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## Catholic War Discourse in the German “Sonntagsblatt” of the Silesian Diocese Breslau during the First World War of 1914–1918

Katolickie dyskursy wojenne  
w niemieckiej „Sonntagsblatt” diecezji śląskiej Breslau  
podczas pierwszej wojny światowej (1914–1918)

**ABSTRACT:** The First World War, 1914–1918, demanded that even the Breslau (Polish: Wrocław) Catholic Church give answers to their millions of faithful at home and the soldiers at the front how to value the war in theological and religious terms. “Sonntagsblatt,” the Catholic weekly published during the entire Great War period a large number of articles on this problem. Herewith we attempt to analyse how the Breslau clergy used the “Sonntagsblatt” to give spiritual support.

**KEYWORDS:** First World War, Diocese of Breslau/Wrocław, Catholic press, Sonntagsblatt, discourse of war

**ABSTRAKT:** Pierwsza wojna światowa (1914–1918) wymagała, aby Kościół katolicki we Wrocławiu podzielił się z milionami wiernych, zarówno tych pozostających w domach, jak i żołnierzy na froncie, z teologiczną i religijną oceną wojny. Przez cały okres Wielkiej Wojny “Sonntagsblatt,” tygodnik katolicki, publikował na ten temat liczne teksty. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą analizy, jak duchowni wrocławscy wykorzystywali “Sonntagsblatt” do udzielania duchowego wsparcia.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** pierwsza wojna światowa, diecezja wrocławska, prasa katolicka, Sonntagsblatt, dyskurs wojenny

## Catholic Press in the Diocese of Breslau during the First World War

The attitude of the Catholic Church in the German Empire to the First World War has already been researched.<sup>1</sup> The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 had a big impact on the entire Catholic Church. Pope Pius X (1835–1914) criticized the war shortly after its inception. In his “Reminder to all Catholics in the World” he made it clear that Christ was the saviour in war times and that all politicians and heads of states should promote peace instead of the hostilities.<sup>2</sup> His successor Pope Benedict XV (1854–1922) tried to undertake several peace initiatives. As the superior of the Catholic Church he was extremely concerned about Catholics fighting against Catholics. He went out of his way to contribute to peace processes and focused on the humanitarian issues, while trying to be relatively neutral while dealing with either party to the conflict.<sup>3</sup>

German bishops, priests and all the faithful had to bear all the war consequences at the home front and in the battlefields. The hostilities needed to be discussed not only among the German military and politicians, but also in the Catholic circles and their intellectuals. The question arises what the Church’s understanding of the war was, with which words, discourse and semiotics was it dealt with. In this respect our research has examined in a hermeneutic and discursive manner a very rich Catholic historical source in the form of the German Catholic Church press published during the period of 1914–1918. The journals of each single German diocese normally appeared every Sunday and tried to reach every Catholic household despite the troublesome times.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: exemplary literature regarding the Catholic Church and the First World War 1914–1918 [in:] H.-J. Scheidgen, *Deutsche Bischöfe im Ersten Weltkrieg: die Mitglieder der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz und ihre Ordinariate 1914–1918*, Köln 1991; *Und auch Soldaten fragten. Zu Aufgabe und Problematik der Militärseelsorge in drei Generationen. Bericht des wissenschaftlichen Symposiums zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Militärseelsorge vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, B.H. Jürgen (hrsg.), Paderborn 1992 (*Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Militärseelsorge* 9), pp. 55–62; *Geschichte des Breslauer Domkapitels 1800–1945 im Rahmen der Diözesangeschichte vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, K. von Engelbert (hrsg.), Hildesheim 1964, pp. 169 ff; *Faith of our fathers. Catholic chaplains on the Western Front, 1916–1919*, Stephen Bellis, Warwick 2018.

<sup>2</sup> A. Strucker, *Die Kundgebungen Papst Benedikts XV. zum Weltfrieden*, Freiburg 1917, pp. 113 ff.

<sup>3</sup> L.A. Friedrichs, *Die Friedensinitiativen des Vatikans während des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Norderstedt 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the meaning of Catholic publicists during the period of 1914–1918 see: D. Rose, *Von der konfessionellen zur nationalen Polemik. Katholische Publizistik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, [in:] W. Gömberg, T. Pittroff, *Katholische Publizistik im 20. Jahrhundert. Positionen, Probleme, Profile* (Reihe: Rombach, *Quellen und Studien zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte des modernen Katholizismus* 3), pp. 213–234.

