



# Fighting for the Soul of Germany: The Catholic Struggle for Inclusion after Unification (Harvard Historical Studies)

By *Rebecca Ayako Bennette*

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Historians have long believed that Catholics were late and ambivalent supporters of the German nation. *Rebecca Ayako Bennette*'s bold new interpretation demonstrates definitively that from the beginning in 1871, when Wilhelm I was proclaimed Kaiser of a unified Germany, Catholics were actively promoting a German national identity for the new Reich.

In the years following unification, Germany was embroiled in a struggle to define the new nation. Otto von Bismarck and his allies looked to establish Germany as a modern nation through emphasis on Protestantism and military prowess. Many Catholics feared for their future when he launched the *Kulturkampf*, a program to break the political and social power of German Catholicism. But these anti-Catholic policies did not destroy Catholic hopes for the new Germany. Rather, they encouraged Catholics to develop an alternative to the Protestant and liberal visions that dominated the political culture. *Bennette*'s reconstruction of Catholic thought and politics sheds light on several aspects of German life. From her discovery of Catholics who favored a more "feminine" alternative to Bismarckian militarism to her claim that anti-socialism, not anti-Semitism, energized Catholic politics, *Bennette*'s work forces us to rethink much of what we know about religion and national identity in late nineteenth-century Germany.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

A first-rate work that significantly revises our understanding of a key issue in modern German history. Bennette shows for the first time that the *Kulturkampf* dented German Catholic loyalties to the new nation-state far less seriously than historians have hitherto assumed. Instead, it was precisely during the period of repression that Catholics developed an alternative national culture, one which opposed not the nation-state itself, but Protestant and liberal visions of it. This very fine book is a crucial contribution to the history of German Catholicism before World War I. No other work brings us as deeply into the mindset of German Catholics as they negotiated their way into the culture of German nationalism. (Helmut Walser Smith, Vanderbilt University)

Bennette joins a growing number of recent historians who are shedding fresh light on the dynamics of religious conflict under the Kaiserreich. *Fighting for the Soul of Germany* guides us reliably and insightfully through Catholic understandings of German nationhood in the era of Bismarck. (Geoff Eley, University of Michigan)

**Bennette** has written a lucid, scholarly analysis that furthers past research that has studied Catholics no longer in the ghetto, and who can now be treated as modern historical subjects. (D. J. Dietrich *Choice* 2013-01-01)

#### About the Author

Rebecca Ayako Bennette is Assistant Professor of History at Middlebury College.

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