed up by Ritchie Robertson, "Religion and the Enlightenment: A Review Essay," *German History* 25, no. 3 (2007).

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not – as the literature usually suggests – that Catholics in Germany weakly aped Protestant developments. This book seeks to rectify an imbalance in the scholarly literature. Only once we have a complete picture of the transformations of German Catholicism in this period will we be able to begin the process of reassessing the Protestant Enlightenment as well. This book shows how German Catholicism was recast by its Enlightenment even as the institutional framework of the *Reichskirche* and the Holy Roman Empire became unglued. This book proposes alternative genealogies for the nineteenth-century Catholic revival in Germany and thereby attacks one of the most unyielding conundrums of nineteenth-century German history. Although much has been written on the enormous Catholic revival in the nineteenth century, we know almost nothing about what preceded it. If the received view of eighteenth-century German Catholicism as backward, unchanging, and somnolent is correct, such a church cannot be the progenitor of the confident, popular, and politically adaptable German Catholicism of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, this book shows how German Catholicism was created out of its own resources.[8]

The argument of this book therefore implies a larger revision of the Protestant Enlightenment, although this subject will not be pursued in detail here.[9] With the rise of the absolutist state and its secular

[8] Scholarship on nineteenth century German Catholicism has, with some justice, mainly focused on the vigorous, ultramontane revival. For example, Christoph Weber's *Aufklärung und Orthodoxie am Mittelrhein, 1829–1859* (Munich, Paderborn and Vienna: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1973) demonstrated how "Enlightened" priests and theologians were pushed aside by orthodox bishops and their lay supporters. David Blackbourn's *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) showed how Catholics could defy the Prussian state and ecclesiastical authorities. Michael Gross's *The War against Catholicism: Liberal Identity and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004) argued that anxiety over the vigorous Catholic revival lay at the heart of German liberalism. I am not suggesting that the church envisioned by Enlightened reformers was the church German Catholics wound up with in the nineteenth century. As I discuss in the "Conclusion," the destruction of the *Reichskirche* by Napoleon shifted the debate over the German church to new terrain. By rethinking the church in the eighteenth century, however, German Catholics provided the conceptual tools with which a German Catholic church could be allayed against the dominant narrative of Germany as a Protestant nation. Catholics were split, however, over the direction the church should go in accommodating modern developments. Educated, bourgeois German Catholics were progressively sidelined in this discussion as the nineteenth century progressed.

[9] Two recent interventions in the literature on the German Enlightenment have drawn our attention to its religious context. Thomas Ahnert's *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment: Faith and the Reform of Learning in the Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006) puts Thomasius' religious

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justifications for power, the eclipse of orthodox establishments, the political weakness of the papacy, and the diminishing fear of forceful re-Catholicization, Protestants as well were forced to rethink their Churches. As the dramatist and amateur theologian Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) noted, religious movements are like "barrels of cider fermenting in the basement . . . one sets the other in motion; *one* does not move by itself."[10] The project is directed at understanding one of the central peculiarities of German history, namely the persistence of two major confessions in a single polity. Whereas in much of Old Regime Europe relatively cohesive national cultures emerged within religious and political structures that had been reshaped by the settlements at the end of the Reformation and Wars of Religion, Germany remained biconfessional, with two major confessions enjoying legal status under Imperial law.[11] This book engages the renewed scholarly interest in the ways not only in which religion and ecclesiastical institutions shaped national culture, but also in which those cultures were recast in the eighteenth century. By focusing attention on the Holy Roman Empire – and by insisting that both confessions (Protestant and Catholic) were remade – the book reconnects one of modern Germany's central cultural conflicts back to the eighteenth century.

Olaf Blaschke has suggested that the renewed intensity with which confessional identities were contested in the nineteenth century constituted a "second confessional age."[12] Questioning the tendency among social historians to assert that the nineteenth century was predominantly a "bourgeois" century or an age of "secularization," Blaschke noted that religious conflict and, more significantly, the hardening of confessional

commitments at the core of his philosophy, whereas Ian Hunter, in *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), outlines the ways in which the post-Westphalian religious settlements could be undermined by a revival of metaphysics. Neither book, however, looks at Catholic Germany.

[10] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke*, vol. 7, *Theologiekritische Schriften I und II* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1970–), 715.

