The war on the Western Front ground to a halt with the Armistice of November 11, 1918. That day was also the Feast Day of Saint Martin of Tours, a notable patron saint of soldiers, who was especially worshipped not for his military prowess but rather for his peacemaking and social devotion to the needy. Sixteen centuries after his death, the stories of Saint Martin had powerful resonance in the aftermath of the First World War as Europe tried to heal itself. Due to his associations with both France and Hungary, and his travels through Central Europe, he became a pan-European figure of veneration during the Middle Ages. In the aftermath of the First World War, his stature gained new currency due to this coincidence with the Armistice on the Western Front.

Traditional religious imagery played a key role in helping European society make sense of the war. Religion, along with classical and romantic tropes, allowed communities of bereaved to mourn the loss of loved ones. This occurred on a mass scale, as more people simply had to deal with violent death and destruction, approaching what Jay Winter has termed a “universality of bereavement” as European society attempted to assuage its grief. Traditional imagery and languages of mourning thus played a fundamentally healing role, strengthening social bonds and emotional ties. Hence, as Winter noted in his classic study, war memorials after 1918 involved dual motifs: “war as both noble and uplifting and tragic and unendurably sad.”¹ War memorialization involved this duality in an ever-shifting process of balance between the two interests. It was only after the Second World War, not the First, that European society changed its attitudes toward war memorialization, invoking more abstract imagery and universal values.²

¹ Winter, Sites of Memory, 5, 85.
The religious aspects of commemoration have often been subsumed under the heading of “nationalism,” especially in Germany a vengeful nationalism, dedicated to redeeming the political loss of the First World War.3 There were, however, other valences of loyalty. Scholars coming after the transnational turn have begun to note other sources of social identification. Regarding religion in war, the subject is still underdeveloped, yet there are exciting avenues of possibility. For instance, in contrast to the plethora of public and utilitarian aspects of memorialization at schools, hospitals, train stations, and especially public monuments, as Jay Winter has noted, “Catholic commemoration was more sacred than secular.”4 As previous chapters have shown, this fits with the different Catholic time scale of the twentieth century.

This chapter highlights the Catholic aspects of the process of memory and mourning. Its approach is fundamentally transnational, showing the importance of the nation as a locus of sacrifice, but also underscoring the importance of cross-regional, local, familial, and personal ties – all of which are seen through primarily Catholic frames of reference. This web of associations helps to show the insufficiency of the nation-state as the sole focus of symbolic representation for societies coming to terms with the destruction of the First World War. Indeed, precisely by examining the losing powers, one sees most starkly that collective defeat did not mean disenchantment and dissolution. The Catholic powers of Central Europe relied on an adaptation of traditional forms to help them cope with the new horrors of war.

Recent comparative histories have stressed that the Great War was the moment at which older mourning practices confronted the new fact of the absence of the bodies of those killed in the war. Soldiers were often buried on site in makeshift graves in military cemeteries; consequently, civilian cemeteries had to incorporate symbolic forms to acknowledge the real and symbolic loss of tangible bodies.5 A Catholic way of war helped to make this absence more bearable. The communion of saints, particularly notions of saintly intercession, embodied by the Virgin Mary above all, helped religious believers make sense of the sacrifice in a Catholic way that stressed sorrow and healing on a universal scale.

3 For one of the most powerful statements of this view, see George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
4 Winter, “Commemorating War,” 311.
Returning home

Soldiers returned from combat and attempted to reintegrate into society. As numerous studies have shown, the demobilization process was incomplete, as soldiers returned to societies that the Great War had permanently changed. Yet public piety in interwar Europe did not immediately decline after the failure to achieve quick victory in 1914. Returning home from service on the Western Front, chaplain Jakob Ebner’s diary entry of December 8, 1918 recorded churches full of anxious people in the town of Winterberg and elsewhere. Many current and former soldiers were in attendance at Mass, and priests’ sermons were addressed, “To the Homecoming Warriors.”

In the interwar era, massive social problems still threatened Europe: disease, conflict, famine, and death. Enforcing the peace of Versailles, and repaying Germany for its harsh occupation during the war, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr from 1923 until 1925. The troubles of the war continued, and the churches were not empty. The story of religious consolation and diminishing returns on those beliefs was a complicated, variable process that occurred in disparate sectors of publicly-observable practice.

In the immediate post-war era, the Catholic Church at a local level was torn between proclaiming a moral panic and providing a calm reassurance of stasis. Church periodicals were filled with themes of loss of paternal authority and extra-marital relationships causing the spread of sexually-transmitted disease, a habit learned from soldiers away from home, particularly at brothels, some of which had even been sponsored by the military. Against all society, local clergy members vented against rampant consumerism and materialism that excluded religiously-based spiritual values. In Catholic regions like Tyrol and Bavaria, the clergy conceived a need for a mission to reintegrate soldiers into religious life and spoke of a dangerous split between Church ideals and local practice that could potentially destabilize society.

Transnationally, however, as Oswald Überegger has argued, Church rhetoric about moral panics in rural societies in the immediate post-war phase obscured the fact that soldiers returning home were largely successfully reintegrated in the 1920s. In the words of a Church periodical, the returning troops in regions like Tyrol and Bavaria “found their rest again” in the societies they

---

6 EAF, NL 44, Jakob Ebner Tagebuch, p. 834, December 8, 1918: Mass in town of Winterberg, Mass in Pfarrkirche, Hirtenbrief read out “an die heimkehrenden Krieger.”

had left, and performed “apparently faultlessly their religious duties.” Benjamin Ziemann’s research on rural Bavaria further undermined the Nazi myth of a “front-community” of battle-hardened men permanently transformed through their experience as soldiers.  

Depending on the socio-political needs of disparate communities, religiously-based visions of collective sacrifice wavered between consolation and agitation. In a pastoral letter of 1919, the Austrian bishops announced to soldiers, “what you patiently suffered for, is secured in a better world [in Heaven] and finds there its eternal remuneration.” Such rhetoric was meant to soothe souls and validate the many sacrifices of war.

Notions of collective sacrifice, however, could also agitate communities. English and German military chaplains, for example, reminded communities that the dead would not rest easily and that political mobilization had to continue. The political context mattered greatly. In the English case, chaplains motivated their listeners to maintain the peace that victory had achieved, while in the German case, chaplains agitated for a renewed war that would achieve a more just peace.

In contrast to most of the bishops, military chaplains had seen the horrors of war firsthand, sometimes renouncing them utterly and questioning their own role in the war. For instance, the Jesuit chaplain Karl Egger wrote in his memoirs of the self-doubt common to chaplains who had seen the slaughter of battle and felt themselves complicit. Addressing himself and his priestly fellows, Egger wrote in a highly self-critical fashion:

Hey, chaplain! Didn’t you desire the spawning of this hell? Through your inflammatory words, didn’t you give nourishment to glowing hatred in the hearts of men? You servant of the crucified Prince of Peace, weren’t you of the Devil, from the beginning departing from all good spirits, in terrible self-infatuation, a henchman of murderers?

It appears to me as if the eclipsed soul is fraught with the ruins of the collapsing building of my war outlook. The common cry: no more war! appears as the only light. I damn the terrible experience of the war! How does it help me? I become yet more confused. I feel that I’m spiritually falling apart, fury and disgust in the heart! Everything blood, all sacrifices in vain! Cursed cloaca of the collapse! Damned hyenas, vampires of war!

Ibid., 217. See also Ziemann, Front und Heimat, 390–1.


Egger, Seele im Sturm, 229.
Trying to make sense of his spiritual crisis, Egger found his role as a rural pastor. Rocked by inner turmoil, to outward appearances he lived his life readjusted as a normal priest taking care of parishioners, as documented through a photo-album memory book. Such accounts composed in retrospect could easily slip into constructed nostalgia of a pre-war idyll.\textsuperscript{12} In the interwar period, rosy reminiscences longed for a pre-1914 “world of yesterday.” In the post-1945 era, they could also reach back to before the First World War, but the more thorough destruction of the Second also made the interwar years seem a relative haven of peacefulness and comfort.

Making sense of the sacrifice incurred in loss, Catholics closest to the centers of power showed most acutely the eternal religious dilemma of deference to state authority: giving to Caesar what was Caesar’s and giving to God what was God’s. At the end of the war, Ludwig Berg, the Catholic chaplain at Kaiser Wilhelm II’s headquarters throughout the war, documented both the continuity and the change in sharp detail. In one of the Kaiser’s last disquisitions before he left Germany for exile in Holland, he nervously and hypocritically commented on the situation of Pope Benedict XV, potentially threatened by revolutionary unrest in Rome. Venting his own fear of the crowds and the upheavals taking place in Germany, the Kaiser told Berg that, “The Pope should have ample machine guns in the Vatican, and a few of those machine guns could clean the rabble from Saint Peter’s Square.” Changing his mind, he immediately went on to state that the Pope was compelled to be a Christ figure because of religious belief: “And if the rabble really caught the Pope and killed him, he must be like his Lord and Master; Christ died for his beliefs. The Pope must also be prepared, if he is truly serious as an advocate for truth, to die as a martyr for truth and justice.” Berg highlighted the differences between temporal and metaphysical leadership, juxtaposing the Kaiser’s verbal outbursts with his actions that led to his flight to Holland on November 10: “The Kaiser is not up to his great task, in view of the great danger to his life, and is not prepared to die as a martyr for Germany and for his kingdom.”\textsuperscript{13} Berg’s diary highlights that association with state power tempted Catholics to support it. Sharing privileged accommodations at the heart of military power, and eating well as much of the population starved, Berg was biased toward loyalty to the Kaiser and his military regime. Even as late as November 1918, in a meeting with Cardinal Faulhaber, Berg’s sermons and philosophy


\textsuperscript{13} Betcher and Kriele, \textit{Pro fide et patria!}, 809–10.
highlighted the traditional themes the necessity for believers to fight “for faith and fatherland,” a theme from which he never wavered while in his position at the Kaiser’s headquarters; this theme was the organizing principle of Berg’s war diary and his notion of service. Yet by dismissing the Kaiser as a false martyr, a Catholic believer like Berg could carve out a space for religion that transcended the political order of monarchy. Especially after the Armistice, Berg reiterated the role of religion as a source of comfort and healing. On November 15–16, 1918, soldiers at the train stations leaving the front to return home told Berg that they had forgotten how to pray, and he responded with the traditional comforts of religion that would smooth over the ephemeral political reordering: “Now I can understand you. When you return home again to wife and child, old memories will help you pass over difficult times. Our Lord God is still always the old one.” Religion, and its conceptions of ordered domesticity, would continue to be a source of stability in the post-war world of the Catholic believer.