The Sunday journal of the German Eastern Diocese of Breslau (present day Wrocław) was a very important medium. Its circulation reached Prussian Silesia, the Berlin District, Austrian parts of Northern Bohemia and Moravia. Because of the nearness to the Eastern front the people and faithful in these regions were more affected by the armed conflict than those inhabiting dioceses in Central Germany.<sup>5</sup> During the tenure of Cardinal Georg Kopp (1837–1914) the German-language "Katholisches Sonntagsblatt der Diöcese Breslau, zugleich Organ des Vereins der heil[igen] Familie," was launched in 1895. Concurrently, the "Posłaniec Niedzielnny dla dyecezyi Wrocławskiej zarazem organ związku Św. Rodziny" was started for the Polish-speaking Catholics.<sup>6</sup>

Both the German and Polish papers are valuable literary sources to the history of the Silesian Church of Breslau, not yet examined by (church) historians. Collectively, they reached almost five million recipients. Every issue appeared on Sunday and contained basic information about theological and biblical exegesis, discussions about political and social developments, reviews on Silesian and general church history, spiritual texts and essential information on current problems of the diocese. The content exemplifies discourse, semiotics and narratives from the Catholic point of view and reflects the Catholic attitude to the Great World War.

The hostilities affected the diocese from the onset i.e. from August 1914 to a considerable extent. Many priests were drafted into the German military service. Cardinal Adolf Bertram (1859–1945),<sup>7</sup> the newly elected Breslau bishop, was instantly confronted with the war situation. The clergy had to prepare conscripts spiritually by means of retreat days and exercises and provide the priests in the war zone with gifts of love. For the diocese it also meant a shortage of priests in their hundreds of Silesian parishes.<sup>8</sup> The remaining priests had to care about their sheep, about the women mourning for their fallen husbands and sons, and they had to comfort the families spiritually. Thousands of Catholics and

<sup>5</sup> B. Ziemann, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918*, Reihe: *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* 329; Darmstadt 2016, cards I–IV.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the first vol. of "Posłaniec Niedzielnny dla dyecezyi Wrocławskiej zarazem organ związku Św. Rodziny" from 23 December 1894, published weekly by the diocesan administration of Breslau by the priest can. Marx.

<sup>7</sup> Literature on Cardinal Bertram, see: Archiv für Schlesische Kirchengeschichte, hrsg. vom Institut für Ostdeutsche Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte, vol. 1949–2019, Münster; *Adolf Kardinal Bertram (1859–1945), Sein Leben und Wirken*, T. Scharf-Wrede (hrsg.), (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Kunst im Bistum Hildesheim), hrsg. vom Verein für Geschichte und Kunst im Bistum Hildesheim, Hildesheim 2015.

<sup>8</sup> For the structure of the Breslau Diocese during the First World War see: *Handbuch des Bistums Breslau und seines Delegatur-Bezirks für das Jahr 1917*, Breslau 1916.

the faithful of the Diocese of Breslau fell victim to the war, while the diocese lost a significant part of its terrain after the hostilities had come to an end.<sup>9</sup>

Still, it remained important for the diocese to reach the Catholics with spiritual information through – among others – the “Sonntagsblatt.” Its message was appreciated by the Catholics at the home front and the soldiers in the battlefields. It is remarkable that most articles referring to the war effort were written anonymously and therefore the authors are mostly unknown. Later in the text we will deal with how the diocese tried to support and strengthen the faith among its Catholics. To this end, more than 200 issues of “Sonntagsblatt” have been examined by means of the text data extraction method which is quite an efficient way to analyse discourse and semiotics.<sup>10</sup>

## The relation between God and War

The philosophic question of the relationship of “God and War” is quite a deep personal theological question of mankind and has been the concern of the Catholic Church and other religions for centuries. The same was taken up by German lay and Catholic communities soon after the outbreak of the First World War. During the entire war the inner-Catholic debate “Why God accepts war,” or “Why God allows war” or “What is the divine sense of war” took place amongst the sorrows, grief and pain in literary form in the “Sonntagsblatt.” Many Catholics kept asking the Church’s representatives how it could happen that the Christian nations of Europe went to such a cruel war against each other. These questions demanded unambiguous answers which were published continuously in several articles of the “Sonntagsblatt.”

Christianity with its old antique culture and the spirit of the Holy Bible and the New Testament, with Jesus’ peaceful messages did not advocate war; rather, it attempted to overcome war by proclaiming the truth and getting the conflicting parties to the negotiation table. Doubts were, therefore, raised by atheists and weak Christians: “There is no God because He would never look on the atrocities of war, standing idly by.” To which the Church would reply that if there was no God, then millions of the victims would have died for nothing, and the tears of the widows and orphans would have been in vain.

