

# National Socialist Priests in Austria: The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden*, Its History, and Its Successor Organisation

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## Abstract

National Socialists among Catholic priests were a minority in both Austria and Germany. Nevertheless, an influential group of such priests emerged in Austria in the context of the so-called *Anschluss*. Their roots reached far back into the period before 1938 and into many political and social networks. Initially, the priests succeeded in recruiting new members and disseminating their programme to reconcile Church and State. The group was partly supported by the *Reichskommissar* Josef Bürckel. In September 1938, the Austrian bishops banned all priests from membership. The group feigned its dissolution and founded a conspiratorial successor organisation.

**Keywords:** *Deutsche Christen*; Cardinal Theodor Innitzer; Catholic Church and National Socialism; Catholic Priests; Josef Bürckel; Vatican

## 1. Introduction

The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* (AGF; Working Group for Religious Peace) was a group of National Socialist priests who came out publicly in Austria in April 1938 to support the Austrian Catholic bishops' course of rapprochement with the National Socialist regime (Scherzberg 2020a). The Viennese religious education teacher Johann Pircher (1886–1956) played a leading role. The history of the group's origins shows that its protagonists had many connections with influential political, social, and ecclesiastical leaders, as well as groups and organisations that were involved in the preparations for the *Anschluss* and shaped the spiritual and ideological climate at the time. The goal of the AGF was the reconciliation of the Church

and the Nazi state—i.e., what it was effectively understood by “religious peace” (*religiöser Frieden*)—and the shaping of the Church according to the principles of National Socialist ideology. Accordingly, it used a cross surrounded by a swastika as its logo. The AGF’s public appearance was brief. Already at the end of September 1938, the Austrian Bishops’ Conference forbade all priests to become members of the AGF. In fact, the AGF formally dissolved only to relaunch its activities as a covertly operating group after some time. The party authorities were informed of the existence and work of the group, and at times it received support from *Reichskommissar* (Reich Commissioner) and *Gauleiter* Josef Bürckel (1895–1944).

This article takes a detailed look at the organisation’s origins and the networking of its protagonists. This is followed by a description of the public appearance of the AGF from April to September 1938. Finally, some information is given on the AGF’s successor organisation. The focus of the article is on developments and events taking place in Austria.

## 2. An Influential Circle Between Party and Church: The Signatories of the *Schmerzensfreitagsbrief* and their Networks

After the German invasion of Austria on March 12, 1938, Josef Bürckel, former *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP; National Socialist German Workers’ Party) *Gauleiter* of the Palatinate and successful architect of the vote to annex the Saar region into the German Reich, was appointed *Reichskommissar für die Wiedervereinigung Österreichs mit dem Deutschen Reich* (Reich Commissioner for the Reunification of Austria with the German Reich) (Paul 1999: 51–65). Bürckel was determined to achieve success much like that in the Saar region. His strategy included involving the Roman Catholic hierarchy in propaganda for the vote in Austria (Sauer 2001: 112). Indeed, he managed to persuade the bishops to call for a vote in favour of Austria’s annexation to the German Reich in a solemn declaration (*Feierliche Erklärung*) on March 18, 1938 (Art. Bekenntnis 1938: 5; Liebmann 1983: 92). The chairman of the Austrian Bishops’ Conference, Cardinal Theodor Innitzer (1875–1955), even signed with “Heil Hitler.”

Dear Gauleiter, I am sending you the enclosed declaration of the bishops. You will see from it that we bishops have fulfilled our national duty voluntarily and without coercion. I know that this declaration will be followed by good

cooperation. With the expression of excellent esteem and Heil Hitler! Th. Innitzer Eb. (Art. Bekenntnis 1938: 5; Liebmann 1983: 109).<sup>1</sup>

In the literature, this behaviour of the Austrian bishops—which was not welcomed by the German bishops and the Vatican—is rightly attributed to the scheming behaviour of the *Reichskommissar* (Liebmann 1983: 65–119).

Since neither the diocesan bishops nor the two metropolitans were informed by the Nazi regime that the three documents, combined into a poster as well as a leaflet with a circulation of millions, were to serve as a propaganda camp for the referendum in the entire ‘Greater German Reich,’ the ‘Solemn Declaration’ signed by them was merely a matter for church proclamation in their dioceses (Liebmann 2009: 84).<sup>2</sup>

However, given the political experience on the part of Cardinal Innitzer in particular, it cannot be assumed that the bishops had simply allowed themselves to be tricked. Innitzer was summoned to the Vatican and confronted with the disapproval of both Cardinal Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli (1876–1958) and the Pope himself (Liebmann 1983: 129–134).<sup>3</sup>

During these events, Innitzer was surrounded by a group of influential Catholics who influenced and encouraged him to take a Nazi-friendly course. Many, such as Anton Böhm (1904–1998), Hans Eibl (1882–1958), Johann Pircher, Friedrich Schreyvogel (1899–1976), Franz Riedl (1906–1994), and Taras von Borodajkewycz (1902–1984) had already joined the NSDAP before its banning in Austria and/or had committed themselves to the party during the illegal period (Scherzberg 2020a: 79–117). Their applications for membership and their membership numbers are listed below. It should be borne in mind that a seven-digit number beginning with “6” does not mean that the persons in question joined the NSDAP late. Since the NSDAP was banned in Austria in 1933, no regular membership materialised. After the *Anschluss*, all those who had previously joined or had become involved had

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1 “Sehr geehrter Herr Gauleiter, Beigeschlossene Erklärung der Bischöfe übersende ich hiermit. Sie ersehen daraus, dass wir Bischöfe freiwillig und ohne Zwang unsere nationale Pflicht erfüllt haben. Ich weiß, dass dieser Erklärung eine gute Zusammenarbeit folgen wird. Mit dem Ausdruck ausgezeichneter Hochachtung und Heil Hitler! Th. Innitzer Eb.”

2 “Da weder die Diözesanbischöfe noch die beiden Metropoliten vom NS-Regime informiert wurden, dass die drei Dokumente sowohl zu einem Plakat als auch zu einem Flugblatt in millionenfacher Auflage zusammenkombiniert als Propagandaschlager im gesamten ‚Großdeutschen Reich‘ für die Volksabstimmung dienen sollten, war für sie die von ihnen unterschriebene ‘Feierliche Erklärung’ bloß eine Angelegenheit für die Kirchenverkündigung in ihren Diözesen.”