Catholic women and the dolorous conception of war

A transnational Catholic way of war helped Europe to grieve and mourn the devastation. In contrast to the stereotype of the churches as zealous jingoistic cheerleaders for war, the Catholic way of war showed the adaptation of Catholic tradition to the new circumstances of industrial warfare. The revised Roman Missal of 1920 offered key insights. The Mass in Time of War (Missa tempore belli) represented the Church’s official liturgical guidelines for church services during war. Although the Bible certainly contained much Old Testament sanction for chosen-people violence visited on one’s fellow humans, these passages were not at all a part of the Mass in Time of War. This Mass was based on universal grief and consolation, not on divine-right chosen-people nationalism. As prescribed in the Roman Missal, the Old Testament readings were drawn from the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, particularly Chapter 42. There, the army leaders of Israel implore the prophet to speak to the Lord and say, “Grant our petition; pray for us to the LORD, your God, for all this remnant. We are now few who once were many, as you well see.” Jeremiah speaks to God and waits ten days for a response. The prophet then returns with the Lord’s answer to the people of Israel: “If you remain quietly in this land I will build you up, and not tear you down; I will plant you, not uproot you; for I regret the evil I have done you. Do not fear the king of Babylon, before whom you are now afraid; do not

14 Ibid., 780–2. 15 Ibid., 794.
fear him, says the LORD, for I am with you to save you, to rescue you from his power.”

This was a striking theology, at odds with a representation of the Great War as apocalypse and utter incomprehensibility. It portrayed God as a humane, approachable, and regretful God, divined through the offices of Jeremiah the prophet, which also had the important additional benefit of emphasizing the intercessory priestly hierarchical culture of the Catholic Church. This was not a theology of God as wholly other, mysterious, inscrutable, as in emerging forms of Protestant Dialectical Theology. The Mass in Time of War offered a picture of the Great War as a less-than-radical break with previous time, not a wholly-other period of incomprehensibility. The important point was that the war was not the apocalypse itself. This was further reinforced by the Gospel reading for the Mass in Time of War, a selection in which Christ’s disciples ask him how to discern the apocalypse and the Second Coming of Christ. The disciples ask Jesus, “[W]hat sign will there be of your coming, and of the end of the age?” Jesus eventually responds with the familiar passage counseling the need to avoid false Messiahs, instead looking for a time when, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes from place to place,” which Christ likens to the beginning of labor pains. Importantly, however, Jesus qualifies, “You will hear of wars and reports of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for these things must happen, but it will not yet be the end.”

In the Mass in Time of War found in the Roman Missal, the Church acknowledged war of great devastation and suffering as an inherent part of the fallen human condition. But, in the official Catholic liturgy, the Great War was relativized and normalized; it was not the apocalypse and the end of all time.

Making sense of Christian sacrifice, the Catholic motif of the Pietà had such resonance because it focused attention on families and brought women to the forefront of communities of suffering. In contrast to nineteenth-century monuments of heroic martial masculine virtue that emphasized the bombast of battlefield victory, the Pietà was explicitly feminine, humane, and humble. In an age of mass suffering, the Pietà was an effective and evocative symbol to the masses. The Pietà did not explicitly condemn war, but it called attention to the suffering and sacrifice involved. It allowed survivors to mourn the fallen, linking their


17 Matthew 24:3–8, quoted in Missale Romanum, 102.
sacrifice with that of Christ. Catholic women were not mere symbols in this memorialization process; they were agents in the process of historical remembrance. Perhaps most pointedly, Ruth Schaumann created a stone Pietà in 1929 for the German Catholic Women’s League. Placed in the crypt of the Frauenfriedenskirche in Frankfurt, the Pietà contained a specifically female inscription: “In praise of our husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, R.I.P.” Schaumann’s Pietà contained no image of a soldier, but other works did make this symbolism explicit, putting a dead or dying soldier into the arms of a female mourner. As never before, explicitly classical imagery incorporated women into monuments as ordinary, everyday mourners, as in Friedrich Bagdons’s 1923 design for the cemetery entrance at Freudenstadt, in which a dead soldier lies in the lap of a seated naked woman.

Mothers and fallen soldiers emphasized the universality of suffering, as well as reinforcing the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary as mother of Christ and special patron for human suffering. The Soldier’s Remembrance Chapel in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Cologne, the major Catholic city in the heavily Catholic Rhineland, was sculpted by Johannes Osten around 1920. The chapel showed the body of the fallen Christ surrounded by the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdelene, and John, all standing above the inscription, “Help us, O dolorous Mother, in our sorrow.” Far away, on the idyllic shores of Lake Constance, the Church of St. Nikolaus displayed beautiful stained glass windows, designed by Albert Figel in 1920, that showed explicit parallelism between the female caritas network of empowered women as healers of society’s wounds, definitively framed in terms of Christian sacrifice and Marian devotion. A main window’s inscription proclaimed, “In struggle and need, help us for all time, Mary.” The window’s imagery portrayed a wounded soldier in the foreground, comforted by a Red Cross sister. Subtly shrunken in the background, in a picture-within-a-picture, a grieving Mary caressed the body of the fallen Jesus, newly taken down from the cross. Thus, the window reinforced that female nurses were equivalent to the Virgin Mother Mary, examples of charity and devotion, newly recognized as essential to healing the nation’s wounds and care for the Christian heroes. Otto Hitzberger’s 1927 wooden Pietà in the Laurentiuskirche

---


19 Probst, Bilder vom Tode, 160–2, 368.

20 Ibid., 189–90, 388.

21 Ibid., 266–7, 446.
in Berlin embodied Christian sacrifice in contemporary sculptural styles, directly in the heart of one of the main urban centers of modernist thought. Josef Limburg’s 1927 marble Heroes’ Altar in the Church of St. Ludwig in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, while not specifically a Pietà motif, was an example of traditional imagery in a modernist setting, showing a triumphant Christ rising from the crucifixion on a monument dedicated to the fallen of 1914–18. In rural regions outside of the major metropolitan areas, a plethora of traditional roadside shrines, altars, and chapels became new sites for mourning the fallen of the Great War.

The figure of the widow represented an intriguing and problematic image for post-war societies. As Erika Kuhlman has argued in a path-breaking work on widowhood, “War widows perpetuated war – a defining characteristic of the nation-state – when they performed their gendered roles as women and mothers in need of male protection; they threw a wrench into the war machine when they felt betrayed by their governments, or when they perceived their losses collectively as humans, across national boundaries.” On an ideological level, however, Catholic women identified with the Virgin Mary as the supreme symbol of womanhood and of sainthood. The concept of Christian sacrifice made loss more understandable and endurable.

A family history of death

Beyond the justifications for war lay the reality of families struggling to cope with personal losses. Perhaps the ultimate change in ascriptions of sacrifice concerned Kaiser Franz Joseph. In 1914, the Central Powers’ propaganda machine had made much of the fact that Austria-Hungary and Germany had gone to war to avenge Serbia’s dishonor to the Habsburg monarchy. Franz Joseph died on November 21, 1916, to be succeeded by his great-nephew Karl, the last Habsburg emperor. Having ruled since 1848, Franz Joseph was, for many of his subjects, the personal embodiment of everything the Habsburg monarchy stood for, and his death was a highly symbolic end of an era. By 1916, the Habsburg patriarchy was crumbling. Initial outpourings of grief in the Catholic press reflected the symbolic associations of the throne-and-altar alliance, but this was not shown in war monuments and memorials. Despite the rage of hurrah patriotism that had accompanied the need

to defend the monarchy, during and after the war, memorials did not include members of the Habsburg family. The monarchy had been a symbol of declining resonance even before the war, but the Habsburg state’s failure to provide food in time of war highlighted the monarchical patriarchy’s impotence. After the war, especially in the losing powers, grief and bereavement became highly personalized, as collective symbols lost their meaning at the state level.

More locally, however, religious thought helped to inform grieving families. During and after the war, families relied immensely on the Catholic clergy and laity for information on their family members’ deaths and burials. Through the military and administrative hierarchies, military chaplains, priests, nuns, and religious nurses were often the families’ point of contact for information about lost loved ones. As a military chaplain, Friedrich Gasser of the Fourth Tyrolian Kaiserjäger Regiment received numerous letters testifying to families’ persistence of belief despite the death of loved ones. This correspondence of belief continued even late into the war, when its successful outcome seemed increasingly doubtful for the Central Powers. In March 1918, a grieving mother, Frau Morandini, wrote a postcard to Gasser in which she declared, “I send you my warmest thanks for your note about the death of my dearest son. It is for me a difficult loss; it is painful for me. In my suffering, there is comfort that at least he was given a Christian burial not in enemy hands but here in Tyrol. May the dear God take him up and grant him eternal rest.” Similarly, in a pleading letter written on All Souls’ Day 1917, a civilian father, Rudolf Otto von Ottenhud of Vienna, wrote to Chaplain Gasser asking for assistance in identifying and repatriating his son’s body, located in the soldiers’ cemetery at Monte Buse. Otto wrote that, “It would be a great comfort for us to know that the last remains of our unfortunate child are buried in home soil, so that we can be united with him in the grave when God calls us away [to the afterlife].”

