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**Religion and Labour Organization:
The Christian Trade Unions in
the Wilhelmine Empire**

The 'Christian' or, in other words, mainly Catholic Trade Unions have given rise to more controversial views than virtually any other branch of the German Labour Movement. The Social Democrats, strongly influenced in this respect by August Erdmann, regarded them as a 'product of political and clerical calculation' which aimed to split the labour movement.¹ Their supporters in the Christian-Social camp, on the other hand, thought that the 'Free' or Social Democratic Trade Unions were strongly influenced by Marxism, were 'irreligious' and 'unchristian' and they regarded the Christian Trade Unions as a thoroughly justified response to the challenge of Social Democracy and the 'social question'.² Such contradictory assessments of the Christian Trade Unions can also be found — without significant alterations — in the more recent scholarly literature.³ At the same time, however, there has been an increase in the number of studies whose authors try to do justice to the Christian Trade Unions' independent contribution to the development of the German Labour Movement. Such studies try to avoid taking sides in the old disputes between, on the one hand, the Christian Trade Unions, the Catholic Centre Party and the 'People's Association for Catholic Germany' (*Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland*) and, on the other hand, the 'Free' Trade Unions and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Deserving of mention here are the detailed portrayal of the origins of the Christian Trade Unions by K.H. Schürmann,⁴ the analysis of the trade union controversy in German Catholicism by Rudolf Brack,⁵ the history

of the Christian Trade Unions' wages policy by Albrecht Siegler,⁶ the studies of the political work of the Christian Trade Unions by Michael Berger⁷ and Eric Dorn Brose,⁸ and George M. Dill's account of the Christian Trade Unions' corporatist ideology.⁹ Among recently published regional analyses especial mention must be made of that of Bavaria by Hans Dieter Denk.¹⁰ Finally we should not overlook the biographical accounts of the life and work of the most important figure in the unions' development, Adam Stegerwald, although these — as in the case of the works by Josef Deutz¹¹ and Helmut J. Schorr¹² — scarcely attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Christian Trade Unions themselves.

In short, historians have so far only succeeded in reconstructing the history of Christian Trade Unions in Germany in isolated, individual aspects, and a general overview is badly needed.¹³ In this article, I want therefore to re-examine received historical views of the character of the Christian Trade Unions, and to relate the unions' development to the oft-discussed alienation of the German workforce from the church. Taking into account the Christian Trade Unions' conscious reference to Christian and in particular to Catholic social doctrine, I shall begin with a brief survey of the 'pre-history' of the theory and organization of this branch of the labour movement in the nineteenth century,¹⁴ in order to make clear at the same time the limits of continuity as far as the autonomy of these labour organizations is concerned.

II

Already in the earliest stages of industrialization in Germany, social reformers of Christian persuasion, such as A.H. Müller, F. von Baader, F.J. Ritter von Buss, J.H. Wichern and A. Kolping, were amongst the first to try to analyse the social consequences of this new process of social development, to criticize it and to suggest measures which might alleviate or even solve the 'social question'. It was during this first phase of Christian-social activity, which lasted until about the middle of the nineteenth century, that the basic components of German social-Catholic theories were developed, theories which eventually became much more comprehensive and systematic. Thus the evident poverty of the urban

and rural lower classes was regarded primarily as a question of charity, which in turn appeared above all as a question of morality. The churches' contribution to the solution of the social question was seen to lie in bringing about a change of heart on the part of the poor and of the wealthy through greater pastoral care. Moreover, even where industrialization was accepted as a fact, the solution of the social problems which it brought with it was believed to lie in a return to a romantic vision of medieval corporate society. Thus the first organizations which were founded (confessional journeymen's and workers' associations) were established for patriarchal and pastoral motives and with the idea of incorporating the growing labour force into a corporate structure of harmoniously co-operating social 'estates' such as were held to have characterized German society in the Middle Ages.

Not least because of the growing organizational efforts of Social Democrats and Liberals,¹⁵ the 1860s witnessed a heightened concern with the social question which embraced a broader clerical public. Here one can mention Bishop W.E. von Ketteler's book *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christentum* (The Question of Labour and Christianity) of 1864, his contributions to the episcopal conference in Fulda (1869) and his Liebenfrauenheide speech of May 1869. It should be noted that clear differences emerged in the 1860s and 1870s between the Evangelical (Lutheran) church and the Catholic church in their readiness to intervene actively in the social question.¹⁶ In particular, the nominally interconfessional Christian-Social Association which, supported by the Assembly of German Catholics and the church, held their first conference in Elberfeld in March 1870, were primarily a result of Catholic attempts to approach labour, and owed little to Protestant initiative. These associations were partly grouped by occupation and frequently made economic demands such as a reduction of working hours, as at their second congress in 1875. Although they were dominated by Catholics, they can be considered as precursors of the Christian Trade Unions as far as their interconfessionality is concerned; though they were also increasingly driven to concentrate on religious and cultural issues in the course of the *Kulturkampf* (the struggle between Bismarck's state and the Catholic church in the 1870s).¹⁷ The 1870s and 1880s, however, were also characterized by the clarification of Christian Social theory and its broad recognition within the church. They also saw an expansion of the social initiatives of political Catholicism, in particular of the Centre Party,

and the foundation of confessional workers' associations on a broader basis.

Towards the end of the 1870s one can detect in general a growing willingness on the part of Christian-social theorists, politicians and clerical dignitaries to recognize the need for some kind of organized self-help for labour. This willingness gradually emerged in the course of controversies within the church over the kind of role that workers should play in solving the social question, over the justification of labour conflict, over the degree of autonomy of labour organizations and finally over the kind of overall social order that should be striven for. By this time, therefore, the Catholic church was willing in principle, not least as a result of a series of papal statements culminating in the encyclical *rerum novarum* of 1891, to become involved in social and political issues. On the other hand, the Evangelical church, which bowed to the authority of the state, conceived of itself as a state church and was thoroughly committed to monarchy and Fatherland, encouraged an acceptance of the status quo, which was in turn legitimized by stressing the purely pastoral mission of the church. It was not until 1882 that the first Evangelical workers' associations of the 'new kind' were founded, uniting to form a single union in 1890. In their patriarchal attitudes and commitment to industrial peace these were generally in agreement with the Catholic workers' associations, although the latter — not least under pressure from the development of the 'Free' or Social Democratic Trade Unions — increasingly concerned themselves with economic problems. In this they were supported by the 'People's Association for Catholic Germany', which was founded in 1890 and, as I have already mentioned, by the encyclical *rerum novarum* of 1891. In spite of their reluctance to become involved in industrial conflict — a reluctance based upon the concern for the otherworldly and the tradition of charity — these Catholic organizations thus paved the way for the emergence of confessionally oriented trade unions.