<sup>9</sup> *Geschichte des Breslauer Domkapitels 1800–1945...*, op. cit., pp. 170 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. “Katholisches Sonntagsblatt der Diözese Breslau, Katholisches Sonntagsblatt der Diözese Breslau, zugleich Organ des Vereins der heil[igen] Familie,” volumes from 1914 to 1918, published weekly by the diocesan administration of Breslau by Father Karl Jakubczyk.

Without God morality would have no foundation, and consequently no man could be held responsible for his crimes or rewarded for his mercifulness. God alone was the entity which valued people's actions.<sup>11</sup>

Then other questions were asked: "If God exists, why does he not interfere in the war?" The Church would habitually explain that it was not the task of human beings to assess God's behaviour nor to judge and understand God in any way. Humans themselves caused conflicts, so they had themselves to blame. God never gave anybody an order to engage in war. God endowed humans with self-determination and personal freedom, so that they could consider their actions and be responsible for them. God never wanted war; humans did.<sup>12</sup>

The "Sonntagsblatt" made it clear: humans, not only politicians or leaders, should ask themselves why they did not change their behaviour against each other when the signs of war before August 1914 became obvious. If they had had trust in the New Testament words, Jesus and God's peaceful message, war would never have broken out. It was human failure and sins that led to the hostilities.<sup>13</sup> Divine interference in human affairs depends on God's discretion and his creatures have no part in it. Theologians stated in articles that the existence of evil and the devil enables the existence of good.

The Church concluded that also war had a place and a reason in God's plans.<sup>14</sup> The "Sonntagsblatt" made it clear: humans can't see into the future and anticipate God's purposes but the time of his mercy will come and he will sweep away the calamity and scourge of the war. And until this happens, humans need to learn hard lessons from hard war times. To the question, why war affected not only pagans but also the God-fearing people without difference, the "Sonntagsblatt" tried to answer that the good of earthly life was not the highest good and that suffering was not the greatest evil. Mankind should strive after the highest good in the eternity with God rather than on earth. War was the experience of the creation; salvation would only be experienced in afterlife.<sup>15</sup>

Silesian families would ask their priests, "Why is our Lord watching the ongoing terrible war with indifference? Why doesn't he intervene and put an end to the killing?" The "Sonntagsblatt" would answer, asking "Why didn't humans put such questions before the war? When addiction, immorality, blatant defiance of God were on the rise, it was then that you should have asked:

<sup>11</sup> Author unknown (hereinafter: A.U.), *Schwierigkeiten – ohne Ende*, "Sonntagsblatt" (hereinafter: SoBla) 12.05.1918, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> A.U., *Warum greift unser Herrgott nicht ein?*, SoBla 3.02.1918, pp. 26 ff.

<sup>13</sup> A.U., *Eine treffende Antwort*, SoBla 24.03.1918, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> A.U., *Warum greift unser Herrgott nicht ein?*, op. cit., pp. 26 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, pp. 33–35.

why does God tolerate such gross misconduct for so long? When will he finally intervene?”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the “Sonntagsblatt” quoted Helmuth von Moltke (1800–1891), the famous German Prussian officer, who during the 1870–1871 Franco-German War said: “War is part of God’s world-order.”

Christianity in the light of Jesus’ teaching understood itself as a strong community of brothers and sisters living in peace. Evil entered the created world and brought injustice to mankind; yet, evil had its place.<sup>17</sup> Such were the contents of the articles that revealed the meaning of war: The Lord needs the war for his salvific plans, he knows how to derive good even from evil. The fact that he has great plans for people does not mean that He will spare them hardship; contrarily, he will cause catastrophes to test a man’s character on the analogy to the most fertile layers of earth which are the produce of the greatest movements of tectonic plates. The conclusion was that God had prepared a stony path with deprivation for the humans to lead them to the kingdom of heaven. The path will be the target on the way to the Elysium.<sup>18</sup>

Not only in the “Sonntagsblatt,” but also at Sunday and weekly services, masses homilies and in personal appointments the clergy often referred to the Old Testament’s Book of Job. Job, who was surely a just and god-fearing man, had to deal with disease and pain like people afflicted with war. He was confronted with the systematic and dogmatic philosophical question why a just and righteous man had to sustain so much pain.<sup>19</sup> The priests compared Job’s situation with the ongoing misery. Also Jesus, they preached, lived in this imperfect world and suffered persecution, disaster and evil. The acceptance of the dreadful fate meant following Jesus on the way to the Father.<sup>20</sup> War was foreseen by God as a test for the humans who should only strive after God’s heaven.<sup>21</sup> Several times the Church would explain to the faithful that God did not cause the war: “Mankind has disregarded God’s will. War is retribution for the disregard of God’s love.”