Whenever possible, religious figures sought to comfort families that their loved ones had died quickly, usually painlessly, and had received full rites of Christian burial. Letters from clerics were meant to console:


they did not speak of the agonizing horrors of poison gas, dismemberment by artillery shells, or painful disfigurement. When religious letters addressed the issue of soldiers’ suffering, clerics would mention that the deceased had died valiantly doing his duty, in heroic sacrifice for the greater good, thus imitating Jesus Christ. Clerics reported that soldiers’ last words focused heavily on traditional tropes of family and homeland. As reported by chaplains, soldiers mentioned their loved ones, most often their mother or wife, while trying to convey the message that they were going to a better spiritual place and would continue to watch over and protect the family.27

It was easier to give this reassurance in hospital settings on the home-front. There, clergy could be found to administer last rites and burial procedures, even after death. At battlefront hospitals and in the midst of battle, this standard of religious care was often simply not possible, as the growing size of industrial armies rapidly outpaced the religious care network there. Chaplains rationalized that they had often given units departing for battle a general absolution. At the front, clerics performed individual and mass burials, sometimes giving the burial rites long after death.28 The publicized mass media image of death, however, was traditional in the extreme. Photos of cemeteries showed well-ordered rows of graves, often with flowers and personal inscriptions. Comrades often stood mourning at the graveside, thus assuring those at home of a continuity of heroic devotion.

During and after the war, family networks of consolation continued to uphold religious faith as a source of meaning, making the loss of their loved ones more comprehensible. This can be seen in the condolence letters written from the Kruger family to Frau Krista Scholl, the wife of a Bavarian peasant, Siegfried, killed on June 22, 1915 in Ban de Sapt in den Vogesen. During the war, Siegfried maintained a conscientious devotion to his religious practice. In his letters home, he wrote that he had prayed the rosary three or four times daily and that he “prayed diligently . . . almost every day and night.”29 Religion was a strong component of the Scholls’ marital bonds. Writing from the battlefield on the anniversary of his engagement during the harvest festival, Siegfried wrote to Krista that, “it’s 11 years since we became engaged. Now I live in such a dangerous time. I pray every day that God will lead me home again. You and the children do that, too.”30

28 Ibid., 416.
battle, his family network consoled his wife with their shared religious faith. Krista’s brother-in-law, Gerhard Zahn, wrote to her that he was “very regretful” for her loss, as Siegfried was a “good man and truly careful father.” Gerhard recognized that for Krista, Siegfried’s loss was “very painful and bitterly hard for you,” and he could scarcely imagine that someone with whom they lived so closely “had to give up his life for the Fatherland and that God could determine such a terrible unhappiness for us.” Nevertheless, Zahn believed that duty to homeland was paramount and God’s will prevailed – although it was inscrutable – and that believers had to help each other. Despite the sadness and pain, he wrote, “And yet we must all console ourselves again. What God does, is done for good, that is, no one can overcome God’s inscrutable resolution.” In a gesture of Marian piety that underscored the role of the consoling mother, Gerhard wrote, “Console yourself thus, dear sister-in-law, because even in the greatest pain, we are helped by the heart of the Mother of God. Poor [Siegfried], he rests in peace.”

The Scholl family kept its religiously-framed memory of the sacrificial devotion of Siegfried Scholl, especially through legacies of indulgences for the saying of Mass. For a one-time or regular fee, beneficences could ensure that Catholic believers who had died were remembered as part of the liturgy, linking them with the communion of saints that had formed the Catholic community from its origins in antiquity.

During and after the war, having a Mass said for a fallen soldier was a quick and easy form of remembrance and honor that respected religious faith. For larger fees, the remembrance could continue for longer periods of time. Honoring the death of her husband, Krista Scholl donated 300 marks to her local church in Oellingen for a series of Sacred Heart devotions to his memory, which continued long after the war was over. When Scholl herself died in 1963, her family set up a similar devotion of 300 marks to her memory, keeping the tradition going.

Any item with a personal connection to the dearly departed became a religious relic for believing Catholic families. Such items included bits of clothing, rings, and even the bullets or shell fragments that had killed the soldier. These relics were treasured by religious family members as a form of connection to the deceased. The family of Heiko Fleck, killed in 1917, noted that his final unsent letter home was stained “with his heart’s blood” from the bullet that had killed him, thus reinforcing the imagery of the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, bursting with the

32 BfZ, NL Knoch 1914–1918, Letter of October 10, 1915. For the note about the 300 mark donation, see BfZ, NL Knoch 1914–1918, Abschrift, p. 177.
blood of the Savior. Central to modern Catholic imagery, the symbols of the Sacred Heart in particular reinforced the language of Christian sacrifice, underscoring the belief that the individual had died for a higher, communal purpose, in imitation of Christ. The Great War was a decisive moment in the emergence of such symbols in the Catholic imaginary.

Medievalism was also a large part of Catholic memory and mourning culture, which attempted to draw on traditional motifs. There were certainly areas of overlap with Protestant Christianity, especially in medievalism’s emphasis of the martial virtues of chivalry. This attempted to humanize representations of war, thus establishing continuities of civilization in defiance of the atomizing, senseless nature of industrial carnage. Catholic believers also drew upon additional layers of their religious belief structure, indebted to the medieval era. The Church as a medieval society provided a simplistic vision of an organic community in which everything was religiously ordered and stability reigned. It was a powerful antidote to terrifying visions of modern society and the horrors of war it had unleashed. Especially in the formation of a German nation-state led by a version of liberal Protestant nationalism, Catholicism had been a convenient foil, denounced as superstitious, feminine, medieval, and un-German; it was precisely these qualities, however, that made Catholicism a rich source of traditional stability in the minds of believers. In particular, the intercessory saint culture and the notion of the Virgin Mary as feminine protector provided extra layers of comfort for Catholic believers struggling to understand the cataclysm of the Great War.

Votive tablets placed in churches and religious shrines were another source of religiously-based memorialization, invoking especially the healing powers of women. In thousands of Catholic churches across Europe, believers thanked the community of saints for interceding on behalf of their loved ones, and often implored their continued assistance in the future. The Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph (patron saint of a happy death) figured prominently in prayers to the saints, as did Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. Soldiers’ saints were especially venerated, particularly those who became pacifists, like Saint Martin of Tours, or who suffered wounding persecution by the Roman military, like Saint Sebastian (easily recognizable as a body pierced by arrows), or who refused to harm their fellow Christians, like Saint Maurice of the famous Theban Legion. Militant saints were also invoked in representations in prayers

---

33 BfZ, NL 97.1/96 (Fleck), Letter, May 12, 1917, “Als Erdwurm” to mother and sister.
34 Busch, Katholische Frömigkeit; Schlager, Kult und Krieg.
36 Gross, War against Catholicism.
and on memorials, particularly to lend strength to the claim that the deceased had fought a good fight; these included Saint George, slayer of the dragon, and Saint Michael, the archangel who leads the forces of God against the forces of Satan in the Book of Revelation. 38 Benjamin Ziemann has noted, however, that the use of Saint George could also be read not merely as militant Christianity but, in the context of popular piety, as an admonition for soldierly purity in the face of danger, thus representing a plea for returning soldiers to guard themselves against morally lax behavior. 39

The bodily destruction of mass industrial warfare tested the limits of believers’ rational understanding of a well-ordered universe. The major conceptual hurdle was battlefield violence that prevented bodies from being recovered. Some men simply disappeared. Some were blown apart and completely destroyed, some lost in the mud and dirt of the trenches, while others simply went missing. Catholic chaplains close to the front were well aware of the issue. Jakob Ebner, serving on the Western Front, recorded in his diary the questions he received from fighting soldiers about death and burial in the new type of war:

Who wants to search for the unforgotten and find them and record their names, they who lie forward in the trenches, shaken and smothered through heavy shellfire or through explosions? . . . Who searches together for those who have been ripped to pieces by explosions or shellfire or who have even been pulverized into atoms? Who can recognize Father and Son in the mass graves of this war of movement, in which the brave rest united beside – and sometimes on top of – each other? 40

Of special importance in a conflict in which so many were killed by artillery, some to be completely obliterated, was another prominent female saint, Saint Barbara. This patron saint of artillery, engineers, miners, and any Catholics who faced the dangers of sudden, violent death, especially by explosions, figured prominently both during and after the conflict. 41 Saint Barbara would help to comfort those families who had no body to mourn.

Far from being an antiquated relic of a pre-modern religious behavior that the war had supposedly destroyed, the cult of saints as intercessory figures demonstrated the vitality of popular Catholicism in interwar Central Europe. 42

Figure 10 Bricolage grave, Saint Barbara (Lipusch)

“This grave incorporated an artillery shell, which could represent either the profession of the soldier or his cause of death. Patron saints, such as Saint Barbara (for miners, trench diggers, and artillery), helped believers to make sense of the new forms of death and destruction.”
Scriptural readings for the Catholic Requiem Mass emphasized passages that promised individual salvation for the believer, but as part of a larger community. The Gospel and liturgical language drew especially from John 11:25–6, and its story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead: “Jesus told her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” After the priest sprinkled the coffin with Holy Water, the absolution for the Requiem Mass emphasized the Catholic community in particular, as the priest intoned, “Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, this mercy unto thy servant deceased, that, having in desire kept thy will, he may not suffer in requital of his deeds: and as a true Faith joined him unto the company of thy faithful here below, so may thy tender mercy give him place above, among the Angel choirs. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

During and after the war, prayers at soldiers’ gravesides and memorial services at home spoke in universal terms of common suffering. In a common prayer book issued to German Catholic soldiers by the Archdiocese of Cologne, the “Prayer for the Fallen” reminded soldiers that, “The best prayer that you can perform for the fallen is the reception of holy communion for them, offering up a plenary indulgence that is bound with it.” The instructions continued: “By prayer for the fallen, do not think merely on your fallen comrades, rather also on the fallen enemies. Death led them all before the same judge, before whom you also must one day stand and who can now be well-disposed to you whenever you pray for friend and enemy.”