3 Therein Liebmann also provides a report by Father Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954), who accompanied Innitzer on the trip to Rome.

to submit a so-called “application for registration” (*Erfassungsantrag*) and provide evidence of their activities for the party. Those who joined the party before June 19, 1933, kept hold of their membership numbers, whereas those who were recognised as activists during the illegal period were given May 1, 1938 as collective date of entry and a membership number between 6,100,000 and 6,600,000 (Botz 2016: 435–438; Jagschitz 2001: 107–109).<sup>4</sup> The latter was the case for most of those mentioned. Pircher, who had joined before the ban, had a seven-digit number beginning with “1.”

Moreover, the members of the group were very well connected through German nationalist, *völkisch*, and Catholic organisations and associations. The liaison man to the *Reichskommissar*, Karl Pischtiak (1906–1944), feared that Innitzer would “buckle” after the visit to the Pope.<sup>5</sup> He therefore called in his and the Cardinal’s circles to send a letter of support to Innitzer. “I compose a memorandum warning the Cardinal of an upset with a frank exposition of what is *then* to come. I succeed in obtaining the signatures of almost all the personalities who count for anything with the Cardinal.”<sup>6</sup> Eighteen people signed the so-called *Schmerzensefreitagsbrief* (Friday of Sorrows Letter).<sup>7</sup>

The letter was given to Innitzer by a small group led by the priest Wilhelm van den Bergh (1876–1958). Pischtiak noted this in his activity report and added that the Cardinal was “visibly upset and promises to stay the course.”<sup>8</sup>

The content of the *Schmerzensefreitagsbrief* is reproduced here with several quotations:

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4 Jürgen Falter mentions in a footnote a block of numbers between 6,100,001 and 6,420,000. See Falter 2020: 557 n. 420.

5 Pischtiak became a member of the NSDAP in 1931 (membership number: 364,046), but had already been active in NS organisations since 1925. He stated in his personnel questionnaire on the registration application that he had headed the *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* in 1936. He was an *SA-Sturmbannführer*. In 1939, he was awarded the Golden HJ number (119,835) and in 1940 the Silver Service Award. See Personalfragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich von Karl Pischtiak, May, 23, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 192.856/Pischtiak Karl/20.7.1906: 9.

6 Der persönliche Referent in den Fragen des religiösen Friedens beim Reichskommissar, Tätigkeitsbericht mit Vorbericht, July, 1 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0:105: “Ich verfasse eine Denkschrift, die den Kardinal mit einer offenen Darlegung dessen, was *dann* kommt, vor einem Umfall *warn*t. Es gelingt mir, die Unterschriften fast aller Persönlichkeiten zu erreichen, die beim Kardinal etwas gelten.”

7 At that time, the Friday of Sorrows was celebrated one week before Good Friday. It refers to the pain of the mother of Jesus.

8 Der persönliche Referent in den Fragen des religiösen Friedens beim Reichskommissar, Tätigkeitsbericht mit Vorbericht, July 1, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0: 04–107, here 105.

Your Eminence!

It is with the deepest concern that a large circle of the Austrian clergy and leading figures in Catholic life are following the developments in church politics of recent days. As great as our joy and satisfaction was over the wise and manly declaration of Your Eminence and the Austrian bishops of March 18, we are even more dismayed by the incomprehensible attitude that certain Vatican forces are taking to this declaration.

We know very well that these forces will leave no stone unturned to obstruct the path so promisingly trodden for ecclesiastical peace in Austria through inaccurate information. Your Eminence has taken an action in a historical hour which is destined to bring about a change in the position of the Church in relation to the world-moving problems of this time in the happiest sense. We ask Your Eminence to *stand by this act* and not to allow anything to make him waver in this attitude. Behind Your Eminence stand the best forces of the people and the clergy far beyond the borders of the Archdiocese, ready to do their utmost for the inner peace of our people and the souls entrusted to them.<sup>9</sup>

In the following, the signatories refer to the time of the authoritarian corporative state (*Ständestaat*), in which Church and State had formed an extensive unity.<sup>10</sup> Since the overwhelming majority of the people had been oppressed by the State and had suffered material hardship, the anger of the people was not only directed against the old system, but also against the Church and the clergy.

Tens of thousands and tens of thousands resolved on the first day of liberation to leave the Church and to pay for the suffering they had endured. These resolutions remained unfulfilled, because precisely in the psychologically most

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9 Aktion für den religiösen Frieden to Eminenz [Innitzer], Schmerzensfreitag [April 8] 1938, in DAW/Bischofsakten Kardinal Innitzer, Kassetten 18, Fasz. 1: 3–4, here: 3. The letter is printed in facsimile in Liebmann 1983: 140–141: “Euer Eminenz! Mit tiefster Besorgnis verfolgt ein grosser Kreis des österreichischen Klerus und führender Köpfe des katholischen Lebens die kirchenpolitische Entwicklung der letzten Tage. So gross unsere Freude und Genugtuung über die kluge und mannhafte Erklärung Euer Eminenz und der österreichischen Bischöfe vom 18. März war, so sehr sind wir über die unverständliche Haltung bestürzt, die bestimmte Kräfte des Vatikans zu dieser Erklärung einnehmen. Wir wissen sehr wohl, dass diese Kräfte nichts unversucht lassen werden um durch unzutreffende Informationen den für den kirchenpolitischen Frieden in Oesterreich so erfolgversprechend beschrittenen Weg zu verbauen. Eure Eminenz haben in geschichtlicher Stunde eine Tat gesetzt, die bestimmt ist eine Wende in der Stellung der Kirche zu den weltbewegenden Problemen dieser Zeit im glücklichsten Sinne herbeizuführen. Wir bitten Euer Eminenz zu dieser Tat zu stehen und sich durch nichts in dieser Haltung wankend machen zu lassen. Hinter Euer Eminenz stehen dabei die besten Kräfte von Volk und Klerus weit über die Grenzen der Erzdiözese hinaus, bereit für den inneren Frieden unseres Volkes und der anvertrauten Seelen das äusserste einzusetzen.”