War – it was explained – was limited in time.<sup>22</sup> If the Christian principles had been observed, “this world conflagration would never have occurred.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> A.U., *Eine treffende Antwort*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> A.U., *Krieg und Christentum*, SoBla 4.06.1915, p. 211.

<sup>18</sup> A.U., *Weltgebet im Weltkrieg*, SoBla 5.12.1915, pp. 387 ff.

<sup>19</sup> A.U., *Krieg und Göttliche Vorsehung*, SoBla 13.12.1916, pp. 50 ff.

<sup>20</sup> A.U., *Glück oder Unglück*, SoBla 18.02.1917, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> A.U., *Krieg und Göttliche Vorsehung*, op. cit., pp. 50 ff.

<sup>22</sup> A.U., *Nur für eine Kugel*, SoBla 22.07.1917, p. 226.

<sup>23</sup> Article extracted from the Deutsche Kirchenzeitung (publisher): *Krieg und Frieden*, SoBla 7.10.1917, pp. 298 ff.

The "Sonntagsblatt" did not limit itself to presenting the theological position. From time to time it also quoted the opinions of people of different walks of life: assuring of their readiness to defend Germany, almost all defined war as a harrowing experience for the entire nation.<sup>24</sup>

The Church had never regarded war as beneficial for any people or nation. The "Sonntagsblatt" appraised the war mostly as a disastrous and fatal experience especially for interpersonal relationships.<sup>25</sup> The Church saw how much the war experience meant in the life of humans and nations: "To whom has not the war, which has been forcibly inflicted on us by abomination and riot, brought bitter misery and heartache? It neither spares peoples, nor individuals. It does not ask for origin and status."<sup>26</sup> The Church realized that during the war the question of the meaning of God was increasingly raised by soldiers and civilians. The "Sonntagsblatt" would provide traditional proofs of God's truth in order to further strengthen the faith, e.g. the proof of authority.<sup>27</sup>

The Breslau paper formulated a definition of war to the effect that God sent the war because of the heinous sins of all people. God himself would decide the end of the punishment, but the freedom would come when all people had abandoned sin.<sup>28</sup> The Christian religion was perceived as a roadmap that ought to be followed the way like Jesus had taught. A Christian soldier's eye was capable of helping the enemy's child. A Christian soldier was still capable of compassion towards his neighbour, even if the neighbour wore a different uniform, because a Christian soldier never stopped following Christ. Mercy and solace constituted a shield against hate born at the time of war. Christ's way is to love "thy neighbour" despite the circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

## The war as the *bellum iustum*

The previous chapter showed that the Church demanded that soldiers respect their Christian religion concerning correct conduct towards the captured enemies. The Church presented a realistic point of view regarding the complexity of the pre-war political reasons leading to the outbreak of the hostilities. As for the *enemies of Germany*, she put the blame on them for not granting "Germany

<sup>24</sup> A.U., *Stille Kriegsgedanken*, SoBla 13.02.1916, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> A.U., *Ich hatt einen Kameraden*, SoBla 18.02.1917, pp. 53 ff.

<sup>26</sup> A.U., *Kriegsbilder*, SoBla 1.07.1917, pp. 202 ff.

<sup>27</sup> A.U., *Der Gottesbeweis des Krieges*, SoBla 27.06.1915, p. 203.

<sup>28</sup> A.U., *Christentum und Nationen*, SoBla 23.06.1916, p. 235.

<sup>29</sup> A.U., *Mein Kamerad*, SoBla 19.03.1916, p. 94.

its place under the sun.” This wording doubtless referred to German Emperor Wilhelm II’s imperialist policy conducted after the 1890 dismissal of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898). The Church along with the German public was of the opinion that the German government under Wilhelm II promoted and preferred a peaceful relationship with the neighbour states before August 1914.

