

THE GERMAN CENTER PARTY AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN A MORAL DIMENSION

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During the past two decades, scholarly interest in German political Catholicism, specifically in the history of the German Center Party has revived.¹ As a spate of recent publication such as Stathis Kalyvas's *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* and the collection of essays, *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965*,² show, this renewed interest in German political Catholicism is part of a larger trend. All of these works, however, show how much work remains to be done in this field. While most research on German political Catholicism has focused on the period before 1918, the German Center Party's history during the Weimar period remains incompletely explored.

One of the least understood areas of Center Party history is its influence on the Weimar government's foreign policy. After all, the Center led nine of the republic's twenty cabinets. Karsten Ruppert, for example, relies almost exclusively on Peter Krüger's *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar*,³ which emphasizes the role of Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann almost to the exclusion of all other domestic decision-makers. Weimar's foreign policy largely consisted of a series of responses to crises caused by political and economic demands made by the victors of the First World War. These responses in turn were determined by the imperatives of German domestic politics. The German cabinet crafted diplomatic responses and presented them to parliament for ratification. In both of these bodies, members of the German Center Party made crucial contributions to the formulation of German foreign policy.

One of Weimar's greatest foreign policy successes was Germany's entry into the League of Nations, which took place in 1926. While generally, historians consider Stresemann's activities in the League a success, his continued emphasis on the intractable issue of ethnic minority rights has been criticized as unproductive.⁴ For this, historians have blamed the Center Party. Carole Fink has argued that the issue of minority rights was an *idée fixe* of Center Party leaders, which led them to force Stresemann to raise the issue in the League of Nations Assembly.⁵ Quite correctly, historians have pointed out that, from the beginning, this was a futile undertaking and that Stresemann knew it was a mistake, but that Centrist pressures left him no choice but to push the issue. Yes, the Center advocated

¹See *inter alia* Noel Cary, *The Path to Christian Democracy: German Catholics and the Party System from Windthorst to Adenauer* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1996), Karsten Ruppert, *Im Dienst am Staat von Weimar* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1993), Ellen Lovell Adams, *The Cross and the Ballot: Catholic Political Parties in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, and The Netherlands, 1785-1985*. Studies in Central European Histories (Boston: Humanities Press, 1999), Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken, 1918-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992), Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewiesche, eds. *Nation und Religion in der Deutschen Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2001).

²Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds. *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985). See also Jonathan Wright's hagiographic *Gustav Stresemann: Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴Christoph M. Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁵Carole K. Fink, "Defender of Minorities: Germany in the League of Nations, 1926-1933," *Central European History* V(1972), 330-357.

for ethnic Germans “caught behind the lines” in Alsace-Lorraine and in Poland after the First World War, most of whom were Catholic. The subsequent condemnation of the Center Party as interested only in the advancement of its own electoral agenda reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of Centrist attitudes toward the League of Nations. An analysis of the complex forces which determined Centrist decision-making reveals that Centrist attitudes toward the League of Nations were sincere. Furthermore, the insistence that Stresemann raise the issue of minorities despite its futility is entirely consistent with Centrist foreign policy decision-making.

The manner in which Center Party leaders handled these foreign policy crises revealed much about the manner in which Centrists made political decisions. The party, lacking an effective foreign policy, substituted an unsuccessful pattern of crisis management. In times of relative calm, Centrists demanded better Allied treatment of Germany. Party spokesmen emphasized their rejection of the Versailles Treaty's war guilt clause as the basis of the European political and economic order. In the build-up of any foreign policy crisis, Centrists simply repeated their demands for better treatment and were incapable of formulating relevant and practical responses to the crisis currently brewing. Their continued vehement and unwavering insistence on their earlier demands rapidly led to a state of self-paralysis. Yet whenever a crisis threatened the very existence of Germany, Centrists overcame their paralysis and accepted foreign demands in order to avert catastrophe. An analysis of Centrist views of the League of Nations shows that the idealistic and highly moral understanding of policy-making paralyzed party leaders and severely limited the ability of German Centrists to make a positive contribution to international reconciliation and understanding.⁶

While for most politicians and especially for Weimar Germany's long-serving foreign minister Gustav Stresemann, the League of Nations was a purely political institution, and an organization in which each country furthered its own interests, for Centrists, the League of Nations embodied a moral ideal.⁷ Centrists compared the reality of the League as an organization of self-interested parties with the moral ideal of a universal institution, guided by Christian ideals and with justice for all, i.e., they compared it to the Catholic Church. Because Centrists measured the League against such absolute standards, they failed to bridge the deep chasm between the League as an ideal and the organization's reality. In many ways, the relationship between the Center's expectations and the reality of the League of Nations mirrored the relationship between ideal and reality which made it difficult for Centrists to formulate effective foreign policy. For Centrists, the League became a test case of their ability to translate their ideals into action.

The conflict between, on the one hand, the moral imperative for peace and the notion of a unified Christendom, and on the other hand the need for justice as seen from a German perspective, not only hampered the Center's decision-making in times of crisis, but also undermined the party's ability to commit itself fully to the League. While Centrists supported the ideals of world peace and peace in Europe, of cooperation among countries, and of improved opportunities for cultural missionary work [*Auslandskulturarbeit*], party leaders were unable to reconcile these ideals with the League's origins in the immoral Versailles Treaty, the body's failure to satisfy Germany demands, and, perhaps most importantly, with the organization's secular nature. The Christian imperative for peace and the vision of the benefits to be gained through diligent and patient cooperation in the League were never strong

⁶ See also Martin R. Menke, “Good Germans – Good Catholics,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 19(2006), 299-314.

⁷ Christian Kimmich (*op. cit.*) accepts as valid the moral dimension of the League of Nations for all countries except Germany. According to Kimmich, Germany's pursuit of its own interests undermined the League's ability to function. This one-sided view undermines Kimmich's otherwise useful study.

enough to overcome these reservations and disappointments. As a result, Centrists never supported the League wholeheartedly or unreservedly.

Many Centrist reservations stemmed from the League's flawed birth in the Versailles Treaty. In 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson presented his vision for post-war international relations. He envisioned a high level of transparency and cooperation among nations. To maintain world peace and prevent divisive alliances, he suggested forming an organization of sovereign states committed to world peace and to cooperation among nations as a means to prevent further destruction like that wrought during the war.⁸ When in the summer of 1918, Wilson's proposal became known in Europe, a significant part of the German public greeted it with enthusiasm. Germans interpreted it as a guarantee of their legitimate national interests even after an increasingly likely German defeat. Thus, many progressive Centrists, especially those close to Centrist Undersecretary Matthias Erzberger, linked Wilson's idea for a League of Nation to their own vision of a non-vindictive peace.⁹ The previous summer, Erzberger had already jettisoned Wilhelmine great power aspirations and now adopted Wilson's idea of an equitable and honest peace as his own.

Centrists, however, made a crucial modification to Wilson's idea. Given their Catholic understanding of the world, they could envision a successful international order based only on the firm foundation of Christian values. In April 1918, responding to Wilson's proclamation of his Fourteen Points, party leaders issued new political guidelines demanding "the creation and implementation of a Christian international law."¹⁰ This new international law should also include arbitration, freedom of the seas and an end to slavery, all of which were goals compatible with Wilson's ideas. The party's guidelines, however, revealed some specifically German Centrist concerns. The peace should include guarantees for the independence of the Holy See, the right of German religious to undertake missionary work in Europe's colonies, and protection everywhere of national and religious minorities. In addition, Centrists expected the League would confirm German possession of colonies to an extent appropriate to Germany's economic needs. Finally, Centrists expected German membership in the League as a confirmation by the rest of the world of Germany's leading role in world politics, economics, and culture.¹¹

As defeat drew nearer, Centrists recognized that a future organization established by the victors, even if based on Wilson's ideals, would not satisfy what Centrists considered to be justified German demands. The *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, a paper close to the Center,¹² argued that Britain and the United States intended to establish a world body, which the newspaper already called the League of Nations, as means for world domination and exploitation.¹³ Centrists began to insist on Wilson's Fourteen Points as

⁸*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1918, Supplement 1, The World War, Vol. I, pp. 12-17, January 8, 1918; Address of the President of the United States delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress.

⁹For more information on Erzberger, the standard work remains Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.

¹⁰"Richtlinien für die Parteiarbeit vom April 1918." Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), 74Vo1, Volksverein, Vol. 180: Politische Neuorientierung des Zentrums und Gründung der BVP (Bayrischen Volkspartei), 1918-1920.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²For a discussion of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*'s role during the war and in the early years of the Weimar Republic, see Jean-Claude Montant, "Une tentative d'infiltration française dans la presse allemande: l'affaire de la *Kölnische Volkszeitung* (février - décembre 1918)," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 1980:IV: 658. and Henning Köhler, *Autonomiebewegung oder Separatismus? Die Politik der Kölnischen Volkszeitung 1918-1919* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1974), also Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Adenauer in der Rheinlandpolitik nach dem ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Ernst-Klett Verlag, 1966).