10 Ibid.: 3–4.

favourable moment of victory joy and exuberance of feeling, the actions of Your Eminence disarmed the anger of the national masses [...]. If in Austria there is even the slightest discord between state and church, as we experienced in the old empire, then the pent-up bitterness must burst upon the church with elementary force. An enormous number of departures from the church would lead to the complete dissolution of the ecclesiastical organisation, all the more so because even today a number of clergymen can only be kept from breaking with the church which has reprimanded them for their national sentiments by constant encouragement. It is no secret that the Protestants, after the news recently received from Rome, spoke of the imminent second and final Reformation of Austria. [...]

*The moment the Church opposes the new state, the one who takes the Church's side becomes a traitor in the eyes of the population. Only a madman could demand that the Church in Austria destroy itself.*<sup>11</sup>

The group thus presented Inntitzer with a scenario that threatened to have the Catholic Church sink into irrelevance. At the end of the letter, the signatories referred to the Vatican's attitude towards Leon Blum's (1872–1950) Popular Front government in France and claimed that what was right for some must be cheap for others, especially since, unlike Blum, this was “*a deeply religious Adolf Hitler*” who practised “acts of Christian mercy.”<sup>12</sup>

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11 Ibid.: “Zehntausende und Aberzehntausende haben seinerzeit den Vorsatz gefasst am ersten Tag der Befreiung durch den Austritt aus der Kirche, dieser die Quittung für das erlittene Leid zu erteilen. Diese Vorsätze sind unausgeführt geblieben, weil gerade im psychologisch günstigsten Moment der Siegesfreude und des Gefühlsüberschwanges die Handlungen Euer Eminenz den Zorn der nationalen Massen entwaffneten, [...] Kommt es in Oesterreich auch nur zu Zwistigkeiten zwischen Staat und Kirche, wie wir sie im alten Reiche erlebt haben, dann muss mit elementarer Gewalt die aufgestaute Erbitterung über die Kirche hereinbrechen. Eine gewaltige Zahl von Kirchenaustritten würde zur völligen Auflösung der kirchlichen Organisation führen, umso mehr als schon heute eine Zahl von Geistlichen nur durch ständigen Zuspruch vom Bruch mit der Kirche abgehalten werden können, die sie wegen ihrer nationalen Gesinnung gemäßregelt hat. Es ist kein Geheimnis, dass die Evangelischen nach den zuletzt aus Rom eingetroffenen Nachrichten von der bevorstehenden zweiten und endgültigen Reformation Oesterreichs sprachen. [...] *In dem Augenblick, da sich die Kirche gegen den neuen Staat stellt, wird in den Augen der Bevölkerung der zum Verräter, der die Partei der Kirche ergreift. Nur ein Wahnsinniger kann von der Kirche in Oesterreich fordern, dass sie sich selbst vernichtet.*”

12 Ibid.: 4: “*einen tiefgläubigen Adolf Hitler. [...] Taten christlicher Barmherzigkeit.*”

The letter was signed by the following persons: Lecturer Wilhelm van den Bergh;<sup>13</sup> Dr. Anton Böhm;<sup>14</sup> Johann Pircher;<sup>15</sup> Rector Leopold Schmid (1886–?);<sup>16</sup> Rector Johannes Schusser (1900–?);<sup>17</sup> Cooperator Josef Ober (1904–?);<sup>18</sup> Cooperator Franz Hofer (1909–?);<sup>19</sup> Anton Bauer (1887–?), Rector in Hernals;<sup>20</sup> Franz Riedl (1906–1994);<sup>21</sup> Josef Schmid (1892–?), Rector

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13 Wilhelm Alois van den Bergh was born on April 16, 1876, in Ravenstein (Netherlands). He was parish priest in the parish of St. Magdalena Rauchenwarth, ordained priest on December 21, 1900, and received the curacy on June 1, 1933. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938: 187.

14 See below.

15 See below.

16 Leopold Schmid, born in Straning in 1886, was parish priest in the parish of St. Rochus and Sebastian and inspector for religious education at St. Rochus in Vienna III district. He was ordained priest in 1912 and received the curacy on November 1, 1934. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938: 40.76.

17 Johann Schusser, born in Jedenspeigen in 1900, was ordained priest in 1925. He was a religious education teacher at the secondary school in Vienna V. district from September 14, 1936. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938: 87.

18 Josef Ober, born in Persenbeug, was cooperator in the parish of St. Joseph Laimgrube in Vienna VI district. He was ordained priest in 1929 and received the curacy on November 1, 1931. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938: 90.

19 Two priests with the name Franz Hofer appear in the Viennese *Schematismus*, both listed in 1938 under “diocesan clergy without diocesan appointment.” This is probably the cooperator of Waidmannsfeld, who was born in 1909 and ordained to the priesthood in Graz in 1934, and who was on leave from his studies. In 1939, he was listed as chaplain of Waidmannsfeld. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938: 369; 1939: 327. A “Frl. Ro” who had conversations with Pircher and reported on them mentioned that Pircher had eliminated *Kooperator* Hofer because of his attitude pertaining to celibacy. See Frl. Ro. War bei Prof. Pircher, in *Loidl* 1972: 11–12, here: 11.

20 Anton Bauer, born in Aspang, was ordained priest in 1911, and received the curacy on May 1, 1927. He was parish priest in Vienna VII district, Hernals. See *Personalstand Wien* 1938; also *Lettl* 1981: 94.

