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## Katholische Frauenbewegung in Deutschland 1945–1962

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Until now, scholars of Catholicism have rarely explored the subject of gender roles, while historians of gender have neglected the question of religious commitment. The founding era and early years of the Federal Republic of Germany have been particularly underexamined in these regards. In laying down a marker at the intersection of these two underexplored fields, the present study makes an important contribution to the scholarship on Catholic women's movements between the end of World War II and the start of Vatican II. At its heart is the Katholische Deutsche Frauenbund (Catholic German Women's League or KDFB) and its organizational efforts at the supra-regional and national levels. The study explores how the Frauenbund, which had already come to prominence during the Weimar Republic, positioned itself after 1945 within the women's movement, society at large, and the Catholic Church. In the process, it focuses on the assessment of contemporary role models for women, as well as on the growing significance of women in the continued development of the Catholic milieu.

The introduction describes the Frauenbund's organizational structures and sponsors, whose connections both within Catholic circles and wider society were far-reaching. Clearly influenced by the secular women's movement, the KDFB promoted emancipatory aims. Through a deliberate policy of having women occupy its top leadership ranks, the Frauenbund set itself apart from other Catholic women's associations that were headed by clerics and generally pursued charitable or spiritual aims. The Frauenbund also asserted the organizational independence of women when it founded the »Arbeitsgemeinschaft der katholischen deutschen Frauen« (Working Group of Catholic German Women). The attempts by the German bishops to gather the women's organizations under their own supervision reveal a basic inner-Catholic conflict between pastoral care for women, which continued to be directed by the bishops, and the women's movement, which was self-directed. The organization of all Catholic women within one working group had the effect of perpetuating the Catholic milieu; at the same time, collaboration with non-Catholic women's organizations necessarily meant a revised perspective on an isolated Catholic way of life.

In its social conceptions, the Frauenbund departed from traditional »natural« gender roles and postulated the equality of the various female marital statuses. In its high regard for single working women, it actually went against mainstream social role models. When Catholic marriage counseling services were built up again after the war, Catholic women worked to spread and establish their idea of marriage as a partnership. The Frauenbund's efforts on behalf of mothers convalescing after childbirth sought to promote their bodily and spiritual recovery and, at the same time, achieve greater public awareness about the work done by mothers. In the conflict over the reform of family law, the Frauenbund's leaders ultimately had to submit to the bishops' authority but through persistent efforts still managed to increase their own room for maneuver. Although the KDFB, like other groups,

had long considered family and profession to be irreconcilable goals for women, it eventually adapted its conceptions step-by-step to changing realities: profession and family were to complement one another throughout the course of a woman's life. To that end, the Frauenbund called for greater education and professional opportunities for women while at the same time continuing to emphasize the basic priority of women's family duties. Much more than other Catholic women's organizations, it was political efforts that shaped the Frauenbund's profile. This self-conception as a political entity spawned not only a variety of concepts for the political education of women but also a commitment to building up networks among Catholic female politicians. The KDFB's view of politics included not only parties and parliaments but expressly included attention to social contexts right down to the concerns of individuals and families.

The German Catholic Frauenbund viewed itself as a confident Catholic association. In the Cologne cleric Augustinus Frotz, its leaders found a tactful spiritual counsel who carried out his duties in an appropriately behind-the-scenes advisory capacity and who backed them up in matters of church politics. In this way, Frotz assisted with the balancing act of achieving recognition for the association on the part of the bishops without, however, jeopardizing the independence of its female leadership. To convince German bishops and priests of the value of their work, Catholic women often cited Pope Pius XII and his recognition of the work done by women. As a lay organization, the Frauenbund was deeply involved in both the establishment of the »Central Committee of German Catholics« (ZdK) in 1952 and its subsequent work. The Frauenbund's representatives in the ZdK rejected the establishment of separate women's working groups and, with an average representation of 20%, succeeded in getting a fairly high proportion of women into the organization's committees. During a special women's mass at the 1956 *Katholikentag* (Catholic congress) in Cologne, the participants demonstratively incorporated their self-awareness as women into the liturgy and placed their efforts directly in the service of God. The personal and communal religiosity of the women in the Frauenbund had a deep influence on the life of the organization, whereby the »political« dimension of prayer was by no means excluded.

On the whole, the Catholic German Frauenbund consciously adapted its conceptions of women's roles to the various existing social realities. The organization saw itself as part of the Catholic milieu and supported its cohesion without, however, ruling out civic and political collaboration with non-Catholic partners in the women's movement, in assistance efforts on behalf of convalescing mothers, and in the Christian Democratic party, the CDU. From 1962, the Frauenbund played an active part in the work of the Vatican Council and, later, the Würzburg Synod, while also engaging with the emergent »New Women's Movement,« if at first somewhat hesitantly.