After the July 1914 Sarajevo outrageous assassination, the Emperor finally had no other choice but “to take the sword to defend the fatherland.” For the German Church to be a German soldier meant “to be strong and protective.”<sup>30</sup> Until the end of the war the Church claimed that only the German Empire had requested peace negotiations among all the participating parties several times, but all such attempts had been dismissed.<sup>31</sup> The “Sonntagsblatt” in contrast to other media never concealed to its readers that:

Our nation also deserved a trial and punishment. Nobody but a Pharisee will deny that. And if we are tempted to ask why its duration is so long, we should consider what the German bishops said in one of their pastoral letters: the sins of many years are not atoned for by short penance.<sup>32</sup>

The Bible demanded the exclusion of war and the promotion of peace among persons and nations. The New Testament advocated the love towards the enemy.<sup>33</sup> In reality and in theological perspective the Church referred to important positions and meanings of its theologians in the ecclesiastical history who dealt with the question of war and peace. In the early centuries of Christianity St Augustine (354–430), one of the Fathers of the Church, created the philosophy of justified war known as *bellum iustum*. His central Christian thesis about war and peace has been enriched through centuries as a Christian dogma on war. Many Christian emperors relied on St Augustine’s position when deciding to begin a military conflict.

St Augustine’s position was developed in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and was further taken up by such theologians as Soto and Suarez. St Augustine’s thesis of a *bellum iustum* stated that according to Christian dogma the one and only reason for a just war is to defend the wounded, rectify violated law, or make the enemy recognise his wrongdoing. With an enemy willing to acknowledge his guilt, a peace process could be launched.

<sup>30</sup> A.U., *Ich hatt einen Kameraden*, op. cit., pp. 53 ff.

<sup>31</sup> A.U., *Warum greift unser Herrgott nicht ein?*, op. cit., pp. 26 ff.

<sup>32</sup> A.U., *Eine treffende Antwort*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> A.U., *Evangelium und Krieg*, SoBla 6.08.1916, pp. 251 ff.



If the enemy continued in his wrongdoing, war was justified. Only God or an authority filled with His grace – traditionally the Emperor or King of a nation – could take a decision to begin war or establish peace.<sup>34</sup>

The "Sonntagsblatt" postulated that "war for the fatherland is a just war," and "God will not leave the Germans but will assist them." The duty to fight for "Emperor and Fatherland" therefore was justified for the Catholic Church as an example of the *bellum iustum*. The war was the means with which to attain the end and therefore it was subdued to Christian morality and ethics, rather than the other way round.<sup>35</sup>

### The glory of the "death of a hero" and the "fallen son"

The notion of the "Heldentod," or glorious "Death of the Hero" – also known as the "Heroic Death" – had been firmly rooted in German tradition. To sacrifice one's life for the glory of the Fatherland was the highest honour of a soldier as a warrior.<sup>36</sup> Also the Catholic Church service and literature was attracted to the ideal of the "Death of the Hero," and based it on theological explanations. In a military conflict the entire human body was offered as a sacrifice to the divine Fatherland. A German soldier was expected to fall in the battlefield for a "justified reason of the German people." The "Death of the Hero" during the entire First World War was the ultimate sacrifice honouring God.<sup>37</sup>

It is "not hate, but the love of the fatherland, love of justice that guides the sword of the soldier;" "the warrior becomes an instrument in the hands of the great judge of the world, and falls a martyr of justice when he falls in battle."<sup>38</sup> Such a belief led to the theological view that "God takes those who he loves," so death is only a hard, last journey to the hero's true Fatherland, the Heaven with God.<sup>39</sup> The clergy formulated the thesis that "a nation which is assisted

<sup>34</sup> A.U., *Krieg und Frieden*, op. cit., pp. 298 ff.

<sup>35</sup> A.U., *Nur ein Rosenkranz*, SoBla 14.01.1917, pp. 14 ff.

<sup>36</sup> To this theme compare literature: H. Koss, "...an meiner Seite den Heldentod erlitten": ein Schicksal in Feldpostbriefen, 1.08–11.12.1914, Leipzig 2014; *Heldenmythen – Heldentaten – "Heldentod"*, Saarländisches Künstlerhaus Saarbrücken e.v., S. Elsner, K. Hanus (hrsg.), Saarbrücken 2015; D. Henning, "Heldentod" und "Mahnung": Gefallenendenkmale im ehemaligen Kreis Saalfeld, Saalfeld 2007.

<sup>37</sup> A.U., *Heldentod*, SoBla 6.08.1916, pp. 69 ff, 251 ff.