21 Franz Hieronymus Riedl was born in 1906 and a close friend of Anton Böhm. He studied history, art history, and German language, literature, and philosophy, among others, with Heinrich Srbik. In 1932 he was head of the *borderland office of the German student body* and member of the *Deutscher Klub*. He applied for NSDAP membership in 1933, one day before the NSDAP was banned. He was correspondent of the *Germania* and member of the *Bund Kreuz und Adler*. In July 1933, he was imprisoned for fourteen days in Vienna. After a renewed imprisonment and release, he escaped to Hungary in 1934 and stayed there until the “Anschluss.” Thereafter, he returned as *Reichskommisär* of the *Reichspost*. He applied for NSDAP membership on May 11, 1938 (membership number: 6,130,771). In 1947, he was classified as “minderbelastet” in a de-nazification proceeding (Behal 2009: 96; 104–107; 156–157; 201–204; 223; 228–231; 363–366; Gehler 1990: 173; 466; 580; Staudinger 2014: 31–32; Pinwinkler 2014: 76–77). For the NSDAP membership and curriculum vitae, see *Fragebogen der Betreuungsstelle für die Parteigenossen und Angehörigen der Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung im Bereiche des Gaues Wien* with

Vienna;<sup>22</sup> Prof. Dr. Friedrich Schreyvogel;<sup>23</sup> Hans Eibl;<sup>24</sup> Countess Irene Dubsky Lützow (1884–1980); Count Adolf Dubsky (1878–1953);<sup>25</sup> Lecturer

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attached curriculum vitae, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 124.318/Riedl Franz/ 2.4.1906: 6–7; for the membership card, see *ibid.*: 4.

22 Josef Schmid, born on January 10, 1892, in Straning, ordained priest in 1915. He was parish priest in Neulerchenfeld, Vienna XVI district since February 1, 1931, inspector for religious education, and member of the local school council in the XVI district. See *Personalstand Wien 1938*: 39; 41; 139.

23 Friedrich Schreyvogel, born in 1899, was a writer and dramaturge. He received his doctorate under Othmar Spann's supervision. He was editor of the journal *Abendland* (1925–1930) and professor of German literary history and dramaturgy at the *Staatsakademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst* (1932–1938). In 1933, he resigned from the PEN Club because of its protest against the book burnings in Germany, and in 1936 founded the *Bund deutscher Schriftsteller*, a thinly disguised National Socialist organisation, and worked towards the “Anschluss.” In 1934 and after a break in 1937, he joined the NSDAP, according to his own statements. His membership was confirmed; he was given the membership number 6,187,644. After 1945, Schreyvogel was still able to further expand his career. He was chief dramaturge at the Vienna *Theater in der Josefstadt* (1953–1954) and deputy director (1954–1959) and chief dramaturge at the *Burgtheater* (1959–1961). See Müller 2013; Peter 2018: 444; 446. On his membership in the NSDAP, see *Personal-Fragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich*, Schreyvogel, Friedrich, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 86.969/Schreyvogel, Friedrich /17.7.1899: 4; 6; 11.

24 Hans Eibl, born on October 10, 1882, studied philosophy, classical philology, and German literary history in Vienna. He received his doctorate in 1906 and his habilitation in philosophy in 1914. After participating in World War I as an officer, he became associate professor in 1923, but failed to be appointed full professor in the following year. He was an author of *Schöner Zukunft*, as so-called *Katholisch-Nationaler* liaison man to Franz von Papen (1879–1969) he propagated *Reich* and *Abendland* ideology. He applied for registration as NSDAP member on May 18, 1938, and received the membership number 6,264,550. In 1941, he was again refused a full professorship. After the war, he became co-editor of *Neues Abendland* (Weiß 2014: 27–30; Korotin 2006: 68–69; Stadler 2013: 229–230; Scherzberg 2014: 12–20; 27–28; Liebmann 1990: 175). On his NSDAP membership, see *Personal-Fragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich*, in AT-OeStA/AdR/BMI GA 234576/Eibl Hans, 10.10.1882: 3–5. There is a manuscript in the Gauakte: Hans Eibl, “Zur Geschichte der nationalen und nationalsozialistischen Bewegung in Oesterreich,” in *ibid.*: 9–26. On page 15, Eibl explains the background of the early talks between national Catholics and National Socialists.

25 Adolf Graf Dubsky, Freiherr von Třebomyslic, born on June 30, 1878, son of the Imperial and Royal Ambassador in Madrid. From 1903, he was assigned in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He participated in World War I and, after 1918, he became a private entrepreneur. He was a Czechoslovak citizen, got married, retired as a legation councillor, and was a large landowner. At the instigation of *Gauleiter* Bürckel, Count Dubsky was subjected to a political review at the beginning of 1940 as a member of the *Deutscher Klub*, which Bürckel had abolished. A strictly confidential communication from the *Kreisleitung I* in Vienna reads: “Dubsky Adolf Graf [Leg[ations]Rat, born on June 30, 1878,

Dr. Taras von Borodajkewycz; Cooperator Willibald Glaser (1906–?);<sup>26</sup> and Dr. Karl Lechner. One signature remains illegible.

Of significance is the diverse networking of the signatories of the letter through various organisations and groups. These included the Austrian youth movement *Bund Neuland* (Federation New Territory), whose *Bundesführer* (head) was Anton Böhm and which had a strong affinity with National Socialism (Scherzberg 2020a: 79–85; Weiß 2014: 88–90; 184–186; Böhm 1931; Seewann 1971). Several of the writers belonged to the *Volksdeutscher Arbeitskreis österreichischer Katholiken* (Volksdeutsche Working Group of Austrian Catholics), a group of German-national Catholics who wanted to realise an all-German *Volksgemeinschaft* which excluded the Jews. To this end, the group demanded the ousting of Jews from academic professions and the deprivation of their political rights (Scherzberg 2020a: 85–87; Behal 2009: 770–790; Wenninger 2018: 211; Korotin 2006: 51). The group was directed against political Catholicism, that is, the Christian Social Party, and instead called for a “religious Catholicism.” Presumably this circle is identical with the *Katholisch-Nationalen* (thus called elsewhere), which, with the approval of Innitzer’s predecessor, Cardinal Friedrich Gustav Piffl (1864–1932), had already entered into negotiations with the National Socialists before 1933 (Weinzierl 1963: 506). Many of the members belonged to the *Deutscher Klub* (German Club) and the *Deutsche Gemeinschaft* (German Community). The former was an elitist network that was instrumental in the Nazi infiltration of Austria. Even though the *Klub* was dissolved in 1939, many of its members made careers under the National Socialists (Huber, Erker, and Taschwer 2020). The latter was an anti-Semitic secret society, founded by student Catholic and German nationalist fraternities. It included many politicians of the First Republic, among them the later Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß (1892–1934). Dreams of *Großdeutschland*, anti-Semitism,