¹³*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 647, August 17, 1918, "Vorbedingungen des Völkerbundes."

the only legitimate basis for a world organization. The Cologne paper, fiercely expansionist during the war, now approved of the idea of an international organization whose goal was the future preservation of peace. Commenting on a book by Erzberger in which he described his vision of a League of Nations,¹⁴ the *Kölnische Volkzeitung*'s editors argued that the establishment of a League of Nations represented the only means to end the war before it became a revolution which would inevitably lead to the demise of European civilization. Such an important undertaking surely would require German participation, the editors insisted. For that reason, membership in the League should not be restricted to members of the Allied coalition.¹⁵ Misinterpreting the power dynamics between the leaders of the victorious powers, Centrists did not believe Wilson would let the Allies exclude Germany from the League.

In the fall of 1918, as Germany's military and economic strength evaporated, most Germans lost interest in the League of Nations. Nonetheless, a core of enthusiasts remained. In anticipation of German participation, left-wing Centrists such as Matthias Erzberger and Johannes Giesberts became founding members of the German Federation for the League of Nations.¹⁶ Erzberger even became chairman of the federation's executive committee. In addition, on January 27, 1919, the league's committee for social policy elected Giesberts to the league's executive committee. The measure of support Erzberger, Giesberts, and a few like-minded Centrists enjoyed within broader party circles, however, remains unclear and, given the antipathy of the party's right wing for Erzberger, most likely was limited. Most Center Party supporters were concerned with more urgent problems than the League of Nations, such as finding food or employment and fending off a threatening civil war. In the context of the upcoming negotiations for the peace treaty, Wilson's ideals gained new importance. In the spring of 1919, Centrists, who had pinned their hopes on Wilson's ideal of a new moral world order, perceived the gap between these ideals and the Allied treatment of Germany as an important indicator that the Allies were insincere in their desire for an equitable and lasting peace.

In the peace process, the Allies refused to treat Germany as an equal negotiating partner. Subsequently, the terms first of the armistice and then of the draft peace treaty outraged most Germans. Despite their own annexationist goals during the war,¹⁷ Centrists now called upon the victors to treat Germany according to Christian principles. In a New Year's Day appeal, the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*'s editors described the Catholic Church as a model on which to build the League of Nations. The editors stressed the institution's ability to mediate among nations. Like the Church, the League should be universal, concerned both with the common good of all humanity and with the welfare of each individual. Furthermore, to be successful, the League's members should subscribe to a Christian morality. Consequently, the Allies should treat Germans in a Christian manner. Finally, the editors warned that the Allies' last chance to lay the foundation for Europe's peaceful future depended on the implementation of Wilson's fourteen points. Apparently, Centrists still hoped that, if the Allies would only live up to the American president's word, Germany would receive an equitable peace. This Christian reinterpretation of Wilsonian ideals, however, would find little support among the victors. To apply such ideas to European reconciliation would be to ask Germany's neighbors to overcome the animosities of past centuries and especially of the past decade more quickly and completely than

¹⁴ Matthias Erzberger, *Der Völkerbund: Der Weg zum Weltfrieden* (Berlin, 1918).

¹⁵ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 768, September 29, 1918, "Völkerbund und Weltfriede."

¹⁶ BAB, Nachlaß (NL) Giesberts, Vol. 68: Deutsche Liga für den Völkerbund. *Arbeitsplan für die Deutsche Liga für den Völkerbund*.

¹⁷ For a discussion of German Catholic war goals, see Richard van Dülmen, "Der deutsche Katholizismus und der erste Weltkrieg." *Francia* 2: 347-376, and Hermann-Josef Scheidgen, *Die deutschen Bischöfe im ersten Weltkrieg: Die Mitglieder der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz und ihre Ordinariate, 1914-1918* (Köln: Böhlau-Verlag, 1991).

Centrists themselves were capable of doing. Centrists failed to understand how one-sided their appeals to Christian ideals were. More importantly for the development of a Centrist foreign policy, Centrists' inability to overcome their own prejudices showed how unrealistic their understanding of international relations was.

The Center's appeals for a Christian spirit among nations had no effect on the Allies. To most westerners, a peace based on Christian principles meant that Germans would pay for their sins, not that the Allies would treat Germany with clemency or Christian justice. To the Allies, German appeals for justice must have seemed extremely self-serving. As the war guilt article of the Versailles Treaty irrefutably determined, Germany alone bore blame for the war. The Center's appeals for a Christian League of Nations possessed little credibility when one considered how ardently some Centrists had supported German expansionist policies. In 1919, any German awakening to justice was too late to be deemed sincere.

Subsequently, as the terms under which the Allies renewed the armistice and as the leaked details of the treaty draft revealed, those who were establishing the League of Nations considered Germany outside of the community of civilized nations. To this exclusion, the Centrist press responded with Christian outrage and a renewed assertion of Germany's important role in the preservation and development of European culture. If the victors really intended to establish a lasting European peace, the Allies could not ignore sixty million Germans.¹⁸ To prove their point, Centrists drew attention to the Holy See's war-time appeals for peace among nations. During the war, Centrists had deceived themselves about the strength of the Pope's moral authority and about the impact of his wartime appeals for peace and reconciliation on the public of Allied countries. Now, still blind to the limits of papal power, German Centrists again invoked Pope Benedict's appeal for European peace, which he made in the fall of 1917, to impress the need for cooperation upon Christians of other countries.¹⁹ Whereas Centrists considered the Pope's appeal for peace a great missed opportunity for European spiritual renewal, people in the Allied countries had considered the Pope's appeal a general and moral call for an end to violence, without relevance to the post-war order of Europe.

Centrists continued to present their vision of a post-war European order in a framework of Christian morality. In their self-estimation, Germany's Catholics "had fought the war in the honest conviction that they were fighting a defensive war. During the war, they had sought to avoid any disturbance of the spiritual unity of all nations and of the ecclesiastical unity of Catholics. German Catholics' only consolation was their hope for a victory of the Christian ideals of peace and righteousness by means of a new League of Nations!"²⁰ Emphasizing this appeal to Christian universality, the editors of the *Germania*, the Center Party newspaper in Berlin, argued that Germany's new role as a European power would be to advance social causes. Centrists believed their own *Sozialstaat*, a particularly German mixture of paternalism and mutual responsibility, should serve as a model for some of the League's activities.²¹ Even in the face of utter defeat and future subjugation, Centrists could not imagine the League would function well without the benefit of German cultural and social contributions.

¹⁸ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 365, May 10, 1919, "Verhandeln."

¹⁹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. IX, No. 9, pp. 417-420, August 1, 1917: Adhortatio: "Dès le début." See also Stewart A. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican, 1919-1933: German-Vatican Diplomatic Relations in the Interwar Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²⁰ *Germania*, No. 201, May 15, 1919, "Die Deutschen Katholiken an die Katholiken der Welt!"

²¹ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 428, June 2, 1919, "Deutschlands Beruf in der Welt."

On June 24, 1919 at the latest, all illusions of German participation in the League of Nations, this confraternity of peoples dedicated to the prevention of future war, evaporated. By forcing the German government to accept the Versailles Treaty, the Allies made it clear that Germany was and would remain an object rather than a subject of European diplomacy. While the majority of Centrists proceeded to busy themselves with drafting Germany's first republican constitution, those who had great hopes for German participation in the new League of Nations continued to struggle to find a way of establishing a productive relationship between Germany and the League.²²

In the subsequent period between 1919 and 1921, many influential Centrists argued that the goal of German foreign policy should be to gain admission to the League as quickly as possible. Other party members rejected the League as an oppressive anti-German institution that only provided a thin veneer of idealistic legitimacy to the Allied domination of Europe. Centrist Helene Weber,²³ speaking in parliament on behalf of Centrist women, voiced her disappointment in the new League. According to Weber, the Versailles Treaty's "harsh conditions killed the League of Nations. We women, who only recently have entered political life, have seen an item of faith broken; within us, our trust and hope has been shattered."²⁴ Most Centrists remained silent, however, and only occasionally denounced the organization as an instrument of repression. On November 13, 1919, an editor of the *Germania* criticized the Allies' treatment of Germany, and argued that those who founded the League of Nations showed no intent to achieve reconciliation with Germany. Instead, the French government was transforming the League into an anti-German alliance. Thus, Germany should refuse to join the League until the organization really did serve world peace.²⁵

Only slowly did those Centrists who favored German participation in the League gain support among party moderates. Shortly after the Versailles Treaty was signed, Leo Schwing, a regular columnist for both the Berlin and the Cologne Centrist papers, complained how unimaginative German foreign policy had become.²⁶ "Germany's properly defined mission [in Europe] must be to implement both politically and socially the ideals for which the family of nations has fought." Centrist supporters of the League, however, failed to distinguish between such general acknowledgments of Christian ideals and the formulation of actual policies for the advancement of either German or European goals. At the 1919 Rhenish Center Party congress, a speech by its chairman Carl Trimborn represented a further example of a general commitment to the League without practical steps to make the League a success. He contrasted a policy seeking admission to the League of Nations with its antithesis of a sterile hate-filled policy which would make European peace impossible.²⁷ Trimborn argued that, for Germans to keep seeking admission to the world body, whose founders had rejected Germany, would show the good will of Germans to contribute productively to the creation of a new, more stable and prosperous

²²Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GStAPK), XII. HA, III/144, also BAB, NL Giesberts, Vol. 68: Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund: Ansprache des Abteilungsleiters der Soz.pol. Abt. in der DLfV am 27. Januar, finally: Matthias Erzberger, *Der Völkerbund als Friedensfrage*, p. 9.