For Catholic believers, prayer communities of the living Catholic faithful could continue to affect metaphysical relations between Heaven and Earth, ensuring individual and collective salvation.

Especially in publications, the overall language of prayer moved back toward traditional forms, away from the jingoistic corruptions and omissions that were widespread in time of war. In one notorious example early in 1914, Dietrich Vorwerk, a Protestant pastor and author, altered the Lord’s Prayer to read, in part, “Our Father, from the height of heaven / Make haste to succor Thy German people. / Help us in the holy war, / . . . Lead us not into the temptation / Of letting our wrath be too gentle / In carrying out Thy divine judgment.” Another German propaganda variant of the Lord’s Prayer altered it to speak in the guise of a “Russian Our Father.” Beginning, “Our Father, Who art in

44 Köln, Vor Gott ein Kind, 35–6.
Figure 11 Snowstorm burial (Lipusch)
“During a snowstorm, a military chaplain buries a soldier with funeral rites.”

Petersburg, Thy name be destroyed, Thy kingdom disappear, Thy will be done neither in Heaven nor on Earth.”

It is perhaps a case of omission that best highlights religion’s instrumentalization for state aims during the Great War. During the conflict, a highly romanticized picture booklet of the “Our Father” went line by line through the prayer, representing the text through painted images of wartime Christianity. Tellingly, however, the booklet left out a key message of the prayer, one of the core principles of Christianity: “as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

This message was a prime symbol of the aggressive public war theology, which had no place for forgiveness, especially for perceived wrongdoing. By contrast, in the post-war years, the somber traditional forms of prayer returned, the “Lord’s Prayer” regaining its traditional lines in place of jingoism.

Suicide, spiritualism, and Catholic prohibitions

Specific forms of belief and action around death and mourning during the Great War explicitly contravened official Catholic practice. Suicide and spiritualism were two of the most widespread and visible. Catholic reactions to these occurrences show the flexibility of tradition, as well as its complete negation.

The practice of suicide was the ultimate rejection of the interpretation of heroic sacrifice, and explicitly condemned by the Catholic faith as a mortal sin. In a military setting, however, Catholic prescriptions sometimes had to be disregarded. The military hierarchy supported the Church hierarchy strongly on the issue of suicide. In order to sustain the collective morale of the army, many officers strongly counseled chaplains to admonish the soldiers against committing suicide. The words of the commander of the German 3rd Army Corps couched the injunction in terms of patriotic duty: “It is to be made clear to the troops that it is always an act of cowardliness to throw one’s life away, especially in these times, where our life belongs to our King. Whoever commits suicide now, sins not only against his God, but also against his King and his Fatherland.”48 Catholic chaplains interpreted an increase in suicides as a sign of decreasing collective will. Andreas Farkas, a chaplain in the k.u.k. 25th Infantry Regiment, ascribed a string of “desperate and intentional suicides” to frustration about the lack of winter clothing for the troops, currently stationed in freezing conditions.49

Catholic teachings against suicide were extremely severe in theory, but often adaptable in battlefield practice. According to Canon Law, suicide was a mortal sin that denied immortality to those who committed it. Correspondingly, suicides could not be buried in consecrated ground with believers who had died in a state of grace.50 The official pre-war Catholic field manual for Austria-Hungary held to this doctrine, as did a Prussian field manual that appeared late in the war.51 In actual practice, however, chaplains ameliorated the official regulations on suicide. Catholic chaplains interpreted self-inflicted death as one of the unfortunate realities of the brutality of war. The chaplain Benedict Kreutz, the future leader of the Deutscher Caritas Verein (DCV), showed no hesitation in his diary when he reflected on burying suicides. Kreutz granted

49 OStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 216, Pastoralbericht, Andreas Farkas, November 1915.
50 From the 1917 Code of Canon Law, see Canons 1240 and 2350, found in Peters, The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code, 421–2, 746.
them a Catholic military burial on multiple occasions. For instance, an infantryman, Xaver Lutz, drowned himself in a river on May 2, 1917, supposedly fearing a transfer to the Eastern Front. Even more conclusively, two days later, a Landwehr artilleryman, Victor Vögele, hanged himself. Kreutz gave Catholic burials to both servicemen. Similarly, Karl Laska, a chaplain with the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army, wrote in his monthly pastoral report to the Apostolic Field Vicariate in Vienna that he regularly accorded burials of suicides the same honors as other military burials.

Along with suicide, spiritualism was another topic that conflicted with Catholic doctrine. During and after the Great War, Catholics participated in séances and forms of spiritualism designed to get in touch with the dead. These paranormal practices began during the war, as people saw the ghosts of their relatives and close friends. Ghosts of soldiers killed in battle appeared at the homefront and ghosts of their loved ones appeared to soldiers in a network of spiritual family aid. Believers usually perceived these ghosts as trying to help the living, sometimes simply giving notification that they had died, easing the uncertainty of not knowing. Often couched in terms of rumor and hindsight, occult publications in Central Europe were filled with stories such as that of “Frau W. from S.,” who on the afternoon of October 30, 1914, suddenly felt “great unrest and bodily weakness,” overcome by a vision of her husband lying with his chest torn open at the edge of a forest; on November 6, Frau W. received a telegram informing her that her husband had indeed been killed in a forest near Ailly on the afternoon of October 30, dying from artillery shrapnel in his chest. Sometimes, ghosts or spirits actively intervened to change the behaviors of the living, either imploring them to lead better moral lives or immediately saving them from imminent death. In a case of the latter, a dragoon recounted the time in November 1915 when he was moving to administer a final mercy shot to one of his horses wounded in an attack and a ghostly vision of his dead mother appeared, luring him away from the struggling animal. Moments later, a shell burst on the horse, ripping it to pieces and destroying the ground where he would have stood had it not been for this vision, which he was convinced had saved his life.

52 Wollasch, Militärseelsorge im Ersten Weltkrieg, 118.
53 ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 217, Pastoralbericht, Karl Laska, December 1915.
Actively contacting the dead was strongly outlawed by the Catholic Church, which deemed spiritualism a form of superstitious “black magic” that ran contrary to the rites of the Church. In the Catholic conception, once the dead had been given burial rites, they could not be summoned on command by the living.\textsuperscript{56} For the most part, Catholics obeyed the prohibitions, allowing their dead to rest in peace. There were, however, exceptions, as religious believers sought comfort in any contact whatsoever with their loved ones. In other instances, Catholics ventured into spiritualistic practices out of scientific interest or for entertainment. In many cases, believers sought the approval of Church authorities for participation in such affairs, writing that their ventures into spiritualism and the occult complemented, and did not negate, their dogmatic beliefs—but permission was usually denied when such requests reached higher levels of authority. In a 1927 letter to Cardinal Schulte of Cologne, C. Flössel asked for a dispensation “because of the scientific method of my research,” which, for the previous six years, had investigated such phenomena as “parapsychology and related areas,” “hypnosis and occult science,” and “spiritualism sessions.” Flössel wrote that, “It is certainly prohibited through Church decrees to partake in these kinds of things, and that is fully correct since a great deal of mischief [Unfug] is done there,” but that his experience as a university professional complemented his “absolutely strong Catholic position.” He declared that, “I stand with conviction on the fundamentals of Catholic dogma and fulfill with conscientiousness all of my religious obligations.”\textsuperscript{57} History does not record the Church response to his petition.

Other Catholics wrote that spiritualism and occult practices complemented their faith at a more personal level. They were also aware that such feelings ran counter to established Church decrees, and in some cases sought clerical permission to continue hybrid forms of spirituality. In a 1930 letter to Cardinal Schulte, Adolf Overzier described his spiritualistic convictions in detail, writing:

For the past half year, we have a little circle that meets every two weeks in order to do so-called table-turning [Tischrücken] on a spiritualistic basis. I submit that we have never talked with evil spirits or with strangers, rather only with our dead relatives and acquaintances, in particular with our parents. The result of this is that our faith has deepened itself even more, that we considerably remember them more now than was earlier the case through having Masses said for them and lighting candles. In short, for my wife as well as for me, the religious

\textsuperscript{56} “Spiritimus, Teilnahme an solchen Sitzungen verboten,” \textit{Wiener Diözesanblatt} (1917), 90.

\textsuperscript{57} AEK, Gen I 22.12, Letter, April 30, 1927, C. Flössel to Cardinal Schulte.
Overzier wrote of his awareness of Church prohibitions and tried to pay obeisance to them, framing his interest in terms of entertainment:

Now I can understand that conjuring spirits, black magic, and how one likes to call all these things, are fundamentally outlawed by the Church and must be. But I cannot comprehend how wonderful entertainment evenings [Unterhaltungs-Abende] somehow should violate the commandments of God or the Church. My last confessor explained that it was not sinful. On occasion, I have talked with others here and there about this point, and I have consequently experienced that the views are different.