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Vienna 1, Goethegasse 3 has behaved impeccably in every respect during the period of prohibition and to the best of his ability has placed himself in the service of the National Socialist Party. His wife and children are illegal party comrades. The above-mentioned was a Czechoslovak citizen, member of the SDP and is said to be a personal friend of Pg. Henlein” (“Dubsky Adolf Graf Leg[at]ions]Rat, geboren am 30.6. 1878 Wien 1, Goethegasse 3 hat sich in der Verbotzeit in jeder Hinsicht einwandfrei benommen und nach seinen (*sic*) besten Können in den Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Partei gestellt. Seine Frau und seine Kinder sind illegale Parteigenossen. Der Obige war tschechoslowakischer Staatsbürger Mitglied der SDP und soll ein persönlicher Freund des Pg. Henlein sein”). Kreisleitung I Gau Wien to Gaupersonalamt, January 25, 1940, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 124.534/Dubsky Adolf/30.6.1878): 5; see *ibid.*: 4; 6; Broucek 1983: 454.

<sup>26</sup> Willibald Glaser, born in 1906 in Brunnersdorf, was cooperator of St. Johann in Vienna X district. He was ordained priest in 1931, and received the curacy on September 1, 1933. See *Personalstand Wien 1938*: 105.

anti-liberalism, and anti-socialism characterised the secret society. It postulated that Jews, liberals, socialists, and communists should no longer be able to hold influential state offices (Aicher 2012: 150–151; Staudinger 2002: 261–262).

Bridges to a Catholic-national Reich ideology were built via the journal *Schönere Zukunft. Wochenschrift für Politik und Kultur, Soziologie und Volkswirtschaft* (More Beautiful Future: Weekly Journal for Politics and Culture, Sociology and Economics) (Eppel 1980: 44–53; Ziegerhofer-Pretentaler 2006: 395–414; Schelonke 1995: 193–233; Weiß 2014: 115–123) and the *Bund Kreuz und Adler* (Federation Cross and Eagle) (Breuning 1969: 225–235). The founder and editor of *Schönere Zukunft*, Joseph Eberle (1884–1947), shaped the orientation of the journal towards a Catholic-national ideology of Reich based on the idealisation of the mediaeval empire by the history professor Heinrich (Ritter von) Srbik (1878–1951)<sup>27</sup> and the concept of a corporative state by Othmar Spann (1878–1950). Although Eberle did not want to give up Austria as a sovereign state, the journal advocated a “bridge-building” of the authoritarian corporative state to National Socialism. Anton Böhm, who was part of the editorial team along Eugen Kogon (1903–1984) and Alfred Missong (1902–1965)—the latter also a member of the *Bund Neuland*—spread his propaganda for a rapprochement with National Socialism via *Schönere Zukunft*. With the help of Böhm’s good contacts with Franz von Papen and the *Deutsche Gesandtschaft*, Eberle managed to keep the magazine alive until it was banned in 1941. Eberle was imprisoned for several months but released for health reasons.

The *Bund katholischer Deutscher Kreuz und Adler* was founded in April 1933 under the auspices of Vice-Chancellor von Papen. Catholic Germans were to be called upon to co-operate in the new Reich. An Austrian sub-organisation of the *Bund* was being planned, which again included Anton Böhm, but also Kogon and Franz Riedl. Among the founding members of *Kreuz und Adler* was the clerical religious instruction teacher Richard Kleine (1891–1974) from Duderstadt, who later became the leading head of the AGF’s covertly operating successor group (Breuning 1969: 225–235; 326–340; Scherzberg 2020a: 87–90).

Particularly important to the background of the *Schmerzensfreitagsbrief* was an organisation described by the liaison man to the *Reichskommissar*

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27 Heinrich (Ritter von) Srbik was a university professor, minister of education, and, after the *Anschluss*, a member of the Greater German Reichstag, in addition to being a member of the NSDAP (membership date: May 1, 1938). This meant that he had been recognised as an “illegal,” that is, as someone who was already active for the party at the time the NSDAP was banned. See Pesditschek 2015: 293–298.

Bürckel, Karl Pischtiak, as “party official” (*parteioffiziös*), namely, *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* (National Political Working Group for Religious Peace). Pischtiak described himself as its leader,<sup>28</sup> he named Pircher, Eibl, van den Bergh and Josef Schmid as his collaborators in his activity reports, and with Böhm they forged a plan of action.<sup>29</sup> Van den Bergh had already written a letter in 1936 on whether a convinced Catholic could be a convinced National Socialist, which was published by the *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (National Political Working Group). In this essay, he characterised the respective essence of the Catholic and National Socialist worldviews in order to highlight commonalities. He emphasised the “myth of blood,” that is, religion was determined by “blood” and “race,” whereas morality was determined by the “concrete, race-related” nature.<sup>30</sup> According to van den Bergh, sterilisation, castration, eugenics, anti-Semitism, and totalitarian youth education were nowhere bindingly dogmatically rejected<sup>31</sup> and anti-Semitism was permitted as “self-defence against Jewish foreign domination.”<sup>32</sup> The total claim to the education of youth was not in contradiction to the right to educate youth religiously and Catholically: “National socialist education is not denominational education, but anti-liberal, anti-Marxist, anti-materialist, ethnic, God-bound education, while recognising and respecting the given Christian denominations, so that denominationally ‘complementary’ education in the area of denominations is not excluded.”<sup>33</sup>

The address of the *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* given at the end of the manuscript was identical with Pircher’s private address. It is not entirely clear since when the group existed, but there are concrete indications that it was already active in 1935 and acted as both a legal arm of the NSDAP

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28 Personalfragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich von Karl Pischtiak, May 23, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 192.856/Pischtiak Karl/20.7.1906: 9.

29 Der persönliche Referent in den Fragen des religiösen Friedens beim Reichskommissar, Tätigkeitsbericht mit Vorbericht, July 1, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0: 104–107, here p. 105.

