

**Catholic Historical Association.
Association of Contemporary Church
Historians**

Veranstalter: American Catholic Historical Association

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The American Catholic Historical Association held its spring meeting at Marian College, Indianapolis on March 27-28th.

Of particular relevance to members of this list were three panels. The first examined „Priests and Pastors in the Third Reich“ and included a paper by Doris Bergen, who asked whether the Wehrmacht chaplains were Christian soldiers or Nazi priests. Using two examples, one Protestant and one Catholic, Bergen demonstrated that German military chaplains responded to the demands of their tasks in various ways, from adopting soldierly ways to identify with their comrades at the front to appealing (ultimately in vain) to army officers to prevent the killing of Jewish children. Bergen exploited the records of the Reich Ministry of Church Affairs to argue that the complex selection process produced military chaplains who were generally older, more nationalist clergymen. Members of the Confessing Church, other independent-minded clergy and aggressive „German Christians“ were all screened out. Bergen concluded that „the moderate nature of many chaplains“ made the service „an effective vehicle for legitimization of the Nazi regime“ John Delaney contributed a paper which examined the role of Catholic priests in „opposing Nazi anti-Polish racial policy measures directed at Bavarian peasants“. By inviting Poles, mainly forced labour recruits on Bavarian farms, to Mass, including them in the local spiritual community, giving them small gifts and instructing parishioners „to treat Polish fellow-Catholics as co-religionists, not ‘sub-human racial threats’“, parish priests demonstrated a high level of leadership (in the absence of support from the ecclesiastical leadership).

Kyle Jantzen gave a paper on the politics of pastoral appointments in the German

Church Struggle. Arguing that local church history often fails to correspond with the high church politics of the Nazi era, Jantzen used the example of pastoral appointments in Nauen (Brandenburg) to illustrate how parish patrons, local political authorities, parish clergy, lay leaders, district synods and Land church authorities combined to appoint pastors. As they engaged in this process, local clergy and laity enjoyed “a significant range of freedom in which to act” and displayed the willingness to articulate practical and ideological grievances against potential pastors. The second panel of note dealt with the Catholic responses to war, and included a paper by Frank Buscher of the Christian Brothers University (and Canadian Department of Justice, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Section). Buscher detailed the work of Cardinal Josef Frings in dealing with the German refugees from 1945-1955, demonstrating the dilemma Frings and others faced between many refugees’ desire to return to their former homes, their frustration with a prolonged existence in temporary camps, and the difficulties of integrating them into post-war Germany. A third panel had an interesting contribution by Jose M. Sanchez on Pius XII, which took a different approach to the question of that pope’s response to Nazism and the Holocaust. Rather than an austere monarch of the church, Sanchez argued that Pius was in fact a shy but warm personality, a lonely man in a lonely job, who simply wasn’t prepared for the crises he faced. Hampered by his diplomatic background and his habit of looking at both sides of every problem, Pius did not have the confidence or experience to be the pastor that the Roman Catholic Church needed in World War Two. (Ed. note: This last sentence should surely be questioned. Pius had every confidence, as well as the experience, in his own abilities as a diplomat. Whether these were the right qualities at that juncture is still a matter of debate. J.S.C.)

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