F. Hitze's set of practical guidelines for craft sections within the existing Catholic or Evangelical workers' associations, put forward in 1894, were of particular importance here.¹⁸ Hitze argued that these craft sections should encourage job training and explain social legislation. He wanted them to engage in a survey of working conditions and to work for their improvement. In this context the use of the strike as a last resort was not excluded. These ideas spread rapidly: in some places, such as Berlin, Cologne, Munich,

Freiburg and Stuttgart, the various specialized sections joined together to form a kind of local cartel or 'association for the protection of labour'. These continued to have some representation at the congress of the Christian Trade Unions even after the turn of the century. Although it cannot be doubted that several different traditions played a role in the foundation of the Christian Unions in the 1890s, they none the less regarded themselves primarily as being rooted in a continuous clerico-religious policy of social reform.¹⁹ In their objectives however — above all, that of improving the economic situation of the workers — in their organizational structure and finally in their practice, the Christian Trade Unions were linked to the trade union tradition. Trade unions, as distinct from workers' associations, factory associations (*Werkvereine*) and craft unions, should be understood in this context as autonomous representatives of employees, independent of the state, the employers and the church, and fighting against their members' underprivileged economic, social and political position.

From the beginning the Christian Trade Union movement, which had mainly developed out of the Catholic workers' associations through the craft unions, had to fight for its independence. Whereas the Social Democratic movement, lacking an established tradition of its own, was able to adapt quickly to the needs of a mass movement in its transition from club to party or trade union, the Christian Social movement was hampered by established philanthropic and pastoral work in monasteries and charitable associations, which reflected the view that the solution to the social question lay in the individual's fight against poverty. From the church's point of view, the Christian workers' associations and craft unions were often valued less in terms of their real successes in improving social conditions than in terms of keeping religiously inclined workers out of the 'Free' Trade Unions and the SPD. Whether pastoral, social or power-political considerations were uppermost in the development of social Catholicism is of course a question too broad to be fully answered here. What can be said, however, is that the overall contribution of the Christian-social movement to the emancipation of labour in the nineteenth century was ambivalent. It did articulate and organize the representation of the needs of workers who were religiously inclined and belonged to the church, but who — as a great deal of evidence serves to indicate — would not have accepted the representation of their interests by the SPD. On the other hand, by channelling the political involve-

ment of this section of labour into specifically Christian organizations, the Christian-social movement helped introduce a serious division into the structure of the labour movement as a whole. After the demise of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1890, the increased readiness of representatives of the Catholic church to support Christian Trade Unions in addition to craft unions must be seen not least as a response to the rapid expansion of the SPD. Without this support the Christian Trade Unions would have faced not a rapid growth but, in the face of united clerical opposition, a speedy death.

The very existence and nature of the Social-Democratic labour movement was an important, if not the major, stimulus to the development of the Christian Trade Unions, which not least for this reason experienced their greatest success in Germany. The anti-clerical orientation of the SPD, from August Bebel's oft-repeated dictum of 1874 that 'Christianity and socialism oppose one another like fire and water'²⁰ to the declaration of the 1891 Erfurt Programme of the SPD that religion was a private matter,²¹ tended to prevent workers of the faith from joining the SPD and the 'Free' Trade Unions. It also produced clerical resistance, in which — whether they liked it or not — the Christian Trade Unions were also involved. In this context it should not be forgotten that Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* and the role of Protestantism as the state religion further served to create a 'ghetto mentality' on the part of the Catholic population. Thus Catholic workers identified more strongly than their Protestant counterparts were inclined to do with religious belief and the church. This identification then manifested itself in the creation of an elaborate network of Catholic lay organizations. In addition, of course, the 'ghetto mentality' of the Catholic community tended to lead in the end to an accommodation with the state, culminating in the enthusiastic acceptance of Germany's involvement in the First World War in 1914.

Apart from the rejection of Social Democracy on ideological and political grounds, it is difficult to find any other reason why it should have been necessary for German Catholics to create autonomous labour organizations and Christian Trade Unions. The claim that the decision to form the Christian Trade Unions — in so far as one can speak of a 'decision' at all, in the light of previous religious socialization — was an indication that large sections of labour still lived in a religious milieu, is more or less tautological. It is true that the persistently substantial membership

of Catholic workers' associations and Christian Trade Unions and the repeated decision of millions of people to vote for the Centre Party all indicated the leading role not only of religion but also of the Catholic church well into the 1920s. But the Christian elements in the programmes of the Christian Trade Unions were accompanied by elements of nationalist ideologies from around the turn of the century onwards. Moreover, the percentage of Catholics voting for the Centre Party continuously declined from about the same time. This seems to indicate that the church's potential for political influence was becoming steadily weaker.

III

As we have seen, the first Christian Trade Unions²² emerged in those parts of Germany in which a substantial network of Catholic workers' associations already existed. This is true in particular of the area around Aachen, of the industrial region of the lower Rhine (Mönchengladbach, Krefeld), the Ruhr and the south German districts around Munich and Stuttgart. Only the strong pressure of employers and Catholic bishops in Breslau and Trier initially prevented the spread of the Catholic Unions in Upper Silesia and the Saar. The uneven regional distribution of the membership of the Christian Trade Unions is shown by the fact that in 1903, 77 per cent of all Christian Trade Unionists lived in the Rhineland and Westphalia.²³ In 1911 the figure was still as high as 53 per cent.²⁴ In the main it was priests who issued the invitations to the founding conferences of the Christian Trade Unions and were the main speakers, especially those involved in the 'People's Association for Catholic Germany'. Initially priests also participated in the running of the unions through the institution of the 'Council of Honour' which functioned as a court of arbitration and board of control. On the other hand both the confessional workers' associations and the specialist organizations were directly subordinate to the church.