30 Dozent [Wilhelm] van den Bergh, Kann der überzeugte Katholik überzeugter Nationalsozialist sein?, in September 1938 edited by the Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden, Wien 7, Burgg[asse] 7, in DAW/NL Rudolf Kt. 123, Fasz. 10: 1–7, here p. 4.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.: 6: “Notwehr gegen jüdische Fremdherrschaft.”

33 Ibid.: 7: “Die [ational]s[ozialistische] Erziehung ist keine konfessionelle Erziehung, sondern eine anti-liberale, anti-marxistische, anti-materialistische, völkische, gottgebundene Erziehung bei Anerkennung aber der gegebenen christl[ichen] Konfessionen und der Respektierung, sodass die konfessionell ‚ergänzende‘ Erziehung im Bereich der Konfessionen nicht ausgeschlossen ist.”

and an intelligence service.<sup>34</sup> With the invasion and incorporation of Austria into the German Reich, this task was fulfilled, and the group was disbanded (Scherzberg 2020a: 92–93).

Two of the laymen in the circle of signatories are to be discussed specifically, as they are personalities who made a public career after 1945. Anton Böhm (Behal 2009: 154–180; 188–196; 209–236; 252–286; 314–335; Weiß 2014: 116; 182–186; 243–244; Eppel 1980: 44–53; Scherzberg 2020a: 96–99) was born on March 6, 1904. He studied law, political science, history, and philosophy and received his doctorate in 1928. He then worked as an editor for the journal *Schönere Zukunft*. From 1932 he was involved in the *Volksdeutscher Arbeitskreis österreichischer Katholiken*. Its leader, Wilhelm Wolf (1897–1939), later foreign minister in the Seyß-Inquart cabinet, helped him to build up the best relations with National Socialist networks, especially with the German embassy in Vienna and with Hans-Bernd von Haefen (1905–1944). According to his statements, Böhm joined the NSDAP on June 18, 1933, one day before the ban.<sup>35</sup> On May 24, 1938, he submitted the necessary registration application and stated that both the membership card and other evidence had been destroyed. He stated his commitment to the NSDAP as follows:

The applicant comes from the Catholic camp and considered it his duty to promote the National Socialist idea there. Through his personal influence and by cultivating the corresponding ideas, he has brought the vast majority of the Catholic League ‘Neuland’ to National Socialism. The boys’ groups of the Bund were already officially connected with the H-J during the illegal period and were immediately incorporated into it when it was overthrown. [...] The majority of the Bund’s university students belong to the SA. The rest (old academics, etc.) will disband voluntarily. The Bund had to be incorporated into the Kath[olische] Aktion in order to protect it from the VF<sup>36</sup> and the ÖJV<sup>37</sup>, which harassed it incessantly because of ‘Nazi sentiments’; at times ‘Neuland’ was also banned by the church on the insistence of the political side. In the Kath[olische] Aktion the applicant worked in a similar sense, although less successfully. In addition, he participated directly in the n[ational]s[ocialist] movement. Throughout the illegal period he was in personal and working contact with such men as Reichsstatthalter Seyß-Inquart,

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34 See the next section.

35 Personal-Fragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich, Böhm, Dr. Anton, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 37.724/Böhm, Dr. Anton/6.3.1904: 8–9, here p. 8.

36 *Vaterländische Front* (Patriotic Front).

37 *Österreichisches Jungvolk*. Junior organisation of the *Vaterländische Front* and state youth organisation in the authoritarian corporate state.

Mayor Neubacher, Ministers Wolf, Glaise-Horstenaus, State Secretaries Wimmer and Stuppäck, State Commissioner Wächter, Gauamtsleiter Fellner (Linz), First Secretary of the Reichsstatthalter Hammerschmid, Reg[ie-rungs]Komm[issar] Riedl, Reg[ie-rungs]Komm[issar] Reder and many others. They would be willing to confirm my statements.<sup>38</sup>

Apparently, this was convincing. Böhm received the membership number 6,105,089,<sup>39</sup> so he was recognised as an “illegal.”

Together with Taras von Borodajkewycz, Böhm participated in the preparation of the 1933 *Katholikentag* in Vienna and obviously influenced the programme and appeared as a speaker. After the *Anschluss*, he worked as a *Reichskommissär* of the magazine *Reichspost*, and published articles with a Reich ideological and Greater German flavour under a pseudonym. After a year of military service, he was recruited by von Haefthen to the Foreign Office in what was later named the Cultural Policy Department (*Kulturpolitische Abteilung*). There he was responsible for the region of southeastern Europe. At times he lived with Franz Alfred Six (1909–1975), who had headed the department since 1943, in his villa in Berlin-Dahlem. Towards the end of the war, he left Berlin for Austria and was interned in the US-American camp in Glasenberg—a place where important networks for the later period were formed among the internees. Böhm was released in October 1946

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38 Personal-Fragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich, Böhm, Dr. Anton, in AT-OeStA/Adr ZNSZ GA 37.724/Böhm, Dr. Anton/6.3.1904; Bl. 8–9, here: 9: “Antragsteller kommt aus dem kathol[ischen] Lager und hat es für seine Pflicht gehalten, ebendort für die nationalsozialistische Idee zu werben. Er hat den kathol[ischen] Bund ‘Neuland’ durch seinen persönlichen Einfluß und durch Pflege entsprechenden Gedankenguts zur weit überwiegenden Mehrheit dem Nationalsozialismus zugeführt. Die Jungengruppen des Bundes standen bereits i[n] d[er] illegalen Zeit in offizieller Verbindung mit der H-J und wurden beim Umsturz dieser sofort eingegliedert. [...] Die Hochschüler des Bundes gehören mehrheitlich der SA an. Der Rest (Altakademiker usw.) wird sich freiwillig auflösen. Der Kath[olischen] Aktion mußte der Bund schon deswegen eingegliedert werden, um ihn vor dem Zugriff der VF38 und des ÖJV38 zu schützen, die ihn wegen ‘Nazigesinnung’ unaufhörlich schikanierten; zeitweise war ‘Neuland’ auch auf Drängen von politischer Seite kirchlich verboten. In der Kath[olischen] Aktion hat der Antragsteller in ähnlichem Sinn gearbeitet, wenn auch weniger erfolgreich. Darüber hinaus beteiligte er sich unmittelbar an der n[ational]s[ozialistischen] Bewegung. Er stand die ganze illegale Zeit ohne jegliche Unterbrechung in persönlicher u[nd] Arbeitsverbindung mit Männern wie Reichsstatthalter Seyß-Inquart, Bürgermeister Neubacher, den Ministern Wolf, Glaise-Horstenaus, den Staatssekretären Wimmer u[nd] Stuppäck, Staatskommis[sar] Wächter, Gauamtsleiter Fellner (Linz), dem Ersten Sekretär des Reichsstatthalters Hammerschmid, Reg[ie-rungs]Komm[issar] Riedl, Reg[ie-rungs]Komm[issar] Reder und vielen anderen. Sie würden bereit sein, meine Angaben zu bestätigen.”