²³Helene Weber (1881-1962) served as Deputy Chair of the Catholic German Women's League and as Chair of the Center Party's Women's Auxiliary. She was a member of the National Assembly, 1921-1924 member of the Prussian lower house, 1924-1933 member of parliament.

²⁴*Verhandlungen des Reichstages: Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 327, p. 1105: May 12, 1919.

²⁵"13. November." *Germania*, No. 525, November 13, 1919.

²⁶Leo Schwing, "Unsere Zukunft in Europa." *Germania*, No. 358, August 8, 1919.

²⁷Carl Trimborn, "Der rheinische Zentrumsparteitag" *Germania*, September 17, 1919. Trimborn, who was also head of the Centrist delegation to the National Assembly, became chair of the party's national executive committee (*Reichsvorstand*) upon its formation in 1920. *Zeitgeschichte in Lebensbildern*, Vol. 1. p. 81ff.

European order. More practical Centrists advocated showing German support for the League of Nations by participating in whatever League-related organizations would admit Germany. Given the aimless resistance of the German Foreign Office to such activities, progressive Centrists in the cabinet took the initiative. Single-handedly, Centrist Johannes Giesberts, now Reich Postal Minister, convinced the cabinet "at the last minute, despite the originally opposing position of the Reich government, to accept an invitation to the League of Nation's Labor Conference in Washington."²⁸ Centrists considered the subsequent election of a representative of the German government and of a German worker to the managing board of the International Labor Office in Bern a great step forward.

Throughout the last months of 1919 and into the spring of 1920, in the ranks of the Center party, enthusiasm grew for the League of Nations as an imagined means to circumvent the Versailles Treaty. For example in the Rhineland and in Silesia, areas where the Center was strong, Centrists looked to the League of Nations to overcome French domination.²⁹ If the German government were to conduct a foreign policy guided by the spirit of the League of Nations, it would be a "strong and effective weapon" against French nationalism and French power politics.³⁰ "Only through open, well-meaning, and honest behavior can Germany attain a respected and noted position in the life of nations. The nations of the European continent need one another, since another war would lead to the demise of western civilization and culture."³¹ Centrists were seemingly unaware of the contradiction between the Centrist press's rejection of the League as an instrument of French domination and the newspapers' calls for Germany to join the organization as a means of overcoming this domination. Similarly, Centrists still could not imagine that such a world body could do without German participation. They believed that at some point soon the League's members would have to ask Germany to join, but perhaps Germany should refuse to join the League in its current state.

Finally, on January 16, 1920, the editorial board of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* took a firm stand and unequivocally endorsed German efforts to gain admission to the League. Given the Cologne paper's influence in the Rhineland, the lower Palatinate, and in German Centrist circles generally, this endorsement was an important step. The paper's editor in chief, Joseph Froberger, claimed that the only alternative to the League of Nations as the basis of all future international relations was imperialism.³² Ten days later, the editors again commented on the nature of future international relations.³³ Referring to the 1917 peace note of Pope Benedict XV, they argued that in Christianity politics and ethics remained eternally inseparable and that the Ten Commandments applied to the community of nations just as much as they applied to any community of individuals:

That which is morally incorrect can never be correct politically. But, to comprehend the importance of this [connection of politics and ethics] requires a consciousness of the moral unity, the common goals and the mission of the all-encompassing human confraternity committed to love of one's neighbors.

²⁸BAB, NL Giesberts, Vol. 68: Deutsche Liga für den Völkerbund: *Jahres-Tätigkeitsbericht der sozialpolitischen Abteilung*, December 10, 1919, p. 6.

²⁹*Germania*, November 13, 1919, "13. November."

³⁰*Germania*, No. 454, October 3, 1919, "Frankreich und Deutschland."

³¹*Germania*, No. 82, February 18, 1920, "Randbemerkungen zur auswärtigen Politik."

³²*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 42, January 16, 1920, "Um den Völkerbund!" On Froberger, see Köhler, *Autonomiebewegung oder Separatismus?*, 13-14.

³³*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 72, January 26, 1920, "Christentum, Völkerrecht und Völkerbund."

The editors believed that those who had established the League of Nations were unconscious of this inter-relationship of morality and politics, but a new spirit would inevitably permeate the organization and convert the masses of Europe to a new ethical type of politics. The editorial ended with a demand that the League of Nations include the Holy See. "As there can be no League of Nations without [the participation of the Pope], there can be no League of Nations without a return to Christian teaching."³⁴

With this editorial, Centrists found a standard which permitted them to condemn the League while still seeking to participate in it. By rights, the League should admit Germany both because the spirit of peace and cooperation required it, and because it was self-evident to Centrists that Europe and the world needed German involvement. It was unjust of the Allies to exclude Germany, just as it would be unjust for Germans to sanction the Allied wrong-doings. Centrists could sanction neither applying for membership in an organization which invited all other countries but Germany to join, nor accepting a status in the League less than fully equal to that of the other great powers. Furthermore, it was impossible for Centrists to advocate membership in a secular world-wide organization which would exist parallel to the universal Church without insisting that the League acknowledge the moral influence if not the authority of the Roman Pontiff. Centrists found it both necessary and impossible to join the League as it existed.

If reality was unacceptable, Centrists would justify their decision-making by redrafting the reality of the situation. Equally as strong as the reasons to postpone membership until the Allies met Germany's demands was the Christian categorical imperative to overcome all obstacles in the search for peace and love of one's neighbor. For the remainder of the Weimar years, the constant conflict between these two deep-seated needs raged within the Center Party.

In January 1920, seeing things realistically, Carl Trimborn, who had advanced to the post of Party Chairman, informed the delegates to the first national Center Party convention held in Berlin January 19-22 that joining the League of Nations was out of the question for the moment. Still, Trimborn saw the solution in a change on the part of the League, not on the part of Germany. ". . . In principle, we consider admission to the League desirable, but only under the condition that it be made possible for us to do so under dignified circumstances."³⁵ A week after the Versailles Treaty formally took effect, dignified circumstances seemed farther away than before. Later in the year, Centrist editors complained that France was taking active measures to prevent any discussion in the League of Nations Assembly concerning German membership in the League.³⁶ Furthermore, the actions of the League Assembly itself concerning the future of Eupen-Malmedy and Upper Silesia contributed to continuing Centrist disenchantment with the League of Nations. In the case of Eupen and Malmedy, the League of Nations was directly involved. In the Upper Silesian issue the League became involved only after the plebiscite produced results unfavorable to French interests.³⁷

Since the Congress of Vienna, Eupen and Malmedy had been districts in the Prussian Rhine Province. While homogeneously Catholic, they were located on the linguistic border between the Romance and Germanic languages. One sixth of their population was Walloon, the rest German. In the

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Protokoll des 1. Reichsparteitags der Deutschen Zentrumspartei*, pp. 15-17.

³⁶ *Germania*, No. 514, November 23, 1920, "Frankreich im Völkerbund."

³⁷ Kimmich barely mentions the League's involvement in the Eupen-Malmedy and Silesian decisions, even though the League's perceived failure contributed much to Germans distrust of the League.

Versailles Treaty, Germany ceded the territory to Belgium.³⁸ The treaty, however, included a provision that, between January 23 and July 23, 1920, residents could enter their names on lists to express their desire for a return to German rule. Because of a policy of intimidation by the local Belgian authorities, documented by the German Foreign Office, few residents opted for German rule.³⁹ Despite German objections, on September 20, 1920, the Council of the League of Nations confirmed the cession of Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium. On November 6, 1920, in one of parliament's first foreign policy debates that fall, the German Center Party addressed the fate of the newly ceded territories.⁴⁰ Speaking for the party's delegation, former Colonial Minister Johannes Bell accused the League of failing to supervise the registration process, which enabled the Belgian authorities not only to make access to the voting lists difficult, but also to threaten those who did sign with discrimination. After criticizing the composition of the League's Council, in which seven of eight members were representatives of former enemy powers, Bell prophesied,

Given our past experiences with the League, anyone with the least insight knew what its decision would be. . . The value of the League of Nations in its current form drops day by day. If things continue in this manner, it will no longer be worth the paper on which the League Covenant is written. [For the future,] we expected a true League, dedicated to peace among nations like the league described by Pope Benedict.