The model for most of the subsequent Christian Trade Unions was the 'Trade Union of Christian Mineworkers', which was founded in October 1894 primarily on the initiative of the miner August Brust (1862-1924) and which initially was responsible for the Dortmund area. Its role as prototype was especially true in the case of the aims stated in the second clause of its statutes: 'the aim of the union is to improve the moral and social position of the

miners on a Christian and legal basis, and to bring about and maintain a peaceful agreement between employers and employees'. In addition it stated: 'the union is loyal to the Kaiser and the Reich and excludes the discussion of confessional and party-political matters'. Within the Christian Trade Union movement, article 8, which stated that 'by joining the union... anyone' declared 'himself to be an opponent of social-democratic principles and aims', was particularly controversial. The problem of 'party-political and confessional neutrality' in a more general sense also gave rise to conflicts. Both clauses in the miners' union were opposed by the craft union of textile workers of the Aachen district in the negotiations of the two organizations over the foundation of a central organization. Whereas the miners' union had a clear impact on the formulation of the basic principles of the Christian Trade Unions — 'interconfessionality' and 'party-political neutrality' — its strongly centralized organizational structure did not prevail: it was replaced by a democratic structure in 1905. It should also be pointed out that the concern for confessional neutrality found expression in the statutes (clause 13), whereby the executive and the 'Council of Honour' were to be composed of both Protestants and Catholics in equal numbers.²⁵

Without wishing to go into the history even of the largest individual Christian Trade Unions, it is worth noting the deviant course taken by the textile workers. Whereas the Christian miners, like the metalworkers, who had formed a central organization in 1889 at the instigation of the Duisburg/Lower Rhine Christian Trade Union under the leadership of Franz Wieber (1858-1933), gradually gathered around a strong central organization, the development of the Christian textile unions was characterized by regional fragmentation. At the end of the 1890s in both Rhineland-Westphalia and the Aachen area, as well as in south Germany, there developed centres of the Christian organization of textile workers. These unions certainly regarded themselves as Christian, and also recognized the 'Mainz Guidelines' of 1899 which, as we shall shortly see, played a key role in the development of the Christian Trade Union movement; but they were initially unwilling to forfeit their independence. Thus when the unions were centralized on 1 April 1901, 'union regions' (*Verbandsbezirke*) were created with their own general assemblies and executives. It was not until 1906 that the national executive of the Christian textile workers was elected by the general assembly of their central organization. As

well as these organizational variations, differences of political ideology characterized the formation of the textile workers' central organization. Thus at the 'social conference' of 23 January 1898 in Aachen, which took place on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Aachen Christian Social Textile Workers' Union, August Brust, the chairman of the miners' union, supported by the 'People's Association for a Catholic Germany' and the West German Workers' Associations, spoke in favour of a central association of central unions which were confessionally and politically neutral. He was opposed by Hubert Immelen, the publisher of the *Aachen Volksfreund*, a Catholic daily newspaper, who spoke in favour of local and regional unions on a confessional basis and linked to the Centre Party. Here he was following the statutes of the union, whose first anniversary was being celebrated in Aachen. In order to get his ideas accepted, Immelen wanted non-trade union organizations, such as the workers' and journeymen's associations, to be invited to the planned congress. The dispute between Brust and Immelen over the basic alignment of the planned fusion of the Christian Unions ran parallel to the foundation of more unions, mainly at a local though sometimes a regional level. By clever tactical manoeuvring and by calling preliminary conferences, Brust managed to postpone Immelen's plans for a general congress in August 1898. When the congress finally took place at Whitsuntide (21-22 May) 1899, the outcome had already been predetermined to a large extent by these preliminary conferences, which had adopted Brust's position in December 1898.

The significance of the May 1899 congress, attended by thirty delegates from north Germany and eighteen from the south, lay in the acceptance of the 'Mainz Guidelines', which recognized the principles of interconfessionality and party-political neutrality.²⁶

The unions should be interconfessional, that is, they should include members of both Christian confessions, but stand on the ground of Christianity. The discussion of confessional questions is strictly forbidden. The unions should also be apolitical; that is, they should attach themselves to no particular political party. The discussion of party-political questions is to be avoided, though the introduction of legal reforms on the basis of the present social order should be discussed.

In addition, principles for the organizational structure of the individual unions were established. These laid down that the general assembly, composed of delegates from the local groups, would

elect from amongst itself the central leadership, to consist of two chairmen, two secretaries, two treasurers and helpers. It was left to the individual unions to decide if — like the miners' union — they wished to form a Council of Honour from non-members and how far they wished to extend its powers. It was requested that 'account should be taken of both confessions . . . in the election of delegates, members of the central leadership and of the Council of Honour'. All along the line, therefore, the model of the miners' union had prevailed. Its leader was also elected as the first chairman of the executive of the national association.

The knowledge that the Christian Miners' Union had in no way been able to realize its aims 'peacefully' was one reason why the discussion of tactics, as well as mentioning surveys of the social situation of workers, resolutions, negotiations and petitions, also included the strike. This, however, was clearly portrayed as a last resort, to be invoked after all other means had failed. The 'Mainz Guidelines' issued the following statement on this point:

It should not be forgotten that workers and employers have common interests. These rest on the fact that not only do both constitute integral parts of the labour process, which means that workers have the right to receive appropriate remuneration from capitalist enterprises, but also both must represent the interests of the production of goods against consumers.

Both parties justly claim the highest possible return for the capital they invest in the production of goods, the employer for his capital and the worker for his labour. Without both, capital and labour, there is no production.

For this reason the entire efforts of the trade unions should be informed and sustained by a spirit of compromise. The claims they make must be reasonable, but made firmly and resolutely.

The strike is to be used only as a last resort and if it promises to be successful.