<sup>38</sup> A.U., *Krieg und Christentum*, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> A.U., *Trostworte des Kriegers*, SoBla 7.01.1917, pp. 4 ff.

by God has always a numerical advantage.”<sup>40</sup> The “Sonntagsblatt” stressed the need of the soldier to entrust his life to God’s hands. Many German soldiers related to their horrified families that they had only survived the battles and fights with “God’s help.”<sup>41</sup> The German soldier was “full of patriotism in his love to the Emperor and the Fatherland and he therefore was ready to sacrifice himself and his life in honour.”<sup>42</sup> Sacrifice and Fatherland were powerful terms to honour the fallen German heroes.<sup>43</sup> The clergy intended to arouse deep hope and solace among the faithful of the Breslau diocese who feared for their sons and husbands. The “Heldentod,” the “Death of the Hero,” ennobled the harsh reality and glorified war.<sup>44</sup>

The “Sonntagsblatt” and Catholics were surely convinced that all Germans would regard the fallen warriors as a big sacrifice to the Fatherland, that the fallen warriors earned Heaven where they would find God’s love and eternal freedom after their lifetime on Earth.<sup>45</sup> The “Sonntagsblatt” stated that “the son is everything a mother has. He therefore is everything what she can sacrifice to the Fatherland. She has nothing more precious to lose.”<sup>46</sup> A son may die, his mother will place her trust in God, knowing that she and the son will reunite in Heaven for all eternity.<sup>47</sup> This notion of sacrifice was the son’s highest motivation as a soldier. Death was no coincidence but was willed by God. The Church admitted that a “fallen son” was the most difficult examination set by God and a trial for every mother’s heart.<sup>48</sup>

The picture of two brothers who together joined the war with great enthusiasm was used by the Church as a relevant illustration. The “Sonntagsblatt” would express the dignity of the death of one of the brothers. The acceptance of a brother’s death in the field was also regarded as the highest sacrifice: “Who would not reverently stand still before such heroism and brotherly love!”<sup>49</sup> The term “true comradeship”<sup>50</sup> in war has had a long tradition in the German – and not only German – military. It was also taken up and sanctified by the Church. The meaning of a “fallen comrade” was highly valued in Catholic communi-

<sup>40</sup> A.U., *Opfersinn*, SoBla 25.02.1917, pp. 60 ff.

<sup>41</sup> A.U., *Was die Feldpost brachte*, SoBla 24.06.1917, pp. 194 ff.

<sup>42</sup> A.U., *Ich hatt einen Kameraden*, op. cit., pp. 53 ff.

<sup>43</sup> A.U., *Opfersinn*, op. cit., pp. 60 ff.

<sup>44</sup> A.U., *Mein Kamerad*, op. cit., p. 94

<sup>45</sup> A.U., *Nur für eine Kugel*, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>46</sup> A.U., *Opfersinn*, op. cit., pp. 60 ff.

<sup>47</sup> A.U., *Kriegsbilder*, op. cit., pp. 202 ff.

<sup>48</sup> A.U., *Nur für eine Kugel*, op. cit., pp. 226.

<sup>49</sup> A.U., *Zwei Brüder*, SoBla 25.03.1917, pp. 94 ff.

<sup>50</sup> A.U., *Ich hatt einen Kameraden*, op. cit., pp. 53 ff.

ties and German society because it induced courage in the face of the enemy, even in ultimately hopeless situations and in the face of one's own death. It is another question whether this term was also a solace for a German mother or father who had to mourn for the fallen son.

The idea of the "death of the Hero" was also valid during the Second World War. Since the final German downfall in 1945 this attitude has almost disappeared from German society and culture because it began to be perceived as a distortion of war's reality.

## Conclusion

The Catholic Church of Breslau during the entire period of the First World War 1914–1918 contributed intellectually to the discourse on war which drew the attention of the faithful, civilians and soldiers alike. The Church's explanations were important to the recipients and helped to understand and accept the sense of war from a religious perspective. The "Sonntagsblatt" – following Pope Benedict XV in this respect – saw war as the world's biggest misfortune and at the same time as a part of God's salvific plan. The "Sonntagsblatt" stated that the Church did not give up on the concept of *bellum iustum* and that humans and especially Catholics were called to put in effort to restore peace.

It revealed that Catholic Church in the diocese of Breslau and other German dioceses was true to this attitude with the people placing their trust in the clergy. For all the atrocities and harsh experiences from the First World War no one could prevent the outbreak of the Second World War. Today the Europeans and the Germans deal mentally with these discourses to a lesser degree because of the long period of peace and the personal freedom since 1945. Yet, these discourses reveal how the First World War influenced people's concerns and their understanding of the meaning of their life during hard times.

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