Until then, Bell implied, Centrists would remain skeptical of the League.

While the League's poor handling of the registration process in Eupen and Malmedy struck a first blow to Centrist support for the League, in the fall of 1921, the decision to partition Upper Silesia completely convinced Centrists that they could expect no good from the League as long as France dominated Europe.⁴¹ In the months before and after the March 1921 plebiscite, France's blatant partisanship for Poland enraged Centrists. After the refusal of French troops to defend ethnic Germans against Polish insurgents led by Wojciech Korfanty, a Polish deputy in the prewar German Reichstag, tempers ran high.⁴²

The aftermath of the plebiscite convinced Centrists that the French government had no intention of taking any steps toward Christian reconciliation. In Upper Silesia, the Allies had committed themselves to applying for the first time Wilson's cherished principle of self-determination.⁴³ While the French troops' anti-German interference boded ill for the success of the plebiscite of March 20, 1921, the vote yielded a comfortable over-all German majority of sixty percent. It also revealed Polish majorities in

³⁸ Articles 32 - 38, Versailles Treaty.

³⁹ Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik (ADAP), Series A: Volume III, Nos. 80 and 272, pp. 137-138, March 26, 1920: Der Unterstaatssekretär im Auswärtigen Amt Haniel von Haimhausen an den Geschäftsträger in London Sthamer and pp. 546-549, September 8, 1920: Der Reichsminister des Auswärtigen Simons an den Vorsitzenden der deutschen Friedensdelegation von Mutius (Paris). Also, *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 345, pp. 1024-1027: November 6, 1920: Parlamentarische Anfrage von Johannes Bell, Zentrum, an Reichsaußenminister Simons. Simons' response follows on pp. 1027-1031.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ For more on the Silesian plebiscite, see F. Gregory Campbell, "The Struggle for Upper Silesia." *Journal of Modern History*, 42(1970): 261-385, also Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland, 1918-1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), and Guido Hitz, *Carl Ulitzka (1873-1953) oder Oberschlesien zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2002).

⁴² See Sigmund Karski, *Albert (Wojciech) Korfanty: Eine Biographie* (Dülmen: Laumann-Verlag, 1990).

⁴³ Article 88, Versailles Treaty.

certain rural districts which separated the German-dominated towns in the eastern part of the plebiscite territory from the solidly German areas.⁴⁴ How the Allies reacted to this ambiguous result would be a test of their will not only to settle the Silesian question in the spirit of reconciliation, but also of their will to consider fairly Germany's legitimate interests. Perhaps the plebiscite results would open French eyes not only where Silesia was concerned, but also to the need for reconciliation with Germany. On April 19, the *Germania* was able to report that the respectable French daily *Ere Nouvelle* had admitted that the French government and French public opinion had mistaken Polish blustering for Silesian sentiment.⁴⁵ Whether or not the French government, Poland's most staunch supporter, would formulate a policy which reflected the plebiscite's outcome remained to be seen.

After deliberating over the fate of Upper Silesia during the summer, the Allies decided that the electoral results had produced an untenable geographic division. The Allied governments decided to refer the issue to the League of Nations for a decision. Centrists had little faith in this appeal.⁴⁶ In German eyes, the French government dominated the League of Nations, and the League's decision would consequently reflect French interests. Centrists criticized that not only did the "French government oppose any productive work, ..." but it also enjoyed "undivided support from not only Poland, but the Little Entente as well."⁴⁷ All other League member states suffered under this undue French influence. Still, German Centrists did not completely give up hope that justice might prevail. The Cologne Centrist paper put the issue bluntly: "despite all bitter disappointments we in Germany have experienced since our collapse, we have never seriously given up the idea of a League of Nations. It is appropriate to our steadfast German manner of thinking to maintain such a high ideal, even when its reality appears incomplete or distorted."⁴⁸

Whether this was propaganda to convince the League's members that a favorable decision would strengthen German support for the League, or an expression of the Center's inextinguishable hope for future improvement, the League Council pay little heed to German interests. The League's recommendations of October 12, 1921, as adopted by the Allies on October 19, divided Upper Silesia. Despite the predominance of Germans in the urban areas of this region and the overall German majority in the plebiscite territory, its eastern region, in which the largest number of Poles lived, was given to Poland.

When the Allied Ambassadors' conference published its decision, Center Party leaders reacted in outrage. Prussian Prime Minister Centrist Adam Stegerwald warned that "the heaviest blow possible has been struck against the hopes for a final, real peace and against the economic reconstruction of Europe."⁴⁹ Crucial to the League's recommendations, the decision deprived Germany of the region's most valuable coal seams and mines. The editors of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* commented that the German Upper Silesians were "the real victims of this decision from Geneva, "for the Polish terror had shown what Germans could expect from their Polish rulers."⁵⁰ For Centrists, it was clear French chauvinists alone bore responsibility for this "further asphyxiation of German life." The Cologne paper's

⁴⁴For results by district, see *Germania*, No. 154, March 21, 1920, "Deutscher Sieg in Oberschlesien." For a listing of the final count, see *The Treaty of Versailles and After*, pp. 213-214.

⁴⁵*Germania*, No. 194, April 19, 1920, "Eine Stimme der Vernunft in Frankreich."

⁴⁶Under Article 11, paragraph 2, Covenant of the League of Nations, the organization could arbitrate disputes.

⁴⁷*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 714, October 4, 1921, "Der nutzlose Völkerbund."

⁴⁸*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 725, October 8, 1921, "Der Genfer Bund."

⁴⁹*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 764, October 11, 1921, "Stegerwald über Oberschlesien." .

⁵⁰*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 764, October 22, 1921, "Und die Menschen?"

editorial concluded rhetorically: "Was the League of Nations not founded to reconcile peoples and to build bridges?"

Since instead of reconciling peoples, the League instead had divided peoples further and destroyed bridges between them, the Center Party's leaders now had to decide whether their policy of support for the League's ideals could be continued. On the one hand, the ideal of European peace and reconciliation remained valid, on the other, it would be difficult to explain to the German public the distinction between the ideal embodied in the League and the League's actions. As early as October, 1921, some Centrists spoke out in favor of continued support for the League. Op-ed pieces in the *Germania* and *Kölnische Volkszeitung* advocated closer union of the European states and of all League members as the only means to prevent future war. The spirit which should guide European unification was that of a Christian community. St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei* would serve as a model for the harmonious cooperation among all nations on earth. Medieval society had been an example of such harmony, but nationalism now overshadowed this Christendom. The time had come to make St. Augustine's ideal a reality.⁵¹ Others in the party made the same diagnosis of Europe's ills, but came to more sanguine conclusions. At the same time as Centrists were reminded of medieval idealism, Leo Schwing wrote in the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* that twentieth-century Europe was deathly ill. "The European crisis is more than economic and social; it is a moral and spiritual crisis. . . Is there a European spirit? Hardly! But there is a common need for Europe. By aiding its neighbors, each country best serves itself." For Schwing, the Center's mission was to "strengthen this insight," even though this would prove difficult if one, "considered that [this need for European spiritual renewal] is the most formidable charge against that cursed deed, the moral catastrophe of our continent, the Peace of Versailles."⁵²

Center Party leaders, however, were reluctant to endorse continued support for the League. In November 1921, the party's national committee addressed the Silesian decision and its implications for continued support of the League of Nations.⁵³ While Monsignor Georg Schreiber, one of the Weimar Center's leading experts on foreign affairs, urged the party "to nourish enthusiasm for the League," the majority of the committee followed a different line. Count Friedrich von Praschma, a leader of the Silesian wing of the party and one of the few aristocratic party leaders to remain in party leadership after the war, "took an antithetical position to that of Professor Schreiber. -- Those assembled agreed with him."⁵⁴

Yet Schreiber did not resign himself to despair. Already in the December issue of *Das Zentrum*, Schreiber reminded party members that there was much to criticize about the League of Nations in its current form, but that the League's mere existence was a step forward. Since Germans had to address the League when making their claims to Upper Silesia, it would only make sense to join the League as quickly as possible.⁵⁵ The fact that, three months after the League's fateful decision and less than a

⁵¹ *Germania*, No. 656, October 26, 1921, "Internationale Bestrebungen und Katholizismus."

⁵² *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 731, October 10, 1921, "Solidarismus oder Untergang?"