In their 'Mainz Guidelines' the Christian Trade Unions associated themselves with the substance of the principles of the Catholic social doctrine that were summarized in the encyclical *rerum novarum* of 1891 — individuality, solidarity and the subsidiary nature of social questions in the face of questions of morality and religion — and thereby broke with Social Democracy, whose concepts of 'class conflict', 'materialism', and 'godlessness' they rejected. In the programme of the Christian Trade Unions the social question was once again portrayed primarily as a question of morality, which could thus be solved by goodwill, especially on the part of the employers.

In fact the leaders of the Christian Trade Unions were forced to recognize that the employers, especially in Ruhr mining and the textile industries, were in no way willing to agree with their ideas of co-operation in the workplace. Petitions remained unanswered, offers of negotiation rejected, and the Christian Trade Union in no way positively preferred to the 'Free' or Social Democratic. Rather the reverse; it was seen as a particularly sophisticated version of the labour movement which would lead workers into the arms of Social Democracy in any case. Thus from their very foundation the Christian Trade Unions found themselves involved in industrial disputes. Sometimes, as in the case of lock-outs, these threatened to destroy them altogether.²⁷ But they none the less participated in such actions in order to protect themselves from the reputation of being mere servants of the employers or the church, concerned only to avoid industrial confrontation. It is a remarkable fact, indeed, that the Christian Trade Unions, whose dues were originally set at a very low level in order to win support, initially spent proportionately less on welfare and more on industrial conflicts than did the 'Free' Trade Unions. It was only after 1905-6 — in the period of consolidation — that the relationship between contributions and expenditure for welfare and industrial disputes reached the same level as in the 'Free' Trade Unions, although the percentage of Christian Union members involved in industrial disputes lagged behind that of the 'Free' Unions to an increasing degree. On the whole it can be said that between 1903 and 1913 the percentage of their total expenditure on all kinds of support for their members that the Christian Trade Unions paid out for strikes and lock-outs (on average 51.5 per cent) exceeded that of the 'Free' Trade Unions (47.2 per cent), but that the percentage of their members engaged in industrial disputes (9.2 per cent) lagged behind that of the 'Free' Trade Unions (12.9 per cent) (see Table 1). This demonstrates quite clearly that the Christian Trade Unions were not uninvolved in industrial conflict: their concepts of social partnership and co-operation did not prevent them from recognizing the need to become involved in industrial disputes. Thus the Christian Trade Unions always and especially in the period before the First World War had to walk a tightrope between maintaining the loyalty of their rank and file on the one hand and avoiding a public condemnation from the German bishops on the other, a threat that always seemed to be present during the 'trade union controversy'.

TABLE I
Participation of Christian and 'Free' Trade Unions in Strikes 1903-1913²⁸

Year	Offensive strikes			Defensive strikes			Expenditure on strikes and lockouts as a % of total expenditure in support of members			Persons involved in industrial disputes		
				Christian Trade Unions			Christian Trade Unions			Free' Trade Unions		
	Christian Trade Unions	'Free' Trade Unions	Christian Trade Unions	'Free' Trade Unions	Christian Trade Unions	'Free' Trade Unions	Christian Trade Unions	'Free' Trade Unions	Absolute	% of Members	Absolute	% of Members
1903	47	597	26	582	76.4	57.9	4713	5.2	74981	8.4		
1904	92	867	25	608	63.1	57.6	8019	7.5	98831	9.3		
1905	181	1366	35	837	81.1	62.8	80602	42.8	381296	28.3		
1906	345	2012	52	996	62.5	62.9	30049	12.2	215415	12.7		
1907	189	1605	35	799	51.1	52.5	17171	6.0	173094	9.2		
1908	82	678	81	1117	30.3	23.8	6809	2.6	126883	6.9		
1909	112	832	74	1007	28.7	27.4	7210	2.6	131244	7.1		
1910	182	1514	55	906	51.7	52.1	22366	7.1	369011	18.2		
1911	247	1863	65	1044	49.1	47.0	18490	5.3	325253	13.9		
1912	250	1676	77	949	32.7	37.0	13124	3.7	479589	18.7		
1913	234	1425	72	899	39.6	36.7	21036	6.2	248986	9.6		

It is striking that the Christian Trade Unions trod the road to a national association even before an extensive system of individual unions had come into existence. Thus the Mainz and Frankfurt congresses (1899 and 1900 respectively) were in no way the conclusion of the foundation of the Christian Trade Unions but rather served as the stimulus to the creation of new regional and local organizations and of centralized unions. That the creation of a national organization ran parallel to the foundation of many centralized unions is best shown by individual examples. Thus the Christian Social Metalworkers' Union, the Central Association of Christian Woodworkers, the Association of Christian Tobacco and Cigar Workers of Germany and the Central Association of Christian Building Workers were all created in 1899. In 1900, only a year after the Mainz Congress, the Association of Christian Shoe and Leather Workers of Germany, the Association of Christian Male and Female Tailors and Allied Trades and the Christian-Social Association of Non-industrial Workers and Various Trades of Germany were also established. The Central Association of Christian Painters and Allied Trades and the Association of Christian Bakers and Confectioners and Allied Trades of Germany came into existence in 1901. There followed the foundation of the Central Association of Christian Ceramic Workers (1902), the Association of Male and Female Nurses (1903) and the Central Association of Christian Male and Female Workers in the Graphical Trades and in Paper Manufacture (1904).²⁹ These unions all had their own history, of course, and any full account of the Christian Trade Unions must pay due attention to them. All that can be done here, however, given the space available, is to note that the cornerstones of the national organization before the First World War were mining and textile workers, who alone represented 50 per cent of the national organization in 1905 and still 42 per cent in 1910. The membership of the Association of Textile Workers numbered 60 per cent of the total female membership of the Christian Trade Unions in 1905 and 46 per cent in 1910.