39 AT-OeStA/Adr ZNSZ GA 37.724/Böhm, Dr. Anton/6.3.1904, 2, 3, 5, 7.

and now used his Catholic networks for his further journalistic activities, for example, at the magazine *Wort und Wahrheit* (Word and Truth) and later at the *Rheinischer Merkur*. In the de-nazification process in 1948, he was classified as “*minderbelastet*” because he claimed to be a member of the anti-regime *Kreisauer Kreis* (Kreisau Circle) and the activity in the Foreign Office was a cover. High-ranking clerics, such as Michael Pfliegler (1891–1972) and Karl Rudolf (1886–1964), supported his defence. Until his death, Böhm belonged to the *Pro Oriente* Foundation, which was dedicated to dialogue with the Eastern Churches. Throughout his life, he denied having been an “illegal” member of the NSDAP, even on the occasion of a symposium in Graz in 1988 (Liebmann 1990: 222),<sup>40</sup> which was dedicated to coming to terms with the past. He never showed any awareness of wrongdoing.

Taras von Borodajkewycz is best known for the so-called Borodajkewycz Affair in the 1960s, which was initiated by the later Federal President Heinz Fischer (b. 1938) when he was a doctoral student. Von Borodajkewycz was a friend of Böhm and, like the latter, a member of the *Christlich-Deutscher Studentenbund* (Christian German Students’ Association) (Behal 2009: 207–209). After a few semesters of studying theology, he switched to the subject of history, later became an assistant to Heinrich Srbik, and also belonged to the German Nationalist *Deutscher Klub*. He was awarded a papal order for his work as secretary of the 1933 *Katholikentag* in Vienna. He joined the (then illegal) NSDAP in January 1934 in the local group Schottenfeld and paid his membership fees in the following years without any gaps. He applied for registration on June 12, 1938. As merits for the National Socialist movement, he stated:

I made my private flat available to the staff of the Vienna SA for their meeting. In my flat I wrote expert opinions for the illegal provincial leadership, which the present State Secretary Dr. F[riedrich] Wimmer had prepared and kept the copies. I was also entrusted with organisational plans of the Vienna SA, its accounts and files concerning the trial of General Krauss. My flat was often the descent quarters for members of the Old Reich who came with political assignments (e.g. Baron Thienen, M. Hieronimi). I did various works for the cultural department of the NSDAP (Dr. Morawetz-Thienen) Recruited new members and funds for the party. My scientific work and lectures served the

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<sup>40</sup> On the history of the symposium and on a subsequent exchange of letters between Böhm and Theodor Veiter, see Behal 2009: 368–377.

idea of National Socialism and were therefore fiercely attacked in the system press, even in French journals.<sup>41</sup>

State Secretary Friedrich Wimmer (1897–1965) and leader of the *SA Brigade 90* confirmed the information. The local group leader of Schottnfeld, Walter Babel, assessed the applicant as follows:

A proven fellow fighter. Paid his dues on time every month, recruited other members and put himself selflessly into the struggle of our movement. Conscientious of duty, loyal, willing to make sacrifices, impeccable character. Worthy of the honour of membership. Warmly endorsed.<sup>42</sup>

Von Borodajkewycz was recognised as an “illegal,” and enregistered.<sup>43</sup> He was given the membership number 6,124,741, with effect from May 1, 1938.

Von Borodajkewycz’s extensive *Gauakte* is full of enquiries about political judgement and corresponding answers. In many of them, he is said to be undeniably National Socialist, but in some he is also said to be unreliable because of his Catholic denominational ties and his contacts with clerical circles. This is illustrated by two examples. An official of the Office for Civil Servants (*Amt für Beamte*), “Pg. Kasper” certified von Borodajkewycz on the occasion of his appointment as *Archivrat*:

He is one of the best experts we have on the currents in the Catholic camp, and thanks to his outstanding intelligence, his personal kindness and his diplomatic skills, he is certainly of the greatest value to the movement. The sincerity of his national[socialist] convictions is beyond all doubt, which is

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41 Personal-Fragebogen zum Antragschein auf Ausstellung einer vorläufigen Mitgliedskarte und zur Feststellung der Mitgliedschaft im Lande Österreich, Dr. Borodajkewicz, Taras, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 8-10, here: 10: “Meine Privatwohnung der Stabsführung der Wiener SA für ihre Sitzung zur Verfügung gestellt. Ich schrieb in meiner Wohnung Gutachten für die illegale Landesleitung, die der jetzige Staatssekretär Dr. F[riedrich] Wimmer ausgearbeitet hatte und verwahrte die Kopien. Ebenso wurden mir Organisationspläne der Wiener SA, ihre Abrechnungen sowie Akten, die den Prozess des Generals Krauss betrafen, zur Verwahrung anvertraut. Meine Wohnung war öfter für Pg. aus dem Altreich, die mit politischen Aufträgen kamen, Absteigquartier (z.B. Baron Thienen, M. Hieronimi). Verschiedene Arbeiten habe ich für das Kulturreferat der NSDAP geleistet (Dr. Morawetz-Thienen), neue Mitglieder und Geldbeträge für die Partei geworben. Meine wissenschaftl[ichen] Arbeiten u[nd] Vorträge dienten der Idee des Nationalsozialismus u[nd] wurden deshalb in der Systempresse, sogar in französischen Zeitschriften heftig angegriffen.”