[11] At the heart of this refashioning lay a new fusion between church and state. While this union was constituted in very different ways in accordance with local conditions, one can nevertheless still discern similarities among the successes of the Gallican church in France after the Fronde (1648–1653), the church of England after the Restoration (1660), and the primacy of Reformed (Calvinist) churches in the Dutch Republic. In each of these – and other establishments – stable states and societies formed (with varying degrees of toleration for religious minorities) under the supervision of a fusion of church and state.

[12] Olaf Blaschke, "Das 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000).

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identities were the hallmark of the age. This book therefore serves as a contribution to the debate over the relationship between the "first" confessional age of the sixteenth century and, to adopt Blaschke's term, the second confessional age of the nineteenth century.[13]

Differing confessional definitions of the nation, scholars have shown, were exacerbated by social and political conflict in nineteenth-century Germany.[14] Moreover, it is clear that the dominant Protestant definition of the German nation was resisted by Catholics not because they felt no loyalty to the state or did not have a sense of being German, but because they did not buy into the "integrative" nationalism that reached its apex with the *Kulturkampf*.[15] Catholics, in Wolfgang Altgeld's words, did not oppose the idea of a nation. "What they did oppose was the equation of the national idea with religion!"[16] While this book will not pursue these questions too far into the nineteenth century, it does show how a concept of German Catholicism was articulated contemporaneously with its more prominent Protestant counterpart. It also will show why this Catholic idea became so problematic in the nineteenth century by highlighting the ways in which the national idea was formulated by a distinct group of educated Catholics as part of a two-front struggle. On one side, German Catholics laid claim to the nation against similar attempts of their Protestant counterparts. On the other side, they sought to assert their vision of social, moral, and religious reform as part of a broader *Aufklärung*. As Rudolf Schlögl has suggested, Reform Catholicism in Germany was a response to a shift in lay piety, a piety that drew educated Catholics closer to their Protestant counterparts.[17] But as the nineteenth century progressed, ultramontane ecclesiology and populist practice gained the upper hand in German Catholicism, leading many bourgeois Catholics into a "sort of internal exile."[18] Schlögl and others have drawn our attention to

[13] For an overview suggesting the continuities from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, see Joel F. Harrington and Helmut Walser Smith, "Confessionalization, Community, and State Building in Germany, 1555–1870," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 1 (1997).

[14] See Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Altgeld, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum*.

[15] Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict*, 237–8.

[16] Wolfgang Altgeld, "Religion, Denomination and Nationalism in Germany," in Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 56.

[17] Schlögl, *Glaube und Religion in der Säkularisierung*.

[18] Lucian Hölscher, "The Religious Divide: Piety in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in Smith, ed., *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914 (2001)*, 46. See also

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the social context of shifting Catholic belief. For all the important contributions of social historians, however, we do not yet have a synthetic account of the reform vision of educated Catholics in the eighteenth century. This book, therefore, is an intellectual history that will delineate not only how these educated Catholics rethought the church, but also how the subsequent tensions *within* German Catholicism originated in an unresolved conflict at the heart of their project.

RETHINKING THE CHURCH: CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT AND REFORM CATHOLICISM

"The church," declared the fathers at the Second Vatican Council

> has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.[19]

Balancing between a return to the sources (*ressourcement*) and modernization (*aggiornamento*), the "council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today."[20] Half a millennium earlier, Nicholas of Cusa wrote that "the matters being debated by this holy Council of Basel" called for elaboration and justification. In order to dispel worries about the Council's "novelty," Cusa would "make known some of the learning of the ancient authors" and "demonstrate the superior qualities of our enlightened forebears."[21] Rooted in the language of the past, yet directed toward contemporaries, Cusa's *Catholic Concordance* was at once a program for reform and reconciliation – of church and Empire. Though widely differing from the documents of Vatican II, Cusa's *Catholic Concordance* also sought to reaffirm the place of the church in "language intelligible to [his] generation." In these two conciliar ages – the early fifteenth century and the later twentieth – church thinkers made the case for a restatement of universal norms and values, couching their innovation in a rhetoric of

Thomas Mergel, *Zwischen Klasse und Konfession. Katholisches Bürgertum im Rheinland 1794–1814. Göttingen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1994).

[19] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), §4.

[20] *Gaudium et Spes*, §2.