In order to clear my conscience fully now, I humbly request that Your Eminence would briefly notify me if these good and nice entertainment evenings are sins for me and my wife.59

Particularly striking in this correspondence is Overzier’s wavering between assertions of self-justification and the collective guilt imposed by Church law. Cardinal Schulte’s office responded quickly to offer an interpretation of the “entertainment evenings”: “The answer should read: ‘No to everything,’ i.e., that all the events in the request are not allowed.”60 Such responses highlighted that when Catholics chose to appeal to the authority of the clerical hierarchy, a hard-line authoritarian and inflexible answer was usually given in terms of established doctrine and dogma, especially regarding issues like suicide and superstition. When Catholics exercised their individual initiative at a lower level, however, they had a great deal more freedom of action to enact their beliefs.

Catholic reconciliation and exclusion

Beyond the bishops, scholars must look locally to individual believers and the social bonds of corporate groups, stemming from beliefs and emotions that do not always fit conventional narratives. After the guns of the Western Front fell silent, the Catholic Church provided a transnational means of reconciliation in ways unimaginable to the embittered national chauvinists, especially those from defeated Protestant Prussia. Some German Catholics, however, certainly did feel an embittered sense of defeat and betrayal, perhaps most notably Bishop (later Cardinal) Michael von Faulhaber of Munich, who had been heavily involved in the leadership of Bavarian chaplaincy during the Great War. Nevertheless, the most comprehensive study of the “stab-in-the-back” legend

58 AEK, Gen I 22.12, Letter, September 5, 1930, Adolf Overzier to Cardinal Schulte.
59 Ibid. 60 AEK, Gen I 22.12, Antwort of 18.9.1930.
Catholicism and the Great War

emphasizes the decisive influence of the Protestant social–moral milieu in advancing a sense of religiously-charged nationalist disappointment.\(^61\)

By contrast, due to the transnational character of the Catholic Church and its self-justified universalistic mission, Catholic understandings of being allowed for healing and reconciliation. The influential German Jesuit journal *Stimmen der Zeit* accorded prominent space to essays written by Paul Doncœur, a French Jesuit who had served in the war as a French army chaplain and who had been severely wounded at the Somme. Doncœur claimed that a visit to Lourdes had miraculously healed his wounds, allowing him to rejoin his regiment and participate in the final push to victory in 1918. In the conclusion to one of his articles published in 1922, Doncœur emotionally wrote of the necessity of Catholicism as a force for reconciliation in a fallen world:

Despite everything that can temporarily separate us here below [on Earth], it is nevertheless a wonderful thought that there are millions of souls all over the world who strive to give honor to the same Heavenly Father. We become aware that we are brothers, born of the same blood that flowed out of the same heart at one and the same Calvary. May this feeling of the unity of all sons of the Church triumph over all the obstacles that battle against love and unification. It was for them [i.e., all sons of the Church] that our Savior prayed in high priestly prayer: may they be one.\(^62\)

Doncœur’s Catholic sensibility was not exultant in service of the winning power; he struck a chord among the German Jesuits of the losing side. German Protestants had a much more difficult time reconciling their religious faith across national borders.\(^63\)

While Catholics from the losing powers could conceptualize themselves as both universal and national, nevertheless, the Great War caused religious differences to diminish in some areas and exacerbated them in others; the cleavages were not split along simple lines of secularization or belief. Particularly in Germany, the sacrifice shared by both Protestants

---


and Catholics helped convince them that they were one nation, whose loyalty to the state was more paramount than its religious differences. In the land of the Protestant Reformation, this was a huge conceptual shift. One of the most prominent Catholic philosophers in Central Europe, Max Scheler, wrote of the “Peace between the confessions” that had occurred as a result of the Great War. Scheler claimed that, “There can be no more doubt: out of the dark depths of our historical past, only when we all know to master the newly awakened opposition of parties, putting religious confession on a new path . . . only then is it possible to avoid the bloodiest civil war and restrain the fall of the empire and the Bolshevization of Europe . . . The question today is becoming clear to us, in order to avoid this, it means peace between the religious confessions in this fuller sense.”

The darker side of inclusion was, of course, exclusion. In Germany, religious differences between Christians and Jews became accentuated as Jews were made scapegoats. The majority Christian society desperately grasped for reasons why its shared sacrifice had resulted in defeat, eventually developing the notion of treason by inner enemies: a Jewish–Bolshevik conspiracy that had stabbed the German Army in the back.

The relationships between Nazism and different forms of religion have long been a subject of scholarly interest. Examining the specifically Catholic affiliations of the early Nazi movement, Derek Hastings has persuasively argued that historians need to reexamine the overlap and indeed continuities between the pre-war and interwar periods, particularly regarding the rise of the Nazi Party in Munich. As Hastings notes, “Building on the distinctive tradition of Catholic anti-ultramontanism and opposition to political Catholicism in Munich, the party was able to skillfully deploy the interconfessional ideal of Positive Christianity within an overwhelmingly Catholic context. It embraced the principle of religious Catholicism and thus distinguished itself from other völkisch groups, pitching itself ultimately as the most viable option for völkisch-oriented Catholics in Munich.” The early Nazi movement developed among a plethora of other völkisch groups with strong religiously-inspired affinities for the rebirth of organic national communities in the aftermath of the Great War. Hastings shows that while the Catholic Church as a corporate organization was strongly opposed to Nazism, nonetheless, on a local level, individuals and groups could freely identify parts of their religiously-inspired faith, affirming that their values coincided with political movements. Furthermore, Hastings shows that the Nazi

---

movement underwent a change in its religious attitudes: the very early Nazi movement of 1919–23 had considerable affinities with certain elements of Munich Catholicism. However, the Nazi Party became more anti-religious over time and lost Catholic support, especially after Hitler’s decision to join the Kampfbund in September 1923. Thus, instead of looking at Nazism as either a political religion or a religious politics, it is important to identify the local context and change that the party experienced over time in its relation to local Catholicism in Munich.  

Even in rural, isolated regions of Germany like the Black Forest, there were structural factors such as the breakdown of Vereine in the 1920s that allowed Catholics on a local level to support Nazism as a heterogeneous mass party with national appeal. However, one must not overstate the case. Even in 1930, around half of the Black Forest’s inhabitants still remained loyal to the Catholic milieu, voting with the Center Party and not with the Nazi Party.

Although the war between the Great Powers had ended, a new war against Bolshevism was beginning, with real-world revolutionary attempts in cities such as Berlin, Budapest, and Munich. Catholic military chaplains continued to serve in counter-revolutionary Freikorps units marauding in the Baltic regions, while battles were fought between paramilitary units in the former areas of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, such as on the border between Carinthia and Slovenia.

With historical hindsight, stormclouds of nationalistic hatred and revenge politics were gathering in the interwar era. Perhaps this can be most acutely seen in the death of Matthias Erzberger. The leading German Catholic Center politician who helped direct the July 19, 1917 Reichstag Peace Resolution, Erzberger was especially hated by ultranationallists for his role in signing the Armistice in the railway car at Compiegne in November 1918, becoming one of the so-called “November criminals.” After numerous attempts, Erzberger was finally murdered by a fringe right-wing group on August 26, 1921 in Bad Griesbach in the Black Forest. A news report from Reichspost in the immediate aftermath wrote that, “Erzberger was stamped by his opponents as the representative of an all-too-weak peace policy.” Besides the Reichstag...
Peace Resolution, commentators used the occasion to highlight the papal peace initiatives, especially Benedict XV’s Peace Note of 1917, and Erzberger’s role in facilitating transnational Catholic peace overtures. Erzberger’s memoirs of the Great War culminate in an ironic sense of doom given his eventual assassination: their final pages contain descriptions of numerous assassination attempts, but Erzberger wrote of his belief that God protected him, and that he had helped bring peace to Germany. Erzberger’s role in the events of November 1918 underscored that, as one veered closer to the fringe elements of the German right, there would always be a feeling that Catholics were less German and less devoted to the nation than the ultranationlists wished.

If one traces longer continuities of Central European history, however, one sees that Jews, not Catholics, were the marginalized scapegoats of the First World War. In fact, the Great War was a profound moment of Catholic assimilation into Germany. Sustained shared sacrifice during industrial warfare had integrated Protestants and Catholics in Central Europe as never before into a shared blood brotherhood unknown since before Martin Luther. As religion and nation became fused in the ideological imaginary, racialized thinking implied that non-Christians were of a different race, not true members of a national community. Lingering religious sentiment played a strong role in the ideological imaginary of inclusion and exclusion, ultimately culminating in the genocide of the Jews during the Second World War.

**Catholic philosophy of war**

The Catholic dolorous philosophy of war was present at the very beginning of the conflict and helped make a consoling interpretation of it after it was lost for the imperial powers of Central Europe. Although Catholics were certainly involved in some of the jubilance of the August days of 1914, from peasants at the village level to the highest ranks of clergy in the public sphere, there remained a strong strand of existential despair about the human condition on Earth. While Protestant circles certainly embraced parts of this focus on human sinfulness and the fallen condition, Catholic philosophies of war tended away from legitimizing one form of government or nation-state as divinely ordered. Thus, when imperial powers lost the war and new political orders were created, the conceptual leap was not as jarring for the ordinary Catholic believer.