The creation of centralized unions was thus far from complete at the turn of the century. None the less, as we have seen, a central executive for the whole Christian Union movement was created at Mainz as early as 1899, although a shortage of funds meant that it was unable to operate. It was therefore decided at the Frankfurt Congress (1900) to establish a Union Commission, 'to which where possible the individual trades should send their representatives,

these trades to elect from their midst a committee of five persons living as close to one another as possible. This committee is to be the governing body and its actions will be supervised by the Union Commission'.³⁰ The statutes of the national organization were then passed at the Krefeld Congress (1901). Twenty-three organizations with 83,571 members joined this national body at its inception. The associations which did not join participated in the congress until 1906, besides which general assemblies of the national organization were also held. With the formation of the latter the organizational principles of the Christian Trade Unions had been fundamentally decided upon. The individual unions soon all had general assemblies which elected the executive. The next levels were those of the regional associations (*Bezirks-* and *Gauverbände*) and finally the local pay-offices (*Zahlstellen*) which — especially in the larger towns — joined together to form local cartels. These saw themselves as the local representatives of the national organization and were responsible for the common action of the individual unions in campaigns and for the elections to the representative bodies of the sickness insurance scheme and the industrial courts.

The national organization and most of the central unions soon succeeded in issuing a large number of publications. Thus the 'Report of the National Organization of the German Christian Trade Unions' was published from the 15 April 1901 and took the name of the 'Central Newspaper of the German Christian Trade Unions' in 1905.³¹ For the individual unions which could not support their own independent journal, Adam Stegerwald (1874-1945), the Chairman of the Association of Christian Woodworkers and later General Secretary of the National Organization, edited the 'Christian Trade Union Paper' from 1 October 1901. In addition, the Christian trade union movement also published a number of foreign-language papers and journals. The Union of Christian Miners had already begun to publish a paper in Polish, *Gornik Polski* (The Polish Miner) in addition to its own paper, the *Bergknappe*, when the national organization made overtures to Polish building craftsmen with *Przyjaciel Robotników* (The Workers' Friend) and to Italian building and mineworkers with the paper *L'Italiano in Germania* (The Italian Man in Germany). *Deutsche Arbeit* (German Labour) was published as a forum for theoretical debate and trade union further education from 1916.³² After Adam Stegerwald took over the General Secretariat in Cologne on 1 January 1903, this institution expanded so rapidly that

TABLE 2
Membership of the Christian Trade Unions 1900-1931

Year	Total membership (male and female)	Female membership	Year	Total membership (male and female)	Female membership
1900	(76,744)	?	1916	178,907	28,764
1901	84,497	?	1917	293,187	44,416
1902	84,667	?	1918	538,559	72,409
1903	91,440	5,465	1919	1,000,770	160,024
1904	107,556	7,624	1920	1,105,894	214,550
1905	188,106	11,991	1921	1,028,900	232,250
1906	247,116	21,646	1922	1,033,506	263,146
1907	284,649	24,122	1923	806,992	230,263
1908	260,767	22,087	1924	612,952	153,749
1909	280,061	20,182	1925	582,319	148,736
1910	316,115	21,833	1926	531,558	112,846
1911	350,574	27,152	1927	605,784	121,831
1912	350,930	28,008	1928	647,364	124,129
1913	341,735	27,623	1929	673,127	126,001
1914	218,197	25,624	1930	658,707	113,090
1915	162,425	24,242	1931	577,512	94,402

one can say on the whole that the Christian Unions had been consolidated on a local, regional and national level by 1906. They had in their possession a national press, union functionaries and an extensive system of insurance benefits. The contributions were accordingly raised dramatically from year to year. The steady increase in membership (see Table 2), which was only interrupted irregularly by internal organizational squabbles (1902) and losses due to recession (1907-9 and 1913), confirmed this process of stabilization, though this was obviously also a product of the generally favourable economic conjuncture from 1894. It should be stressed that, in spite of their own commitment to the concept of craft and estate, the Christian Trade Unions rapidly pushed ahead with the development of industrial trade unions, though the craft union remained the dominant form of organization before the war — something which applied equally to the 'Free' Trade Unions, which still numbered 53 separate organizations in 1910.

IV

Organizational consolidation in no way averted all threats to the existence of the Christian Unions. To be sure, they had emerged strengthened from the struggle over the possibility of some future joint action with the 'Free' Trade Unions. They also more than survived the struggle over the new import duties introduced by the Imperial Government in 1902, a struggle in which the individual unions were eventually left free to deal with the problem according to how it affected their 'craft' interests. Admittedly, the controversy over import duties in 1902 did lead to the temporary exclusion of Franz Wieber and the Christian Social Metalworkers' Association and thus weakened the organization temporarily, as can be seen from Table 2. None the less, the metalworkers rejoined the movement in 1903, and the long-term effects of the split were minimal. The real danger to the Christian trade union movement came with the so-called 'trade union controversy' within the larger community of German Catholicism as a whole. This controversy, with its struggle over interconfessionality and the right of the Catholic clergy to interfere, strengthened centrifugal, or in other words confessional forces within the union movement. These soon threatened to tear the whole organization apart.

The controversy over the unions has attracted more historio-

graphical attention than virtually any other issue in the history of the Christian Trade Unions.³³ It began with the question as to whether the interconfessionality of the Christian Unions endangered the religious commitment of their Catholic members and would lead them to indifference or even to Social Democracy. For those 'integralist' Catholics committed to a belief that the faith should embrace all aspects of daily life under the aegis of the church, these fears were deepened by the fact that the Christian Trade Unions refused to subordinate themselves to the leadership or guidance of priests. The fact that for the trade unionists the designation 'Christian' apparently meant nothing more than 'not social-democratic' simply made matters worse in the eyes of many of the 'integralists'. For the Christian trade unionists did not place themselves 'positively' on the platform of a confessionally determined Christianity but only promised that they would avoid everything that might conflict with the religious convictions of their Catholic and Evangelical members in their representation of the 'purely economic' interests of the workers, in sharp contrast to the 'Free' Trade Unions. The unions claimed in any case that moral and religious education was the responsibility of the confessional workers' associations. It was the unions' announcement that if the occasion arose they were prepared to co-operate with the 'Free' Trade Unions, as long as the latter remained neutral in questions of party politics and ideology, that above all called forth the opposition of the 'integralists'. Their opposition crystallized around the publication of Franz von Savigny's pamphlet on 'Workers' Associations and Trade Union Organizations in the Light of the Encyclical *rerum novarum*' (Berlin 1900). It led to the formation of a rival body to the Christian Trade Unions, the 'Catholic Workers' Associations based in Berlin'. These new workers' associations sought to offer a substitute for genuine trade unions in the form of 'economically peaceful', clerically-controlled craft unions. They found support from Cardinal Kopp, the Prince-Bishop of Breslau, and from Bishop Korum of Trier. These two senior representatives of the German Catholic hierarchy insisted strongly on the church's claim to leadership of the Catholic labour movement. They saw economic and religious questions as inseparable. The fact they did not make similar demands as far as, for example, the organizations of Catholic-oriented landlords and employers were concerned was justified — if at all — by the paternalistic argument that workers required special instruction and help, whereas higher social strata