[21] Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, trans. Paul Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

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continuity, but understanding the need to speak to their contemporaries in new ways.[22]

While not a conciliar age, the latter third of the eighteenth century witnessed a vigorous and ambitious reform program for the German church. German Catholics' efforts were made possible by a confluence of crisis and opportunity. The rise of Protestant Prussia threatened the balance of power in the Empire, and, while there was a growing sense of Germany as a nation, its literary and philosophical culture was overwhelmingly associated with Protestantism. Catholics remained tied to a culture and religion that was Latin and universal. In order to strengthen the church, Catholics sought to adapt it to new times. They took advantage of the political weakness of the papacy in the eighteenth century and the economic recovery from the Thirty Years' War.

German Catholics found themselves between two great historical movements: the final stage of Roman centralization of the church, and the emergence of the secular absolutist state. The church they imagined was caught between the Roman universal church and German particularism. German Catholics partook of an Enlightenment idiom of public debate, applying a habit of criticism to the church.[23] They were part of a growing class of educated readers and writers who increasingly found themselves in the service of the state. Whereas in Protestant Germany the state and the church continued a partnership cemented by the Reformation, in Catholic Germany the Counter-Reformation alliance of church and state began to unravel in the eighteenth century. In the ensuing vacuum, German Catholic thinkers sought to forge a unified German church that was at once national and universal. The assertion of intellectual and moral supremacy in the church on the part of educated German Catholics entailed a rejection of many of the practices and attitudes of Baroque Catholicism. As was true for much of Europe in the eighteenth century, bourgeois Catholics were forced to confront their growing sense of alienation from the beliefs and practices of a large segment of the population. In Germany they did not abandon the church, but instead sought to remake it in their own image.

The reform program of educated German Catholics falls under the rubric of the two overlapping, yet at times disjunctive, notions of reform

[22] On the rhetoric of Vatican II, see John O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen," in David Schultenover, ed., *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (New York: Continuum, 2007).
[23] The phrase "habit of criticism" is from Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Norton, 1966), 121.

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Catholicism and Catholic Enlightenment. The former, more narrowly directed, deals with practical efforts, such as those to change the liturgy, religious practices, administration of church property, or the education of priests and laypeople. Reform Catholicism is usually understood in national context, though this is not necessarily so. The second term, Catholic Enlightenment, is broader and more ambitious in scope. At its heart is the central problematic of the relationship of Catholicism to the emergence of the modern world. This term would seem to entail a rejection of much received wisdom about the antireligious nature of the Enlightenment – although that older view is slowly receding – and has been variously construed. For the purposes of this book, I see a fundamental feature of the Catholic Enlightenment (by its very nature international) to be a rejection of the hitherto reigning moral pessimism and Augustinian rigorism at the heart of much of early modern Christianity.[24] While, for conceptual clarity, we may distinguish between these two movements, they were of course intimately connected. This book deals especially with reform Catholicism in Germany – by which I mean the territories of the Holy Roman Empire – as a concrete program, but I will also make the case that this program was part of a larger Enlightenment throughout the Catholic world in the eighteenth century.[25]

As the product of educated, largely urban Catholic *Bürger*, the reform program did not entail a rejection of the Catholic church, but rather an effort to adapt it to new times. The Catholic Enlightenment in Germany was not merely the result of the importation of certain set of anticlerical and antireligious ideas that Catholics simply tried to rearticulate in a language appropriate to their own situation. Instead, it was the culmination of several generations of pious renewal and revival. As Rudolf Schlögl has argued, the Catholic Enlightenment should be understood as an attempt to

[24] Recent work (most prominently by Dale van Kley) suggests that Jansenist-inspired neo-Augustinian piety was allied with a gallican and conciliar ecclesiology to offer a two-pronged assault on papal authority and baroque religion. By shifting the focus from France and the Low Countries to the Holy Roman Empire, my book presents significant exceptions to the prevailing view of the Catholic Enlightenment. While important strains of Jansenist thought did lie behind the movement for reform in Catholic Germany, my book complicates this picture of the Catholic Enlightenment as a failed Jansenist insurgency. The Jansenist attack on baroque Catholicism must be weighed against the latters' vitality and its eighteenth-century transformation. For further discussion see Michael Printy, "The Intellectual Origins of Popular Catholicism: Catholic Moral Theology in the Age of Enlightenment," *Catholic Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2005).

[25] Although we differ in some matters of interpretation, I would like to acknowledge a conversation with Dale van Kley for helping me formulate this distinction.

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