⁵³ Archiv für christlich-demokratische Politik (ACDP)-Zentrumsakten, VI-051, Vol. 863: Sitzung des Reichsausschusses am 15. und 16. November 1921.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Georg Schreiber. "Der Völkerbund und die Idee des Völkerbundes." *Das Zentrum*, 2(1921): 319-320. Rudolf Morsey, one of the first historians of the Center Party, cites this article to prove that the Center's leader rejected the League of Nations as the executor of the Versailles Treaty until they realized that the world assembly held the key to Germany's territorial integrity. Morsey, however, overlooks the enthusiastic support of Giesberts and Erzberger, among others, for the League. Furthermore, Schreiber's defense of the League in the National Executive Committee, and even in this article, shows that his commitment to the League went beyond utilitarianism. Rudolf Morsey, *Die Deutsche Zentrumspartei*, (Düsseldorf, 1966) 194.

month after the meeting of the national committee, Schreiber could publish this appeal in the party monthly showed the party's recognition that League membership had to remain a Centrist goal.

In 1922, more pressing issues diverted Centrist attention from the League. As in 1919, economic and social concerns took precedence over more idealistic questions. As inflation rapidly increased and domestic political stability weakened, Centrists devoted little time to the League of Nations. In January, at the second national party congress, the newly adopted program include clauses on the League that echoed the contradictory demands which Carl Trimborn had already formulated in 1920 at the first party congress. Delegates adopted a platform which considered "the true Christian community of nations. . . the highest ideal of foreign policy."⁵⁶ They also demanded admission to the League of Nations as an equal power, but only after a revision of the Versailles Treaty, and especially a formal revocation of the war guilt clause.⁵⁷ Once admitted to the League, the German government should strive for "the organic development of international law. International regulation of labor law and working conditions, as well as international agreements to limit tax evasion and double taxation are urgently necessary." In addition to such specific goals, German Centrists expected membership in the League to provide opportunities for strengthening Germany's "ardent spiritual community shared with Germans abroad," whether in the diaspora or in areas where Germans constituted a significant minority. Other foreign policy goals included the *Anschluss* of Austria, as well as closer cultural and economic ties with the rest of Europe. Finally, Centrists again demanded compensation for Germany's lost overseas territories, and the right to carry out missionary work in former colonies.⁵⁸ This program did not represent a realistic understanding of the League of Nation's abilities. Even if admitted in 1922, Centrists would have been sorely disappointed by the League's limitations. Unfortunately, Centrists were not willing to admit their own self-interest, perhaps because acknowledging it would require ceding the moral high ground, something Centrists' self-perception forbade. While Centrists believed that Christianity demands an "unwillingness to stop short of the whole human community in expressing our sense of moral responsibility for the life and welfare of others,"⁵⁹ the obstacle of subordinating justice to this higher responsibility proved daunting.

Soon after the 1922 party convention, events in foreign policy once again forced Centrists to turn their attention to France. Raymond Poincaré's return to power, which boded ill for Germany, as well as the Genoa conference and the Rapallo Treaty kept Centrist leaders busy through the spring.⁶⁰ After Chancellor Josef Wirth assumed personal direction of foreign policy in the wake of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau's assassination in June 1922, French prime minister Raymond Poincaré's demanded "productive liens" to secure reparations while the Bank of England's subsequently refused to certify the German government credit-worthy. In their discussion of these developments, no Centrist group or statesmen suggested appeals to the League of Nations for assistance. After the League's decision on Upper Silesia, the organization was more closely than ever identified with French interests for Centrists to have faith in the world body's ability to mediate between Germany and France with any degree of fairness.

⁵⁶Zweiter Reichsparteitag, p. V.

⁵⁷*op. cit.*, pp. VI-VII.

⁵⁸*ibid.*

⁵⁹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1944), 188-189.

⁶⁰The failure of the United States government, representing the strongest economy of the time, to participate in the conference and Poincaré's refusal to attend may have served to emphasis the economic weakness of the European economies; it surely did confirm German suspicions of French obstructionism to honest cooperation beyond French domination.

The same held true after the Franco-Belgian forces invaded the Ruhr industrial area in January 1923. During that crisis-ridden year, Centrists also ignored the League of Nations as a possible mediator. Centrist interest in the League of Nations revived only in the spring of 1924, after the near-collapse of both the French and German economies and the subsequent intervention of Anglo-American economic forces in the form of the committee of experts led by the American industrialist Charles Dawes.

In response to this near-collapse and relegation of France from its dominant role on the continent, Centrists conceded it might be time to join the League. While most historians have praised Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann as the father of Franco-German *rapprochement* Center Party leader and Reich Chancellor Wilhelm Marx played a crucial role in devising a new, more constructive foreign policy. This approach was vintage Centrist policy, which the Stresemann's *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP) only belatedly made its own. In a commentary on Stresemann's answer, the Cologne paper's editors emphasized the role of recently appointed Centrist Chancellor Wilhelm Marx in the development of this new foreign policy. They praised his efforts to raise foreign policy above the fray of parliamentary party conflict.⁶¹ After more than a year of Centrist disinterest in the League of Nations, the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*'s comment on Stresemann's speech indicated an eagerness by some Centrists to revive the party's support for the organization. More importantly, the commentary indicated the beginning of a Centrist policy shift toward cooperation with France. Apparently, the near collapse of Germany in 1923 taught Centrists that they should abandon their impossible preconditions for European reconciliation.

What Stresemann said yesterday about the League of Nations was still very careful and quite reserved. But it was not as reserved as previous comments made from the same place [the government bench in parliament]. What used to sound like a listing of obstacles to German admission -- despite our appreciation of the League's ideal as such -- , yesterday took on the character of a carefully formulated but not hopeless list of preconditions for German membership. We hope that an even more positive or optimistic tone characterize the next official pronouncement on the issue. Without a doubt more Germans have come to realize that equal German membership in the League can only bring us advantages. . . . Caution is good, but we need not confront this problem as carefully and slowly [as we have in the past].⁶²

While Centrists resumed their support of the League of Nations as an ideal, where concrete steps were concerned, Centrists were much more hesitant. Only a day later, the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* urged the German government to reject any invitation to join the League of Nations unless the French government had conceded the need for a fundamental revision of the Versailles Treaty.⁶³ Thus, while Centrists wanted membership in the League for both idealistic and practical reasons, they still insisted that admission be on their own terms. Germany's entry to the League should mark the country's return as a full and equal player on the world stage.

Yet, of all German political parties, idealistic Centrists had the greatest expectations for membership in the League. Even Stresemann's DVP was more sanguine about the benefits of League membership. Unfortunately, Centrists' vision of the League as a Christian federation of peoples who

⁶¹"Deutsche Außenpolitik." *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 161, February 29, 1924.

⁶²*ibid.*

⁶³*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 242, March 30, 1924, "Deutschland und der Völkerbund." See also Georg Schreiber, *Grundfragen der Zentrums politik: Ein politisches Handbuch in Frage und Antwort*, p. 18, also "Erfolglos oder Nicht?"

would acquiesce in German demands to revise the Versailles Treaty conflicted both with the secular nature of international affairs and with the crucial role of the peace treaty as the basis of the post-war European order. Once again, Centrists mixed their Christian ideals and post-war grievances in such a way that party leaders lost sight of the realistic choices available to them.

Nonetheless, by the time Wilhelm Marx returned from the London reparations conference of August 1924, most Centrists had accepted the fact that the League of Nations provided the only, albeit inadequate, framework for the political and economic cooperation of all western European countries. On September 6, 1924, the editors of the *Germania*, the newspaper closest to the party leadership, urged readers to accept "the League of Nations as the political consequence of a long-existing civilizing and economic condition."⁶⁴ Since the nineteenth century, the world had become smaller. Economics and technology had long since overcome national borders: it was time now to overcome them politically, as well. Party leaders rapidly made this new-found enthusiasm for the League an integral part of the Centrist party line. At the third national Center Party congress, held in October 1924, a minor functionary, praising Marx's efforts to restore Germany's credibility, reminded delegates that their predecessors at the first two congresses had firmly committed the party to the League of Nations "as an idea identical with that of the Holy Father. But even today, many in our ranks and in Germany at large fail to appreciate the importance our position on the League possesses. We must absorb these ideas and bring them to the electoral masses!"⁶⁵ Consequently, party leaders described German efforts to join the League as a long-standing plank of the Centrist platform. But, for the elections of December 7, 1924, the party's foreign policy program still included the demands for a revision of the Versailles Treaty as a precondition for Germany's return to the world stage. Centrist leaders sincerely wanted a Christian peace in Europe, but in 1924, and at a fundamental level until 1933, the Versailles Treaty remained an insurmountable obstacle to the party's unreserved commitment to the League.⁶⁶

In a pamphlet for the members of the Center's youth organizations, the *Windhorstbünde*, the group's General Secretary, Heinrich Krone, recalled:

It has often been said that the reparations question is a European, nay a global problem; people are talking about the 'United States of Europe.' The idea of the occident forming a single entity continues to gain ground. This is especially true of those people too young to remember the spell once cast by nationally self-centered cabinet politics.