did not.³⁴

It was mainly thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Kopp that the German episcopacy squandered its first chance to put an end to the growing conflict with its Fulda pastoral message of 1900 which did not specifically mention the Christian Trade Unions but praised the 'Catholic Workers' Associations based in Berlin'. This made possible very different interpretations of what the bishops had intended; and succeeding pronouncements of the German episcopacy and of Pope Pius X, who soon became involved in the debate, were characterized by the scarcely concealed desire to avoid any specific stance on the issue. This was all the more remarkable because most German prelates, especially Bishop Fischer of Cologne (and his successor from 1912, Bishop Hartmann), Archbishop Nörber of Freiburg, Bishop Schulte of Paderborn and Bishop Bertram of Hildesheim, were in general quite well-disposed towards the Christian Trade Unions but again and again allowed themselves to be pressed into a common front by Cardinal Kopp and Bishop Korum. Even when Pope Pius X finally made an official intervention in the trade union controversy in 1912 with the encyclical *singulari quadam*, his comments on the Christian Trade Unions remained ambiguous. It was not least because of this and of Kopp's intransigence that the controversy continued after the publication of the encyclical. It was only after Kopp's death in March 1914, and the outbreak of the First World War, that the question lost significance. It was not until 1919, however, that a compromise, albeit a somewhat superficial one, was reached, and not until 1931 that the Christian Trade Unions finally received official recognition in Pius XII's encyclical *quadragesimo anno*. In any attempt to gauge the nature of the Christian Trade Unions, it is important to realize that the Imperial German Government, despite any fears that these could lead workers into the arms of the 'Free' Trade Unions, intervened with the Vatican on behalf of the Christian Unions. Between 1910 and 1912 it was not only prelates and Centre Party politicians who made efforts to prevent the banning of the Christian Trade Unions but also the Prussian ambassador in the Vatican City.

These endeavours have to be seen against the background of the further organizational and ideological development of the Christian Trade Unions. With the participation, and to a large extent as a result of the promptings of a number of Catholic organizations, the Christian Trade Unions began to play a role in an attempt to

unite all Catholics in a commitment to German nationalism. This took organizational shape in the so-called 'German Labour Congresses', the first of which was held in 1903. The 'German Labour Congresses' were united by a consciously anti-Social Democratic programme in which explicitly nationalist ideas were at least as prominent as more conventional religious ones. The considerable importance of this collection of non-socialist labour organizations was evident from the membership figures of the associations which were represented at the Congresses. According to their own figures, these numbered 620,000 in 1903, 1,000,000 in 1907, 1,400,000 in 1913 and 1,500,000 in 1917.³⁵ The 'German Labour Congresses' thus extended the scope of the Christian Trade Unions' party-political neutrality to all non-socialist parties on a broad basis and in this respect became a forerunner of the German(-democratic) Association of Trade Unions, which was founded in 1919. As differing party-political allegiances penetrated the Christian Trade Unions, however, they increasingly threatened the unions' unity.³⁶ Whereas the 'Free' Trade Unions were unequivocally — and before the war unproblematically — associated with the SPD, the situation of the Christian Trade Unions or their members was far less clear. Unity lay primarily in the rejection of Social Democracy; and thus the claim to 'party-political neutrality' was based on a relatively narrow spectrum of opinion. The focus of political involvement for the Christian Trade Unionists was undoubtedly the Centre Party, to which belonged Johannes Giesberts (1865-1938), the first Catholic trade unionist to enter the Reichstag, the German Imperial Parliament, in 1905. In 1907 the number of Christian Trade Unionists in the Reichstag increased to six, five of them in the Centre and one in the *Wirtschaftliche Vereinigung* (Economic Union). Finally in 1912 five of the seven Christian Trade unionists in the Reichstag belonged to the Centre, one to the Christian-Social Party (which had developed from the Economic Union) and one to the National Liberal Party. The problems which resulted from the varied party-political allegiances of the leaders and members of the Christian Trade Unions only became completely clear, however, in the Weimar Republic.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, in the wake of collaboration with bourgeois parties and leagues, the nationalist component in the propaganda and programmes of the Christian Trade Unions became increasingly pronounced. This was, as we have seen, especially true of the 'German Labour Congresses', to which

the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfenverband* (German National Union of Commercial Employees or DHV) an extreme right-wing, rabidly anti-Semitic white-collar union, also belonged. It was not least because of this that the situation at the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 was no problem for the Christian Trade Unions. It is true that they — like the 'Free' Trade Unions — lost members. Yet their support for the 'civil truce' (*Burgfrieden*) imposed by the Imperial Government on the outbreak of war, with its ban on strikes, and their enthusiasm for the defence of the Fatherland, did not result from any debate inside the organization. It was no accident that Theodor Brauer (1880-1942), the leading theoretician of the Christian Trade Unions, described the war and 'its accompaniments' in 1915 as 'a grandiose and in its way overwhelming justification of the principles' of this section of the labour movement.³⁷ In particular the involvement of the unions in co-operation with the state authorities and employers, the creation of workers' committees in the factories, and the passing of the Auxiliary Service Law (1916) were welcomed by them as being in line with their own efforts. In this, however, there was no fundamental difference between the position of the Christian and the 'Free' Trade Unions, with whom they also co-operated from autumn 1917 in the *Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland* (People's League for Freedom and Fatherland). The policy of both the major trade union organizations was to prevent internal industrial disputes from causing economic difficulties and hampering 'national defence'. It may be the case that the language of the Christian Trade Unions was less equivocal: Adam Stegerwald spoke in favour of the 'ruthless continuation of the war';³⁸ but there was many a 'Free' Trade Unionist who did not want the war to end without gains for the German Reich. That the Christian Unions opposed any strike action during the war — such as, for example, the strikes of April 1917 and January 1918 — was an expression of their basic position. For the same reasons, they gave determined support to the attempts to form a common front with organized employers, to create a so-called 'Community of Work' (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*). Whereas the period of the war was thus no real test for the policies and ideology of the Christian Trade Unions, they found themselves confronted with greater ideological problems in the November Revolution of 1918, since they felt obliged 'to fight against many of the revolutionary achievements . . . on grounds of conscience'.³⁹ In this situation too, the Christian