---

71 Smith, *Continuities of German History*. 
Protestant–Catholic differences in early war philosophy and post-war interpretation were striking. Written in the heady days of July 1914, an editorial in the prominent Austro-Hungarian Catholic paper Reichspost declared, “As long as there are human beings, there will be wars on Earth. As long as goods like homeland, freedom, and honor are held in esteem; as long as nations have interests on securing the economic and political interests of the Fatherland . . . there will be wars down here [on Earth].” The article declared a conception of humanity in a fallen and imperfect condition, based on original sin, and with a view of life on Earth as a dolorous journey: “Earth is not a paradise; the first-born of Creation are not Angels. Guilt and error sprawl everywhere in this valley of tears enormous passions nest in the small heart of man, and the nobly minded must always defend the battlefield against those of base passions; in the name of truth and justice, nations must always take up the sword against national lies and national injustice.” In this Catholic philosophy of war, history was cyclical and not subject to great change, based on the perpetual condition of fallen humankind: “The pages of History speak a bloody language. National peace was the ideal; national war almost always the rule . . . The places change, the motives change, the forms change; but the thing remains . . . History teaches that dreams of eternal peace are illusions. War is bound up with the lives of nations, just as hardship and suffering are bound up with the existence of the individual . . . Tears are almost more necessary to people than smiles.” Right at the outset of war, this was a philosophy of history that contrasted particularly with the optimistic, linear philosophy of German Protestantism – especially the powerful version of chosen-people nationalism. When the conflict stagnated, and victory seemed ever more distant, Catholic philosophy allowed for less traumatic conceptual shifting from the expectations promised at the war’s beginning.

After the war was lost for the Central Powers, this Catholic philosophy of war provided continuity in a confusing new world. Arguing that the Catholic Church was a fundamentally conservative force and that the Great War had brought no new revelations to believers, Peter Lippert, S.J., wrote in Stimmen der Zeit that, “The forms of government of states, the economic systems, the conditions of production, and the distribution of goods are meaningless in themselves for the goals and tasks of Christianity, and thus also meaningless for priests and pastors.” Drawing on the shifting sentiments of the Catholic bishops, based on natural-law

72 “Der Krieg,” Reichspost, July 30 (1914), Nr. 355, p. 1.
73 Lippert, “Klerus, Krieg, und Umsturz,” 84.
philosophy, this line of thought did not sanctify any one form of government. Thus, fallen monarchies, destroyeed empires, and failed states were of lesser consequence to the religious believer. This also left open the option to transfer one’s loyalties to new authoritarian states. Horrified at the terrors of atheistic communism, by default this favored Catholics shifting their political sentiments toward clerico-fascist alliances, which were on the rise across Central and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{74} The Church’s anti-communism in the post-1918 period would also become a focal point of Catholic identity in the post-1945 period, as well as serving as a source of common European political and cultural integration at Europe’s supposed “zero hour” in 1945.\textsuperscript{75}

Writing in 1922, the French Jesuit and former French military chaplain Paul Doncœur reflected the transnational dimensions of wartime sacrifice and memory. Around the time of the Armistice on the Western Front, Doncœur recalled advancing over captured German lines and admiring the large wooden cross erected there, which bore the inscription, “Here resting with God lie seven French warriors, fallen for their Fatherland.” Validating that this sacrifice happened for Catholic believers on opposite sides during the war, Doncœur wrote that, “Certainly, these men fell ‘for their Fatherland,’ in the nicest sense of the word – for its spiritual rebirth.” Doncœur transnationally linked the soldiers’ blood sacrifice to the devotion of Christ as founder of the Catholic religion: “We Catholics . . . believe in the power of salvation through blood; we know that in this fundament the basis of our hope lies decided in this sacrifice offered to God.” Doncœur was firmly restricted in this Catholic interpretation of the war, writing “it was the only explanation” for witnessing the unfolding of the process of salvation through the war. He asked his readers, “What success did the war have in hindsight on religious life?”, and it was a loaded question. He argued that the war brought success “not in a sudden and all-encompassing upheaval of the country, in a mass conversion [\textit{Massenbekehrung}], born out of the divine power of miracles [\textit{göttlichen Wundermacht}].” Doncœur wrote that the “voice of God” was found always in the “conversion of souls only as a result of the deep-seeded work of mercy.” Reconciliation, healing, and mercy would be the order of the day, manifested in small acts of everyday devotion. Doncœur did not minimize the “extraordinary lengths and difficulties of this test” that the sufferings of war had brought European society. He affirmed that some of superficial faith would turn away from belief in

\textsuperscript{74} Martin Conway, \textit{Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945} (London: Routledge, 1997).
\textsuperscript{75} Kaiser, \textit{Christian Democracy}. 
divine order after witnessing and living through destruction on a mass scale. He wrote of the force of Catholic belief as a fundamental stabilizing factor for society after the period of feverish panic, believing that “one saw the old sobriety coming back again.” For France or Germany, for victors or losers of the conflict, Doncœur wrote that the war’s effects were common to all Catholics. In religious minds, faith in a universal magisterium of believers would triumph over national enmity.  

Of course, such sentiments spoke to an idealization of pre-war life and a projected hope of a return to peace. In some ways, the war had not ended. New enemies had already appeared, especially a competing movement of international solidarity, the rise of socialism and its claims of materialistic atheism, which threatened the fundamentals of Catholic belief structure. For Catholics in the interwar period, the danger of Bolshevism was a war to be fought on all fronts. It had entered a decisive phase in 1917, after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and it was one form of combat that did not end neatly on November 11, 1918.  

Religiously-minded soldiers and their families in the Central Powers often lost belief in the cause of state. They kept believing, however, in the metaphysical presence of God in their lives. Erwin Meier, a German soldier serving on the front lines in northern France late in the war, wrote in his diary on September 28, 1918 that, “It is right that we lose the war! The fraud is too big!” After describing the packet of bread that he had received from his mother, he further reinforced the family longings and homefront sense of community that animated the minds and hearts of religious believers, who prayed for their family members and appealed to the intercessory saint culture of the Church for continued protection. Meier wrote, “In Champagne and between Argonne and Maas, there is since yesterday a defensive battle. I suspect that my brother is there. God protect him.”  

Networks of intercession triumphed over nationalist loyalties.  

In the interwar and post-war periods, the domesticity and imagined tranquility of home became a powerful vision of nostalgia. Believers longed for a return to peace and serenity, to childhood, to a time undisturbed by the social suffering of war. In her memoirs, Kristina Margarthe Anja Kronthaler, living in Freiburg im Breisgau, wrote of her childhood in Schweidnitz, in Silesia, with fond, idealized nostalgia: “Often I dream of Schweidnitz, city of my childhood, which was a happy one . . . I know...
in the dream that I am in my hometown, but I do not find the way home to my parents’ house. Then I wake up lost.” In evoking her local identity as a Silesian, she reached back to a regional identity with loyalty to Empress Maria Theresa (d. 1780). She declared that Silesians retained loyalties to Austria and to the local area, despite being “Forced Prussians” (Musspreussen). Katharina recalled an interwar atmosphere of devotional piety, in which her family attended Mass every Sunday, with her father going to services daily. She particularly remembered the May festivities, when the churches were “filled with believers, who sang with zeal” and when there were devotions to the Virgin Mary centered on May altars decorated with flowers and burning candles. Such nostalgic visions were key sources of comfort, providing alternative dreams that helped religious believers cope with the unsettled new socio-political realities of the interwar period.

Local war memorials and fragmented national memories

The Central Powers’ official memorialization of the war was a contested process that faced a huge conceptual hurdle for the states that lost. On a local level, however, memorials in small communities across Europe demonstrated the persistence of traditional religious imagery and messages. Soldiers’ bodies were often buried at the front or else missing, sometimes completely destroyed. These memorials helped Catholics from the losing powers understand the phenomenon of mass death, legitimizing suffering and sacrifice. In the minds of religious believers, the war was seen not as a new form of destruction beyond comprehension, but rather as another episode in the shameful history of human sinfulness. Lists of names, usually in alphabetical order, emphasized the equality of sacrifice.

Official commemorations in Catholic areas gravitated toward universal religious moments, especially the Feasts of All Saints (November 1) and All Souls (November 2). Before, during, and after the war, the days of early November retained a powerful symbolic resonance in the popular mindset, particularly since much of the fighting seemed to stop during this autumnal time in 1918. Catholic believers went to the cemeteries, lit candles, and honored the memory of all the dead, the communion of saints, and the entire community of the faithful departed. Traditional

---

belief in religious salvation would overcome even the new horrors of industrial war.

Especially in overwhelmingly rural regions, in the interwar period the Catholic Church seized control of war memorials, interpreting the sacrifices of the fallen in explicitly religious terms and dominating the public-sphere discourse about the war. This began with the quantitative presence of war memorials. As Oswald Überegger has calculated for the region of Tyrol, around ninety percent of war memorials were in churches, religious cemeteries, or on church property. Regarding the more symbolic language of Tyrolean monuments, between 1918 and 1938 the overwhelming majority of iconography was religious, which meant Christian, and usually Catholic: 33.8% of monuments had purely religious imagery, while a further 23.7% had some combination of religious iconography and more military or civilian motifs. 82

In a world in which the monarchy had been dissolved as a political entity, the Church was still vastly important to the military in maintaining an aura of legitimacy grounded in the throne-and-altar alliance. Chaplains held positions of honor at regimental gatherings, helping to consecrate flags and imbue the proceedings with a sense of divine approval. In the interwar period, military chaplains were essential figures at ceremonies that blended military veterans’ associations and local patriotism. 83 Flag consecration ceremonies drew in rural participants from widespread areas. Such events often began with solemn church services but also usually included celebratory elements at which young and old could socialize in a festive atmosphere. As Benjamin Ziemann has noted, Catholic ordinariates in Bavaria often unsuccessfully attempted to forbid the conjunction of church services with festive remembrance events and flag consecration parties, but the ceremonies went on anyway, in a show of local patriotism with religious initiative. 84

With regard to war memorials, however, the Church in Bavaria laid down a much more decisive opinion, refusing to consecrate any war memorials, or to conduct the requisite ceremonies, if the activities did not have primarily Christian leanings – and the rural communities usually submitted to the Church’s wishes in this regard. 85 In rural regions in Central Europe, such local memorials were mostly situated on church grounds, often incorporated as part of the church itself. All across

82 Überegger, Erinnerungskriege, 131–44.
83 Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland, 4:391–2. For photographs of chaplains leading interwar remembrance ceremonies at veterans’ associations, see DAG, Sch. 29–34: Fotos.
84 Bayerischer Krieger Zeitung, July 20, 1921, September 5, 1921, quoted in Ziemann, Front und Heimat, 425ff.
85 Ibid., 438–61.
Central Europe, memorials to the Great War carried more Christian motifs than those recalling the nationalist wars of the nineteenth century, as religion provided a means of consolation to the bereaved attempting to cope with the war's destruction. In particular, Bavarian Marian piety swelled during the war, reaffirmed by a papal decree from Benedict XV, becoming an excellent vehicle for post-war bereavement, as encapsulated by the Christian form of the Pieta. Centered in Marian devotions to the rosary, the Bavarian pilgrimage church of Altötting swelled with around 300,000 annual visitors in the interwar years. Soldiers and their family networks made vows that if they emerged from the war alive, they would all go on pilgrimages to give thanks. The swelling number of pilgrims made clear that many religious families took such vows seriously.