In his conclusion, Krone urged the *Windhorstbündler* to support the League of Nations.⁶⁷ Even if one discounts the exaggerated pathos used in *Windthorstbund* publications, Krone's appeal shows that party leaders recognized the limitations of their own *Weltanschauung*. Krone's implicit admission that older party leaders could not free themselves of nationalist prejudices demonstrated that Centrist leaders were aware of the contradictions between the moral imperatives reflected in the call to European unity and the party's principled defense of German interests as well as Wilhelmine great power thinking. Furthermore, party leaders realized that the European ideal needed the enthusiasm of the younger generation to become a reality. This realization had a lasting effect on Centrist leaders. After the Second

⁶⁴"Europas Zukunft." *Germania*, No. 381, September 6, 1924.

⁶⁵ACDP, Vol. 56: 3. Reichsparteitag, 1924, pp. 139-142.

⁶⁶Georg Schreiber, *Grundfragen der Zentrums politik: Ein politisches Handbuch in Frage und Antwort*, p. 18. For evidence of dissent on this issue within the party, see the previously quoted speech from the third national party congress.

⁶⁷Dr. Heinrich Krone, "Das Junge Zentrum und die Wahlen." *Flugschriften der deutschen Zentrums partei*, Berlin, 1924.

World War, European youth work became one of the CDU's (Christian Democratic Union's) most important activities. Krone himself became one of Konrad Adenauer's closest confidants.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, Center Party leaders never sufficiently cultivated the enthusiastic idealism of their younger followers. Thus, when European relations, especially Franco-German relations, deteriorated in the late 1920's and early 1930's, these young people could not provide a reservoir of committed Europeans to withstand the resurgence of national chauvinism.

During the spring of 1925, party leaders expended their energies on the failed presidential campaign of Wilhelm Marx. In their internal discussions, Centrists seemed unsure and divided in their opinions how to treat the League of Nations in the campaign. This resulted in contradictory propaganda. On the one hand, its ideal demanded support and energetic propagation. Entry into the League was an integral part of the on-going security pact negotiations. On the other, the distasteful manner in which Germany was to join the League and the League's past achievements did not promise great rewards for the German people. Centrists ceaselessly criticized the League's activities. Handling the dilemma in what was by now typical Centrist manner, party leaders refused to acknowledge this contradiction. They insisted on their unswerving support for the League while warning of the dark motives behind French insistence that Germany join the organization.⁶⁹

This contradictory attitude weakened Centrists' support for the League. In November 1925, in the wake of the fourth national Center Party congress, the double disappointment of the League's past performance and of the party's dashed expectations of the improvements Locarno had been expected to bring led party publicists to belittle the gains to be expected of future League membership. Richard Kuenzer, one of an increasing number of Centrists writing on foreign affairs, reduced the League to a "political clearing house of ideas" and a "unique source of information."⁷⁰ Not only would low expectations avoid future disappointment, but Centrists also sought to assure their supporters that joining the League did not mean an end to German culture. The Centrist *Augsburger Postzeitung* reassured its readers that joining the League would not mean an end to German traditions, German identity, and German independence.⁷¹ In light of this half-hearted support, only few Centrists, among them Johannes Bell, continued to insist it would be to Germany's great advantage to join the League. Bell advised *Germania's* readers that entry into the League was now necessary and would surely bring an end to the Allied occupation of the Rhineland.⁷² In the end, most Centrists, however, expected as a matter of course that Germany should join the League at its spring 1926 session.

When early in 1926 Brazil vetoed German membership, the surprising failure to gain admission elicited a mixed reaction from Centrists. While most considered this failure a further sign of intransigent French scheming and typical of the spirit which guided the League, many Centrists nonetheless reaffirmed their belief that Germany should continue to seek admission to the League. Addressing

⁶⁸Schwarz, *Adenauer*, Vol. I., *passim*.

⁶⁹*Germania*, No. 145, March 27, 1925, "Die kommende französische Taktik." Karsten Ruppert's judgment that the Center's "acclamation of Locarno as an instrument of peace and European reconciliation was insincere (*ein Lippenbekenntnis*)," and that the party's leaders "tended to consider anything as a contribution to reconciliation which served the Reich" ignores the idealism which contributed to the party's dilemma. While Ruppert's assessment of the party's national self-righteousness is valid, the evidence shows that the party's Christian idealism was an equally great if not greater factor in the party's auto-paralysis. (Ruppert, *Dienst am Staat von Weimar*, 184 and 205-210).

⁷⁰*Germania*, No. 558, November 29, 1925, "Der Völkerbund."

⁷¹LHA Koblenz, 700, 145: Sammlung Wolff: Vol. 155/1: *Augsburger Postzeitung* January 1, 1926, "Das Problem der Zukunft Europas."

⁷²*Germania*, No. 563, December 2, 1925, "Locarno, Völkerbund und Europa-Problem."

parliament on behalf of his fellow Centrist deputies, Monsignor Ludwig Kaas declared that Stresemann's policy of continued cooperation with the League

met the approval and enthusiastic support of his political friends. . . The German republic never doubted the gigantic dimensions of this task [of European reconciliation]. It was always clear that dire and repeated setbacks on the way to a new Europe would be unavoidable. . . . Geneva and its shameful conclusion are a beacon of warning and reprobation for the seriousness and the extent of the struggle between those who want a new Europe and those who want to return to the old Europe to which we bade farewell with so much blood and so many tears.⁷³

While Kaas unquestioningly spoke of the League as the font of European reconciliation and cooperation, other leaders in the Center Party disputed the organization's suitability for that task. In cabinet discussions, Labor Minister Centrist Heinrich Brauns wondered whether European economic integration should develop in a structure established parallel to the League instead of within the framework of the League itself. While for now, Brauns surmised, the world body appeared better suited for achieving Germany's goals that might change some day. Former Chancellor Marx, however, clearly dismissed a federation of European states as an inappropriate base from which to pursue Germany's goals.⁷⁴ While this debate about a European organization continued until 1933 and was carried on in all seriousness, no party parliamentary delegation, national executive committee, or party congress ever formalized a Centrist position concerning an ideal organization for European cooperation within the League, or as a separate entity.⁷⁵

Despite criticism of the League and its members for failing to admit Germany as a consequence of the Locarno Agreement, Center Party leaders continued to urge support for the League of Nations. In May 1926, briefly presenting the program of his third cabinet, Marx voiced the "hope that the negotiations. . . in Geneva will lead finally to the implementation of the Locarno Agreements and will enable Germany to contribute to the League of Nations Council as a permanent member."⁷⁶ Just as Marx reaffirmed the position of his government and his party, Centrist publications began a new campaign to garner broad public support for membership in the League. The Chair of the Centrist women's auxiliary, the *Reichsfrauenbeirat der deutschen Zentrumsparlei*, Helene Weber, told readers of the *Germania's* women's supplement that the League of Nations represented an application to the community of nations of the Christian commandment to love one another.⁷⁷ In a speech welcoming Reich President Hindenburg to the newly liberated first zone of occupation,⁷⁸ Cologne's Lord Mayor and Center Party

⁷³ *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 389, pp. 6466-6467: March 22, 1926. See also *Germania*, No. 187, March 23, 1926, "Die Regierungsdebatte über Genf."

⁷⁴ *Akten der Reichskanzlei Kabinette Luther I und II*, No. 326, pp. 1242-1248, March 31, 1926: Ministerrat gefolgt von einer Kabinettsitzung.

⁷⁵ The Centrist vision for Europe, upon which the Christian Democrats built after the Second World War, deserves further historical study. Centrist and Center-related documents on European integration provide evidence that the ideal of a united Europe had gained significant support among Europe's Catholics before the onset of the world economic crisis and the destabilization of European society in the 1930's.

⁷⁶ *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 390, p. 732: May 19, 1926.

⁷⁷ Helene Weber, "Der Weg zum Völkerfrieden, Grundsätzliches zur Frage des Völkerbundes" *Frauenwelt*, Beilage der *Germania*, No. 13, April 4, 1926.

⁷⁸ The first zone of occupation included the territory west of the Rhine river and north of a line which began slightly south of

leader Konrad Adenauer placed Geneva in a line of development which had begun in London in 1924. Adenauer hoped this "development would lead to the resurrection of Germany as well as to the pacification and prosperity of Europe."⁷⁹ As these articles and speeches indicated, support for the League as the vehicle of German recovery was growing stronger.