Trade Unions showed themselves to be a thoroughly independent branch of the labour movement which could scarcely be without influence on the policies of the 'Free' Trade Unions and the Social Democratic Party.

In the course of time — it can be said in summary — the view that a successful representation of workers' interests could scarcely be achieved without and certainly not against the Christian Unions also came to prevail within the ranks of the Social Democratic Party. Thus the Christian Unions had become one of the decisive factors in the German labour movement even in the period before the First World War, although their role can be described as ambivalent. Their very existence helped to split and thus to weaken the organization of German labour. It led to competition within it and therefore to a waste of energy. In specific industrial disputes there can be no doubt that the Christian Trade Unions often acted in a way that held back the success of trade union aims which, however, had been put forward without their involvement. On the other hand, the Christian Trade Unions succeeded in reconciling a significant section of religiously inclined labour to trade unionism. These workers were scarcely potential recruits for the 'Free' Trade Unions. From this point of view, the Christian Trade Unions were a kind of pioneer of the trade union principle. They prepared the ground for a unitary trade union organization which only emerged after the two opposing ideologies had undergone organizational consolidation for several decades. Finally, it should not be forgotten that it was the Christian Trade Unions which brought the Catholic church to recognize the need for independent labour organizations and thereby contributed to the reduction of confessional tensions in Germany by their explicit interconfessionality. The mere existence of the Christian Trade Unions also means that the view, which was often expressed around the turn of the century, that *the* industrial working class inevitably became alienated from the church needs qualification.⁴⁰ If the claim that *the* workers had overwhelmingly broken with Christianity cannot be applied in this simple form even to members of the SPD,⁴¹ then the workers in the confessional workers' associations, in the Christian Trade Unions and who belonged to and voted for the Centre Party demonstrate that Christianity had mass support among labour in its concrete institutional form as well. This was the result not only of the *Kulturkampf* and the struggle against Social Democracy, but also

of the social and educational work of the Catholic church in particular.⁴²

Notes

An earlier version of this article was delivered as a paper to the fifth meeting of the SSRC Research Seminar Group on Modern German Social History, held at the University of East Anglia, in January 1981. It has been translated from the German by Dick Geary and Richard J. Evans.

1. August Erdmann, *Die christlichen Gewerkschaften. Insbesondere ihr Verhältnis zu Zentrum und Kirche* (Stuttgart 1914), 5ff.; cf. idem, *Die Schwarzgelben. Eine Kritik der christlichen Gewerkschaften*, lecture of 4 December 1910 (Düsseldorf 1911).

2. Carl Jansen, 'Christliche Gewerkschaften', in *Internationales Handwörterbuch des Gewerkschaftswesens*, 1930ff, 301-4, especially, p. 301; Otto Müller, *Die christliche Gewerkschaftsbewegung Deutschlands mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bergarbeiter- und Textilarbeiterorganisationen* (Karlsruhe 1905).

3. See for example Heinrich Gellings, *Geschichte der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung* (Kevelaer 1953), 17; Norbert Blüm, *Gewerkschaften zwischen Allmacht und Ohnmacht. Ihre Rolle in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart 1979), 29. See as opposed to this: Herbert Gottwald, 'Der Gesamtverband der christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands 1901-1933', in Dieter Fricke, ed., *Die bürgerlichen Parteien in Deutschland. Handbuch* (2 volumes, Leipzig 1968 and 1970), in particular Vol. 2, 113-45, for example, p. 113.

4. Karl Heinz Schürmann, *Zur Vorgeschichte der christlichen Gewerkschaften* (Freiburg 1958).

5. Rudolf Brack, *Deutscher Episkopat und Gewerkschaftsstreit 1900-1914* (Köln und Wien 1976); cf. further bibliographical references in note 33 below.

6. Albrecht Siegler, *Die Lohnpolitik der Christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands (1894-1933)* (Dissertation, Mannheim 1978).

7. Michael Berger, *Arbeiterbewegung und Demokratisierung. Die wirtschaftliche, politische und gesellschaftliche Gleichberechtigung des Arbeiters im Verständnis der katholischen Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland zwischen 1890 und 1914* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1971).

8. Eric Dorn Brose, *Christian Labor and the Politics of Frustration in Imperial Germany* (Dissertation, Columbia 1978).

9. George Marshall Dill, *The Christian Trade Unions and Catholic Corporatism in Germany 1916-1924* (Dissertation, Harvard 1949).

10. Hans Dieter Denk, *Die christliche Arbeiterbewegung in Bayern bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Mainz 1980).

11. Josef Deutz, *Adam Stegerwald. Gewerkschaftler, Politiker, Minister 1874-1945. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der christlichen Gewerkschaften in*

Deutschland (Köln 1952).

12. Helmut J. Schorr, *Adam Stegerwald. Gewerkschaftler und Politiker der ersten deutschen Republik. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der christlich-sozialen Bewegung in Deutschland* (Recklinghausen 1966).

13. See the author's work, to be published in spring 1982: *Die Christlichen Gewerkschaften 1894-1933* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1982).

14. Cf. especially Schürmann, *Zur Vorgeschichte* (note 4 above).

15. Cf. for example the statement of the local committee of the fifteenth general meeting of Catholics (1863), quoted in Schürmann, *Zur Vorgeschichte*, 35.