At Bavarian sites of memory such as Altötting, Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, who had been integral to Bavarian chaplaincy during the war, made the war experience a foundational element of his post-war preaching. During a May 3, 1925 address to former Bavarian soldiers who had made the pilgrimage to Altötting, Faulhaber implored his listeners to “Honor those who fell on the field of honor! But shame those who fell on the field of shame!” The latter part was directed against the perceived laxness of moral behavior during the war, especially sins of incontinence such as sexual infidelity and drunkenness. Militarizing the message, such diatribes had presentist implications for their living audience. Faulhaber even used the same contrast between the “Field of Honor” (Feld der Ehre) and the “Field of Shame” (Feld der Schande) during an April 27, 1919 sermon for Easter communion held in front of middleschool students who had not experienced the war as soldiers. Faulhaber’s message showed a continuity of form centered in war experience and remembrance. During a speech to members of the Katholischer Gesellenverein in Munich’s Bürgersaal on March 16, 1919, Faulhaber emphasized that the experience of war reconciled humanity’s conscience to God because the omnipresent closeness of death was a guide for leading moral lives. Twenty years later, in the Munich Cathedral, during the May 30, 1939 dedication of a memorial to military chaplains and candidates for the priesthood who had fallen in the Great War, Faulhaber argued that religion was the source of customary power that solidified society, especially through devotion to the flag and the morality of perseverance (Durchhaltemoral), again couching his speech in war terms. For Faulhaber, the Great War was a permanent moral lesson, applicable to future generations.

Ziemann, Front und Heimat, 448–50.
Klier, Von der Kriegspredigt, 137–45.
Especially for many rural regions in which the Catholics of Central Europe were a preponderant majority, memorialized historical remembrance was firmly rooted in local contexts and webs of meaning. Bavaria, for instance, officially declined to participate in German national remembrance and the national hero cult. Throughout the Weimar period, Bavaria did not celebrate the National Day of Mourning (Völkstrauertag) decreed for the sixth Sunday before Easter, which was arranged by the National League for the Maintenance of German War Graves (Völksbund für Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge). Instead, after 1926, the Bavarian Catholic Church created a day of mourning on the second Sunday in November, within the octave of All Souls, thus keeping with a more Catholic sensibility that did not celebrate the German nation. This explicit depoliticization also helped to prevent people from questioning the political frameworks and underlying social conditions that had caused the war in the first place.\(^{90}\)

Care of official monuments and war graves tended to reinforce transnational themes. During the war, governments set up institutions like the German and Austrian Black Cross (Schwarzes Kreuz) to look after war graves, create monuments to the fallen, and monitor official military cemeteries. In the immediate post-war years of rampant inflation and socio-economic distress, these organizations often had little funding, and they only began to enact practical reforms in the mid-1920s and later. Furthermore, negotiating the care of soldiers’ graves on the territories of former embittered combatant states was nearly impossible diplomatically.\(^{91}\)

Photos of Vienna’s central cemetery taken in 1920 reveal an air of exhaustion in the capital, with the soldiers’ section looking “completely dilapidated.” Only in 1925 did this begin to change, with a central monument established by Anton Hanak, prominently featuring a Pietà motif of a mourning woman with outstretched arms, sinking to her knees. This portrayal did not heroicize or glorify war, but focused on individual loss and mourning, applied as a shared suffering common to all those who had lost loved ones.\(^{92}\)

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 455–61.


Locally-based historical monuments, however, often did retain themes of traditional heroism, showing how local power identities operated within larger imperial frameworks. Tyrol, for example, was a staunchly Catholic region that reached back into the nineteenth century, establishing its local identity in regional terms where defeat in war did not matter. The local patriot Andreas Hofer, leader of an uprising against Napoleon, was paramount in the Tyrolean pantheon of heroes. Despite the failure of Hofer’s actions (he was ultimately captured and executed by Napoleonic forces), he was a powerful symbol of the fight for freedom. Nineteenth-century monuments to Hofer became sites of local Tyrolean pilgrimage, especially by military units. New monuments prominently featured the Christian motif of a central cross placed upon an altar, to which the Tyrolean Book of Honor (Tiroler Ehrenbuch) in Innsbruck added lists of the dead, containing the names of all the fallen.

In localities across Central Europe, veterans’ associations, especially at the regimental level, played a key part in creating monuments that combined heroism with Christian sacrifice. Local regimental histories also tapped into deep lines of continuity with past generations of military sacrifice. Of special importance to the area around Salzburg, for example, Infantry Regiment Nr. 59 “Archduke Rainer” drew on the legacy of regimental pride during the Napoleonic Wars, particularly with the establishment of the main “Rainer” monument, an obelisk in the Salzburg cemetery, in 1882. The monument represented 2127 soldiers and 46 officers buried in the communal grounds, who had died throughout the Napoleonic conflicts. As a result of the Great War, new monuments and inscriptions appeared around the Salzburg area, testifying to the expansion of suffering: “Every tenth man fell!” A memorial tablet on the main Salzburg post office identified places of sacrifice in Pontebba and Ciadennis, calling out specific mountains on which actions had been fought. This linked the regiment back to its roots fighting in the mountain areas of Salzburg and Tyrol.

More ominously, there were transnational scenes of memorialization that focused on pan-German loyalties. Plans for monuments included gestures to Nordic heroes’ groves of trees (Ehrenhain). In 1921, the Salzburg sculptor Leo von Moos dedicated a memorial tablet to the fallen members of the Germanic Jahn gymnastic association. The relief showed two gymnasts locking hands in a circle around a wreath of honor for the
fallen, with the inscription: “To the sacrifices for the German Volk and Fatherland, 1914–1918.” Around the edges of the tablet were columns of bronze oak leaves, with swastikas in the corners and the inscription, “Our honor is fidelity” (Unsere Ehre Heisst Treue) – symbols and words that would become infamously adopted by Himmler’s SS.96

Even in a small country such as the Austrian successor state, war memorials took on extremely localized meanings.97 As in Germany, despite so much wartime emphasis being placed on the need to defend the monarchy, war memorials almost never displayed direct references to this institution. Much more prevalent was the notion of sacrifice for the Heimat, which, especially in the fragmented successor states of the Habsburg monarchy, was often a vague notion of a localized ethno-national fatherland.98

The process of “staging the past” in the successor states in the Habsburg Empire showed that contested processes of national identity formation drew heavily on Christian imagery.99 The traditional Habsburg literature on nationalism argued that the Czech nationalist movement was one of the most centrifugal forces seeking autonomy from the Habsburg yoke.100 Even during the late stages of the war in September 1918, however, some Habsburg units containing soldiers from Bohemia did not subscribe to the centrifugal nationalism that was a characteristic of the Czech nationalist movement, celebrating the potentially inflammatory Feast of Saint Wenceslas in a spirit of quiet devotion.101

The new Czech state selectively promoted the memory of former soldiers who served its current political interests. Thus, the members of the famous Czech Legion that had fought in Russia became heroes in a struggle of national liberation, while the many Czech and Slovak soldiers who fought for Austria-Hungary were largely forgotten in official commemorations. In 1928, the Czech Legionaries established a national memorial on V´ıtkov Hill in Prague, which contained a museum and a mausoleum for the remains of the fallen Legionaries. Overall, it would serve as a “temple of the political and cultural renaissance” of the new nation. Furthermore, the new Czech and Slovak states deliberately excluded

98 For a comparison with Austria-Hungary, see Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland, 3:107–8, 131–2, 158.
99 Bucur and Wingfield, Staging the Past.
101 At least, it was reported so by the unit chaplain. ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 233: Sept. 1918 (misfiled), Ersatzbatallion k.u.k IR 102, Pastoral Report of Karl Sobek.
important national minorities from official memory, namely the respective German and Hungarian minorities. In Heroes’ Square in Budapest, a new portion was dedicated to the Tomb of the Hungarian Unknown Soldier. Outside of Budapest, however, monuments to territories lost at the Treaty of Trianon were established, thus agitating fantasies of irredentism.¹⁰²

Of course, in some areas, religious national relations were much tenser. When Vienna slowly became more socially fragmented as the politics of food became less able to sustain survival, ethnic hatred and mutual suspicions became inflamed, especially between Germans and Czechs.¹⁰³ One could find similar instances on the battlefield, where troops from the Sudetenland at a field hospital showed “tepidity” about participating in Catholic religious services together – in contrast to troops from Poland and Croatia, and even POWs from Italy.¹⁰⁴ In other instances, however, even in the heart of the disintegrating Habsburg capital, German and Czech Catholics recuperating in a hospital could coexist relatively peacefully in communal services conducted using both German- and Czech-language liturgy and music.¹⁰⁵ Other battlefield units reported late into the war that Germans and Czechs participated together in combined religious services with eagerness and no apparent sign of national enmity.¹⁰⁶ All of this underscores the need to look at battlefield religion locally, at a micro-level, away from the convenient generalizing narratives of national identities and imperial instability.