The western powers had promised that, at the League of Nations Assembly in September 1926, Germany would be asked to join the League without further delay or obstruction. In the months leading up to the session, *Das Junge Zentrum* urged members of the *Windhorstbünde* to support the League and explained that without the Center's active support, the League would lack much needed spiritual emphasis. Center-related dailies frequently carried articles discussing the League and its agencies, as well as the progress of Germany's efforts towards membership. On July 4, 1926, these propagandistic efforts culminated in an appeal by the national party executive committee, published in *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Zentrumspartei*:⁸⁰

[By joining the League of Nations,] Germany's position vis-à-vis the other states and peoples is about to undergo a decisive change. Germany will face difficult tasks in the League of Nations. Unperturbed by the hindrances and disturbances, the Center Party has shown the way for our foreign policy, a way which everyone recognizes [as legitimate] today, one which no one seriously dares reject. This independent, reasonable and truly national foreign policy must be maintained in the League of Nations.

In the eyes of Center Party leaders, the League of Nations had developed from a tool for the French domination of Europe after 1919 and from proof of the Allied lack of trustworthiness into a forum for the representation of German interests by German diplomats who were accepted as equals by their foreign peers.

The Center's appeal concluded with a plea for the domestic peace necessary to provide Germany's representatives in Geneva with a sure foundation of domestic support. On September 8, 1926, *Germania*'s headlines proclaimed the news for which the Centrist publications had long prepared their readers: "Germany's Admission Decided Unanimously! Now a True League of Nations!"⁸¹ as if without Germany, the League had been incomplete.

While, however, the party's leadership and the party-related newspapers enthusiastically welcomed membership,⁸² participation in the League never brought Germany the advantages for which Centrists had hoped. In the areas of greatest interest – the liberation of the occupied German territories, disarmament, and the protection of minorities, – the League itself failed to yield any significant improvements. The gravity of the subsequent disappointment was increased by the unrealistic

Honnef and ended on the Dutch border west of Mönchen-Gladbach. It also included land on the east bank of the Rhine, extending forty kilometers east of Honnef and north to a point on the Rhine half way between Solingen and Düsseldorf. Not until 1930 did the Allies evacuate the second and third zones, which extended south from the border of the first zone to the point at which the Rhine forms the Franco-German frontier. The third zone also included a French-occupied bridgehead on the east bank around the city of Kehl.

⁷⁹Konrad Adenauer, "Rede anlässlich des Besuchs Reichspräsident von Hindenburgs in Köln," *Reden 1917-1967*. 56.

⁸⁰*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Zentrumspartei*, 1926, No. 6, "Aufruf des Reichsparteiausschusses des Zentrums vom 4. Juli 1926."

⁸¹*Germania*, No. 417, September 8, 1926 "Deutschlands Aufnahme einstimmig beschlossen! Der wirkliche Völkerbund!"

⁸²For example, *Mitteilungen der deutschen Zentrumspartei*, 1926, No. 10, *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 666, September 9, 1926, *Germania*, No. 421, September 10, 1926.

expectations with which Centrist supporters of the League had sought and welcomed membership. Centrists failed to recognize that the voluntary nature of this association of secular states with widely diverging interests significantly limited the organization's abilities. International bodies are ill-suited to be the type of moral guardian Centrists envisioned the League to be. Given its diverse membership, the League could never become a Christian fraternity of nations. Because Centrists failed to comprehend that the broad gap between the Centrist ideal of a Christian-inspired federation and the existing League of Nations did not need to be debilitating, disappointment was inevitable.

Skeptical Centrists prophesied the League's failure. As early as September 1926, the *Germania's* editors warned their readers that many issues could not be resolved by the League of Nations. Other avenues to reconciliation had to be pursued; other ways had to be found to strengthen Germany's Christian influence. The editors urged readers to pay attention to international peace congresses, especially those sponsored by Catholic organizations.⁸³ After all, despite its sanction by the Holy See, the League was a secular organization, not a Catholic body, and as such was in need of Christian guidance.

A year after Germany joined the League, Countess Pauline Montgelas, an ardent advocate of international Catholic cooperation, published a discussion of the role of Catholics in the League of Nations.⁸⁴ She called for greater Christian influence in the League. To achieve this, she argued, Catholics needed to increase their role in the League's activities, especially in areas concerned with cultural and social questions. As a first step to increasing Catholic influence on the League, Catholics should participate more actively in the national civic organizations which supported the League and publicized its work. Just as important as sparking greater domestic interest in the League, however, was the improved cooperation of Catholics across national boundaries. Such cooperation would require no new organization, merely "the enrichment of all efforts through the constructive force of the Catholic ideal" in existing international bodies. Montgelas's ideas, however, were doomed to failure. If at all possible, increasing Christian and particularly Catholic influence in the League would be a long and tedious task which required great commitment. Centrists' patience would evaporate long before the policies suggested by Montgelas produced the political results party members expected from the League.

During the remaining years of the Weimar republic, Centrists criticized the League for falling short of their ideal of a Christian organization. In 1931, scholars assembled at the annual conference of the Catholic Union for International Studies found that "the League of Nations would be much closer to perfection were Catholic thinking to exert a greater influence in it. It would be much more of a 'true League of Nations,' and of peoples, than it is now."⁸⁵ International treaties would become more meaningful were Christian natural law and not Rousseau's individualism to serve as their moral basis. On the other hand, Union members warned that the predominantly humanist League should not meddle in educational matters – a special concern of German minorities in Eastern Europe – if that meant interfering with Catholic teaching. Finally, the German Jesuit and economist Oswald von Nell-Breuning argued that as long as the League failed to recognize the central importance of human dignity in organizing economic relations, and the precedence of the individual's welfare over profit, the organization's efforts to cure the world's post-war economic woes were doomed to failure. While few may have expected practical changes in the League subsequent to these gatherings of intellectuals, the

⁸³ *Germania*, No. 442, September 23, 1926, "Internationale Verständigung."

⁸⁴ *Germania*, No. 374, August 13, 1927, "Katholiken und Völkerbund."

⁸⁵ "Völkerbundsarbeit und katholische Lehre: die dritte internationale Katholische Woche in Genf." *Germania*, No. 225, September 26, 1931.

findings of these conferences provided Centrists with a convenient explanation for the League's failure: it was not a Catholic organization. This explanation, however, begged the question. Centrists were active in countless other secular institutions, foremost in the governments in which they served as chancellors and ministers.

Because Centrists denied any chance of the League's success, it was impossible for the League to disappoint their hopes. Since the League would never be a Catholic organization, success was impossible. Centrists, however, never stopped criticizing the League as if they nonetheless expected it to fulfill Catholic ideals. Most importantly, Centrists' idealistic expectations of the League exemplified the fundamental flaw of all Centrist foreign policy. Centrists attempted to formulate foreign policy according to religious moral imperatives. They considered any policy fatally flawed which did not pass their impossibly idealistic moral scrutiny. Consciousness of this inevitable flaw prevented Centrists from ever wholeheartedly supporting Weimar Germany's foreign policy initiatives.

One of the most important practical issues in which the League failed to meet Centrist expectations was the question of disarmament. Under the Treaty of Versailles, the victors had forced Germany to disarm well below the armaments levels of other European states. Centrists expected the other countries should themselves live up to their obligations set forth in the League of Nations Covenant. The disarmament issue differed from other inter-war problems because, in the Covenant, the Allies had justified German disarmament by declaring it the first step to universal disarmament. Under the Treaty of Versailles and the League Covenant, its demands that other governments follow suit were justified, yet Germany could not force its new partners in the League to disarm. In March 1927, after the second session of the League of Nations Assembly in which Germany participated as a member, Ludwig Kaas complained that the session was "an objective failure," largely because France continued to refuse to participate in the planned disarmament conference.⁸⁶ In the Christmas 1927 issue of *Das Junge Zentrum*, Heinrich Krone feared that "the ideal of disarmament threatens to disappear. Without disarmament, however, the prevention of war and securing of international peace is impossible." "Every friend of peace misses the will and the power of the League of Nations to arbitrate and eliminate international conflicts in an authoritative manner."⁸⁷

After the League of Nations committee charged with organizing and preparing the ground for a disarmament conference ended its 1927 fall session, the editors of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* complained bitterly: "Practically speaking, the cause of disarmament has not advanced one step."⁸⁸ For the editors, culpability was clear. French militarists sabotaged every effort to organize the conference. Subsequently, Germany's complaints about French plans for hegemony in Europe continued. A year later, after the League assembly's fall session of 1928, Kaas once again noted that the League had made little progress on disarmament.⁸⁹ He argued that German disarmament entitled it to reciprocal action by other League members. Six months later, Johannes Bell, long-time defender of the League and of European reconciliation, saw little cause for optimism that the League would make progress in the disarmament question.⁹⁰ By 1930, even Georg Schreiber, a supporter of international cooperation, had to

⁸⁶ *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol 392, pp. 9831-9840: March 22, 1927.