16. See William O. Shanahan, *Der deutsche Protestantismus vor der sozialen Frage 1815-1871* (München 1962), 4.

17. See Berger, op. cit., 8.

18. Published in Erdmann, *Die christlichen Gewerkschaften*, 47f.

19. See for example O. Müller, *Die christliche Gewerkschaftsbewegung Deutschlands*, 5f; 'Lebenserinnerungen', in *Franz Wieber 1858-1928. Festschrift des 'Deutschen Metallarbeiter'* (1928), 190. Cf., however, the opinion to the contrary of Gottwald, op. cit., 119, who takes references to religious reasons for their foundation as 'mythical'.

20. H. Hohoff, 'Christentum und Sozialismus. Eine religiöse Polemik zwischen Herrn Kaplan', in Hüffe and A. Bebel, *Agitationsausgabe* (Berlin 1906), 16.

21. See Dieter Dowe and Kurt Klotzbach, eds, *Programmatische Dokumente der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin and Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1973), 178f.

22. The following outline mainly refers to: *Jahrbuch der christlichen Gewerkschaften 1908* (Köln 1908), 46-181; *Geschichte und Entwicklung der christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands nebst Protokoll des III. christlichen Gewerkschaftskongresses zu Krefeld* (26-29 May 1901) (Mönchen Gladbach 1901); Müller, op. cit.; Erdmann, op. cit.

23. See W. Troeltsch and P. Hirschfeld, *Die deutschen sozialdemokratischen Gewerkschaften. Untersuchungen und Materialien über ihre geographische Verbreitung 1896-1903*, second unaltered edition (Berlin 1907), 86f.

24. See *Zentralblatt der christlichen Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, No. 20 (1912), 314.

25. See *Jahrbuch der christlichen Gewerkschaften 1908*, 71.

26. Quoted from 'Mainzer Leitsätze' in *Geschichte und Entwicklung der christlichen Gewerkschaften*, 10f.

27. See Müller, op. cit., for example, 167.

28. Numbers of the Christian Trade Unions collected and calculated according to: *Jahrbuch der Christlichen Gewerkschaften für 1910* (Köln 1910), 23, 25; *Jahrbuch der Christlichen Gewerkschaften für 1914* (Köln 1914), 27f; and *Jahrbuch der Christlichen Gewerkschaften für 1915* (Köln 1915), 21f. Numbers of the 'Free' Trade Unions collected and calculated according to: *Correspondenzblatt der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands 1904*, 542ff; 1905, 655ff; 1906, 693ff; statistical appendix: 1907, 116ff; 1908, 203ff; 1909, 212f; 1910, 204f; 1911, 208f; 1912, 252f; 1913, 195, 210ff; 1914, 203, 256f. The numbers for those involved in labour disputes refer — with the exception of the 'Free' Trade Unions in the years 1903 until 1907 — to the participants of both strikes and lock-outs.

29. For the history of the individual Christian Trade Unions see above all *Jahrbuch der Christlichen Gewerkschaften 1908*, 46ff.

30. See *Geschichte und Entwicklung der christlichen Gewerkschaften*, 39, 81ff.

31. The edition amounted to 2,300 copies in 1902, 10,000 in 1909 and in the 1920s to approximately 20,000 copies. Quotation from Gottwald, op. cit., 114.

32. The edition amounted to approximately 3,000 copies in the 1920s; quotation from Gottwald, op. cit., 114.

33. Ernst Deuerlein, 'Der Gewerkschaftsstreit', in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, No. 139 (1959), 40-81; Lucian Kudera, *Der Gewerkschaftsstreit der deutschen Katholiken in der Publizistik (1900-1914)* (Phil. Diss., Münster 1957); Oswald von Nell Breuning, 'Der deutsche Gewerkschaftsstreit um die Jahrhundertwende', in Peter von Oertzen, ed., *Festschrift für Otto Brenner zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main 1967), 19-32; Hermann Josef Wallraff, 'Die Belastung einer Gewerkschaft durch ideologische Differenzen. Spannungen innerhalb der christlichen Gewerkschaftsbewegung in den Jahren 1900-1914', in Heinz Oskar Vetter, ed., *Vom Sozialistengesetz zur Mitbestimmung. Zum 100. Geburtstag von Hans Böckler* (Köln 1975), 135-52.

34. See Brack, op. cit.

35. Numbers according to Dieter Fricke, 'Deutscher Arbeiterkongress (DA 1903-1918)', in *Die bürgerlichen Parteien in Deutschland*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig 1968), 411-14, in particular p. 411.

36. See Ludwig Frey, *Die Stellung der Christlichen Gewerkschaften zu den politischen Parteien* (Berlin 1931).

37. See Theodor Brauer, *Der Krieg und die christlichen Gewerkschaften* (M. Gladbach 1915), 5.

38. See Adam Stegerwald, *Arbeiterschaft und Kriegsentscheidung*. Speech given at the Fourth German Labour Congress, 28-30 October 1917 in Berlin (Köln 1917), 17.

39. *Jahrbuch der Christlichen Gewerkschaften für das Jahr 1921* (Köln), 17.

40. See for example Paul Göhre, *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche* (Leipzig 1891), 190; Martin Rade, 'Die sittlich-religiöse Gedankenwelt unserer Industriearbeiter', in *Verhandlungen des 9. Evangelisch-Sozialen Kongresses 1898* (Göttingen 1898), 66-130. See also: Franz Prinz, *Kirche und Arbeiterschaft. Gestern-heute-morgen*, second revised edition (München und Wien 1974), 295f.

41. See Rolf-Walter Becker, *Religion in Zahlen. Ursprung und Wege der quantifizierten Erforschung religiöser Orientierungs- und Verhaltensweisen* (Heidelberg 1968), 31.

42. See finally: Karl-Heinz Vogt, *Katholische Arbeiterbildung und Kirchlichkeit der katholischen Arbeiterschaft Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Genese der kirchlichen Erwachsenenbildung* (Phil. Diss., Bonn 1978).

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