After the war, despite Thomas Masayrk’s avowed preference for a separation of Church and state and a desire to move away from anything symbolically representing the Catholicism of the old Habsburg Empire, even the new secular Czechoslovak state used religious figures in its state commemorations. Such symbols drew on nationalist sensibilities, even if they were problematic for the image of the new state. In many of these interwar Czechoslovak commemorations, Saint Wenceslas served as a compromise national figure, a counterweight to the separatist symbolism of the Protestant Jan Hus.¹⁰⁷ Even within the new Czechoslovak state, however, there were important subgroups whose religious devotions are

¹⁰⁴ ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 240, Pastoralbericht of Oskar Schuchter, April 1918, Feldspital Nr. 404.
¹⁰⁵ ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 244, Pastoralbericht of Richard Seyss-Inquart, July 1918, Reservespital Nr. 12 (Vienna). The chaplain was the brother of Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the later prominent Austrian Nazi Chancellor. See also ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 246, Pastoralbericht, September 1918 Reservespital in Kremsier.
¹⁰⁶ ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 244, Pastoralbericht of Franz Cech, July 1918, IR 75; ÖStAKA, AFV, Ktn. 244, Pastoralbericht of Josef Roskopal, July 1918, 6. Kav. Div, 11. Armee.
¹⁰⁷ Paces, “Religious Heroes.”
not accurately captured by a generic portrait of imperial decline and fall. The Slovak population of Czechoslovakia, for instance, still remained suspicious of the Hus cult and the Prague government in general, and became invigorated by the idea of a separate, explicitly Catholic state. Slovakian Catholic nationalist hopes would be realized in the clerico-fascist regime headed by Monsignor Jozef Tiso.108

The supposed defection of k.u.k. Infantry Regiments 28, 35, and 75, composed mostly of soldiers of Czech ethnicity, highlights how the military performance of Austro-Hungarian units became entangled in interwar memory politics. Eager to blame Czechs for the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy, and to conceal the poor strategic decisions of the high command, Austrian politicians condemned the units, arguing that the regiments in question had defected to the Russian side, readily abandoning the Habsburg lines in the battles of Esztebnékhuta in April 1915 and Zborow in July 1917. Similarly, interwar Czech politicians agreed that units had defected, but instead praised them for it, arguing that they were the vanguard of a triumphant nationalist political movement away from the decrepit Habsburg state. In reality, however, a recent military history of the regiments in question reveals that the Czech units performed loyal service to the Habsburg military, holding the line well, especially given a difficult tactical situation. The units did not betray the Habsburg Army and did not defect, but that did not stop them from becoming a political football in the interwar period.109

The case of Polish Galicia represented one promising area of wartime Catholicism and its aftereffects on popular piety, viewed locally and nationally. To the last days of the war, even after the Habsburg Empire had officially fallen, Polish chaplains eagerly petitioned the war ministry asking to serve in the Imperial forces and even in the forces of the Republic of German-Austria. Even as centrifugal ethno-national tensions were at their height, the Habsburg monarchy found a supply of Catholic chaplains who exhibited loyal “dynastic-patriotic sensibility” (dynastisch-patriotische Gesinnung). War ministry officials turned back such aspirants by telling them that the empire no longer existed and that they should seek to serve within the armed forces of the new Polish nation.110

During the war, both German and Austro-Hungarian sources testified to the exemplary piety of Galician civilians and troops. Austro-Hungarian chaplains observed the intense faith of enemy POWs, ethnic Poles serving

108 Burleigh, Sacred Causes, 258–62.
110 ÖStAKA, LV 1918–1919, 16 LW Seelsorger, Km. 2398:20 702, 20 741, and 20 742, petitions of Alexander Bogdanowicz, Boleslaus Gawel, and Josef Liska.
in the Russian Army, who expressed their thanks for the opportunity to worship and receive holy communion. Bavarian Catholic chaplains commented favorably on the religious observance of Galician Catholic Poles on the Eastern Front throughout the war, contrasting them with German units from various parts of the Wilhelmine Empire. Similarly, German chaplains commented that Polish civilians regularly and eagerly participated in Catholic services offered to German troops stationed near Rozana.

The national affinities of Catholic Poles on the eve of the First World War have raised complicated trajectories of loyalty, which continued into the post-war period. Polish peasants made sure that rural myths and religious beliefs became part of the imagery of the new Polish nation-state. Precisely because ethnic Poles had fought against each other for the Triple Entente and the Central Powers, one single Polish national collective memory did not suffice to explain the sacrifices made during the Great War. Similar stories of complicated ethnic allegiances existed for many of the new nations of East Central Europe in the interwar period. Christianized nationalism, far from being disillusioned during the First World War, was poised for a flourishing in the interwar period.

In Austria, the town of Mariazell provided one of the best examples of the power of transnational Catholicism as a site of memory and mourning, continuing the medieval tradition of Catholic pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago di Compostella, and Aachen. Well into the twentieth century, groups making pilgrimages to the famous town drew on the pomp and circumstance of the medieval and baroque eras. The disruptions of the world wars did not diminish Central European enthusiasm for visitations to Mariazell. In 1957, the town celebrated the 800th anniversary of its official establishment as a pilgrimage site, now with a backdrop of Cold War politics, with the Communists replacing the

111 ÖStAKA, AFV, Km. 230, Pastoralbericht June 1917. Chaplain Julian Ogarek, stationed in Graz, reported that his sermons reflected a Catholic sensibility and were received favorably: “Das Thema derselben ist immer beinahe gleich: ‘Gebet, frommes Leben, Geduld, Vertrauen an göttl. Vorsehung und göttl. Willen, Arbeitsamkeit, das rechte katholische Leben.’”


113 BA-MA, PH 32/267 Seelsorgesbericht, January–February 1917, Etappenpfarrer Greis.


Ottoman Turks as the projected enemy. The Archbishop of Salzburg, Andreas Rohracher, celebrated a Mass for the occasion, in which he declared, “There is no coexistence between Christianity and Communism.” A variety of Catholic figures gathered in Mariazell for celebratory Masses, including German Chancellor Adenauer, Austrian Chancellor Leopold Figl, Cardinal Innitzer from Vienna, Cardinal Wendel from Munich, Cardinal Feltin from Paris, and General Francisco Franco. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 gave a sense of historical continuity and repetition of familiar themes: now refugees from Central and Eastern Europe headed to Mariazell were fleeing Soviet atheism instead of the Islamic Turk. The later bishop of Eisenstadt, Stephan László, became an official Vatican spokesman for refugees in Austria and made Mariazell a key site of organizational visits, with Masses conducted in Hungarian language and vestments. Cardinal József Mindszenty, the Prince Primate of Esztergom and the symbolic leader of Hungarian Catholic resistance to fascism and communism, died in exile in 1975. He was buried in the crypt of the Laudislaus Chapel in Mariazell, where his remains rested until 1991, when they were transferred to Hungary after the fall of the Iron Curtain.  

In the immediate aftermath of the Great War, the Catholic Church focused on the reintegration of soldiers into peacetime society. Official religious faculties delegated to military chaplains in time of war ceased in February 1919, most prominently through the stoppage of general absolution or communal absolution of individual sins without prior individual confession. Across Europe, survivors erected votive chapels and shrines, thanking God for the safe return of the soldiers. Communal bonds of family and faith helped religious believers make sense of a world shattered by war. Alongside the persistence of religious belief, however, the world the soldiers returned to had undergone irrevocable changes. As always, tradition adapted to the needs of the present and projected future.

**Conclusion**

The Catholic philosophy of war helped to lessen the collective sting of defeat for Central European religious believers. The disparate historical remembrances of the conflict showed that the nation mattered as one type

---


of collective, but it was not the only or even most important locus of identity for religious believers. Even at the national level, defeat in 1918 was also a moment of (re)birth for nations such as Poland and Czechoslovakia. Catholic belief even helped former opponents like France and Germany reconcile.

Catholic belief structures provided tangible means of comfort for the faithful. Battlefield relics, liturgies of comfort, and a dolorous philosophy of war helped believers understand the war in traditional terms. Collective loss was certainly an important part of ascriptions of sacrifice but, especially at a local level, most believing Catholics cared more about their family members than about an overarching cause. The intercessory saint culture in particular gave believers the idea that they and their departed loved ones were, now and forever, involved in a metaphysical community of salvation rooted in their belief in “one, holy, Catholic, apostolic Church,” as the formation of the Credo put it. Thus, defeat in war was rendered less onerous. Numerous Catholic portrayals of everyday life testified to the flourishing piety that existed in the interwar years. Defeat for Central European Catholics did not equal disillusionment.

Therefore, the figure of Saint Martin and the quiet Western Front on November 11 is both appropriate and misleading. The representation testified to the powerful belief in the community of saints, which served as a comfort mechanism for religious believers trying to make sense of the war. The image also misrepresented the nature of the Great War, which was unsettled on the Eastern Front and at home. Christian believers in Central Europe faced the new danger of Bolshevism both outside and inside their borders.

Catholic beliefs about death and memory from the Great War centered on local communities in mourning. Founded in the faith of families, notions of saintly intercession helped believers connect to the bodies and souls of their fallen loved ones who were no longer there. The Virgin Mary, in particular, highlighted the feminine and familial dimensions of the human condition, linked to divine intercession through the sacrifice of Christ. This familial-focused grieving showed the resilience of Catholic tradition, adapted to explain the destruction and loss of the Great War.