⁸⁷ *Das Junge Zentrum*, 1927, No. 12, "Weihnachten 1927."

⁸⁸ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 897, December 5, 1927, "Vertrauensproben."

⁸⁹ *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 423, p. 428: November 19, 1928.

⁹⁰ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, No. 363, May 26, 1929, "Gedanken zur Völkerverständigung und zur Abrüstung."

admit that he was witnessing a "fiasco in the League of Nation's treatment of the minorities and disarmament question." He, too, had lost his enthusiasm for the League.⁹¹

Once the disarmament conferences began, they only further sapped Centrist faith in the League of Nations. In 1932, Georg Schreiber wrote a pamphlet outlining the Centrist position on disarmament.⁹² He made no practical suggestions on how to further the cause. In fact, he no longer seemed to hold any hope for practical steps towards disarmament. Typical of Centrists, Schreiber took refuge in idealism: "No matter how stormy the official disarmament conferences are, the ideal of disarmament itself can no longer perish. It will become the dominating, guiding theme [*Leitmotiv*] of the twentieth century."⁹³ Since all Christians are brethren, who bear the living faith within themselves, they had to cease arming against one another. "This arms race is in truth a permanent assassination attempt against human solidarity."⁹⁴ Schreiber concluded his essay by linking material and moral disarmament. "The world's political situation tolerates no hesitation. Existing mistrust must be radically eliminated. It cannot be rendered permanent."⁹⁵ Once again, Center Party members were incapable of bridging the gap between their ideals and the demands of reality, even in an area which Schreiber considered "dominant in the twentieth century." One should note, however, that even in 1932-33, despite the relatively clear case of Allied non-compliance with their own principles, Centrist rejected the alternative of German rearmament.

The second issue in which the League of Nations disappointed Centrists was that of caring for German minorities in Eastern Europe. Of all the German parties, the Center most intensely concerned itself with the fate of Germans minorities and forced the German government to defend their interests in the League of Nations.⁹⁶ Under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, large numbers of Germans, of whom the majority were Catholic, became Danish, Belgian, French, and, above all, Polish citizens. The leader of the Center's Silesian wing, Monsignor Ullitzka, and other party leaders such as Stegerwald and Schreiber, vigilantly defended the interests of Germans living on the Polish side of the post-war frontiers. Ullitzka principally demanded that "Poland should be reduced to its heartland."⁹⁷ In the absence of such a fundamental revision, Monsignor Schreiber constantly criticized the Foreign Office's lack of concern for Germans in the diaspora, and especially lamented the government's failure to support closer cultural ties between Germans abroad and those in the Fatherland.⁹⁸

In 1929, the League of Nations Assembly for the first time concerned itself with the protection of ethnic minorities. Frequent complaints from Germans in Poland about forced Polonization and from Germans elsewhere in eastern Europe forced the world body to take up the issue. In March 1929, in a self-congratulatory note, *Germania's* editors wrote:

⁹¹ *Germania*, No. 281, June 20, 1930, "Die außenpolitische Debatte."

⁹² Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK), ZgS II, Vol. 109: Abrüstung (1918-1933): Georg Schreiber. *Christentum und Abrüstung*.

⁹³ *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁹⁵ *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁶ Carole Fink, *op. cit.*

⁹⁷ *Fünfter Reichsparteitag*, p. 21. "Ullitzka zum Ostproblem: Die Notwendigkeit der Revision im Osten." *Germania*, No. 594, December 21, 1929. see also *Stenographische Berichte*, Vol. 394, pp. 12517-12524: January 31, 1928. *Germania*, No. 281, June 20, 1930, "Die außenpolitische Debatte: Erörterungen zur deutschen Ostpolitik -- Neue Rede des Reichsaußenministers."

⁹⁸ While Krüger, in his sympathetic account of Stresemann's foreign policy, insists that Stresemann cared about German minorities abroad for "national, economic, and revisionary policy" reasons, even he admits that "really, nothing much happened" with the exception "of occasional complaints by minorities, usually from Danzig or Poland." Krüger, *Außenpolitik*, 470.

The paradoxical situation has arisen whereby Germany, putting the issue of minority protection on the agenda for the League of Nations March gathering, has in reality become the defender of the treaties which protect minority rights. Germany has assumed the role of guarantor of minority rights, a role which the victors had established for themselves in the peace treaties. . . The victors' failure to guarantee minority rights thus constitutes a serious violation of the peace treaties.⁹⁹

When the Assembly took up the issue in its March and June meetings, the results only deepened Centrist disappointment with the League. While Foreign Minister Stresemann had originally insisted that the League name a permanent ombudsman to guarantee the rights of ethnic minorities, the League's members merely improved the procedure by which minority groups could bring violations to the attention of the League's Assembly.¹⁰⁰ Ludwig Kaas commented on his experiences as a German representative in Geneva. "I have come to the conclusion that the minorities question lies at the crux of European peace. Concerning the attitude on this issue displayed by our delegates and by the German Foreign Minister, Germans in Upper Silesia have more cause to complain [than the Polish government does]."¹⁰¹ While the League would repeatedly address minority rights issues, it proved itself incapable of offering the German minority in Poland the protection which Centrists sought. As a result, Centrist leaders encouraged the establishment of grass-roots socio-cultural movements to support the maintenance of German culture abroad.

Georg Schreiber, the great propagator of the Center's cultural mission, insisted that all Germans had the right to enjoy the benefits of their mother tongue and its culture. "Not just demands brought forth in Geneva and elsewhere on the international stage by diplomatic notes and discussions, but a great mass movement, impressive in its discipline and calm" was needed to convince European opinion.¹⁰² During the remaining years of the Center's existence, its members urged the government to resurrect the minorities issue from its "first class funeral" in the League's 1929 session.¹⁰³ By the end of the Weimar Republic, however, the German regime of conservative technocrats had no time for such emotional and idealistic causes as the maintenance of German culture in the diaspora and the immaterial needs of Germans in formerly German territories.

Because of the crisis of the Austro-German customs union, the onset of the Great Depression, and the failure of a series of disarmament conferences, Centrists lost more and more of their trust in the League of Nations and paid less attention to its activities. Giving a Centrist interpretation of the broader meaning of the Enabling Act of March 24, 1933, a writer for the *Germania* argued that the Center Party's leaders had repeatedly struggled to convince world opinion of the deep-felt desire of the German people to achieve peace in Europe. The League of Nations had failed and "lost its ability to function,

⁹⁹*Germania*, No. 130, March 7, 1929, "Minderheitenschutz und Minderheitenfriede."

¹⁰⁰Krüger puts the issue bluntly when he claims that "the great [!] minorities initiative of the Reich government in the League of Nations failed at the limits set by the policy of reconciliation and the priority of other issues." Krüger, *Außenpolitik*, 472-473. Krüger blames Under Secretary Schubert for disregarding Stresemann's orders to postpone discussion of the unsatisfactory report, arguing that Under Secretary Hermann Pünder of the Chancery backed Schubert against Stresemann. Pünder's papers offer no evidence of Pünder's partisanship; they merely contain a comparison between the original German proposals and a report on improved minority protection drafted by representatives of Japan, Great Britain, and Spain. BAK, NL Pünder, Vol. 74.

¹⁰¹*Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung*, No. 59, April 16, 1929, "Ostdeutscher Zentrumsparteitag."

¹⁰²Georg Schreiber, ed. *Zentrum und Reichspolitik: Ein politisches Handbuch in Frage und Antwort*, p. 43.

¹⁰³"Auf dem Wege nach Genf." *Germania*, No. 417, September 8, 1930.

especially in those areas of vital concern to [the peoples of] the European continent. . . Now that Geneva has failed, it should possess enough insight to refrain from hindering" Germany in this task of restoration.¹⁰⁴ Three months later, the Center Party was no more.

Thus, during the fourteen years of the Weimar, Centrists were torn in their treatment of the League of Nations between the desire, indeed the imperative, to support an organization dedicated to world peace and European understanding on the one hand, and on the other, the obvious failure of the League to acknowledge the justice of Germany's demands in the post-war world. Unlike other instances of foreign policy decision-making, however, Germany's relationship with the League of Nations never presented the Centrists with grave crises like those threatening the future of the Weimar Republic which routinely dominated Germany's relationship with its former enemies.

After 1945, the division of Germany and the gradual restoration of German sovereignty delayed admission to the United Nations Organization. If, however, a German state had been able to join even in 1945, Germany's Christian Democratic leaders would have committed themselves wholeheartedly to the organization. As Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's enthusiastic support for European integration showed, German Catholic politicians had learned that a restoration of German power was only possible when one denied admitting any such ambitions. More importantly in 1945 the clear question of German culpability for the war made it impossible for any German Christian indignation to arise; justice was not an issue. ■

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¹⁰⁴ *Germania*, No. 95, April 5, 1933, "Der Weg des Zentrums."