42 Ibid.: “Ein bewährter Mitkämpfer. Bezahlte pünktlich monatlich seine Beiträge, warb andere Mitglieder und stellte sich in selbstloser Weise in den Kampf unserer Bewegung. Pflichtbewusst, treu, opferbereit, charakterlich einwandfrei. Der Ehre der Mitgliedschaft würdig. Wird wärmstens befürwortet.”

43 Ibid., date August 18, 1938.

also borne out by his extensive relations with leading circles in the movement.<sup>44</sup>

In February 1943, Deputy Gauleiter Karl Scharizer (1901–1956) replied to an enquiry from the *Parteikanzlei* regarding von Borodajkewicz's appointment to the Extraordinary Professorship of Modern History with Special Reference to Southeastern Europe at the University of Vienna:

In summary, I would like to state that Borodajkewicz [*sic*] is probably one of the most remarkable representatives of the Catholic-national intermediate class, which the church has always used with pleasure and success in difficult political situations. In view of the entire previous life, the ideological activity and denominational commitment of the aforementioned, the temporary activity for the NSDAP recedes considerably into the background. I am therefore of the opinion that Borodajkewicz is not suitable as a professor of modern history.<sup>45</sup>

Depending on one's attitude, the historian's confessional attachment was thus seen as an opportunity or a danger.

In 1943, party expulsion proceedings were even brought against him because he had refused to donate anything at a clothing collection and was said to have publicly expressed doubts about the victorious outcome of the war. Although von Borodajkewicz defended himself vehemently, the district party court (*Parteikreisgericht*) expelled him from the party on June 7, 1943. On his appeal, the Vienna *Gaugericht* of the NSDAP, chaired by Gisbert Hoberg, overturned the expulsion on October 7, 1943, but gave him a severe

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44 Kasper to Gauleitung, February 26, 1941, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 16: "Er ist einer der besten Kenner der Strömungen im katholischen Lager, die wir haben, und Dank seiner hervorragenden Intelligenz, seiner persönlichen Liebenswürdigkeit und seines diplomatischen Geschicks sicherlich von allergrösstem Wert für die Bewegung. Die Lauterkeit seiner nat[ional]soz[ialistischen] Gesinnung ist über jeden Zweifel erhaben, wofür ja auch seine ausgebreiteten Beziehungen zu leitenden Kreisen der Bewegung sprechen."

45 Scharizer to Parteikanzlei on February 24, 1943, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 46: "Zusammenfassend möchte ich feststellen, dass es sich bei Borodajkewicz [*sic*] wohl um einen der bemerkenswertesten Vertreter der katholisch-nationalen Zwischenschicht handelt, deren sich die Kirche von jeher in schwierigen politischen Situationen gerne und mit Erfolg bedient. Bei dem gesamten Vorleben, der weltanschaulichen Aktivität und konfessionellen Bindung des Genannten tritt die vorübergehende Tätigkeit für die NSDAP doch erheblich in den Hintergrund. Ich bin daher der Meinung, daß Borodajkewicz gerade als Professor für Neuere Geschichte nicht geeignet ist." Scharizer had been a member of the NSDAP since 1927, Gauleiter of Salzburg in 1932, fled to Germany after the party was banned. He was deprived of his Austrian citizenship. After the *Anschluss* he became Deputy Gauleiter of Vienna until the end of the war. See [https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/Karl\\_Scharizer](https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/Karl_Scharizer) (accessed: September 30, 2023).

reprimand.<sup>46</sup> The justification referred to von Borodajkewycz's attitude, that he had "resisted expulsion from the NSDAP with drastic words" which "indicate that he is attached to the party."<sup>47</sup> The explanation of the necessity of the severe reprimand is notable:

But even his statements, which he admits as possible, were out of place. The accused knows very well that the block leader goes from house to house; he was therefore not allowed to give him such an answer, particularly not in the tobacconist's shop in front of others, even if he could not give anything more to the collection. If, moreover, a man like the accused makes such a statement about the war, people must either believe it to be true, because it comes from a Party member, or they must assume that this Party member no longer belongs to the Party inwardly and is in a different camp. If the accused himself were a man in the street, he would only have had to be reprimanded for his behaviour. His high level of intelligence, however, should have prevented him from making such statements. He was therefore to be punished for these statements.

The expulsion of the accused from the NSDAP was not to be upheld; he was to be given a severe reprimand because of his undisciplined statements.<sup>48</sup>

In the de-nazification procedure, von Borodajkewycz managed to be classified as *minderbelastet* by relativising his activities, which was apparently considered plausible.<sup>49</sup> From 1955, he held a professorship in economic history at the Vienna *Hochschule für Welthandel*, the present-day Vienna University of Economics and Business (*Wirtschaftsuniversität*). In 1953, he stood as a candidate for the Association of Independents (*Verband der Un-*

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46 Urteil des Gaugerichtes Wien der NSDAP v. 7. Oktober, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 53–56, here: 53.

47 Ibid.: 55: "gegen den Ausschluß aus der NSDAP mit drastischen Worten [gewehrt], die zu erkennen geben, daß er an der Partei hängt."

48 Ibid.: "Aber auch seine Äußerungen, die er als möglich zugibt, waren nicht am Platze. Der Angeschuldigte weiß genau, daß der Blockwart von Haus zu Haus geht; er durfte ihm daher, noch dazu in der Trafik vor anderen, keine derartige Antwort geben, selbst wenn er zur Sammlung nichts mehr abgeben konnte. Wenn sich ein Mann wie der Angeschuldigte überdies noch derart zum Kriege äußert, so müssen die Leute entweder die Äußerung für wahr halten, weil sie eben von einem Parteigenossen stammt, oder aber müssen sie annehmen, daß dieser Parteigenosse innerlich nicht mehr zur Partei gehört und in einem anderen Lager steht. Wenn der Angeschuldigte selbst ein kleiner Mann wäre, so hätte er für sein Verhalten nur gerügt werden müssen. Sein hoher Intelligenzgrad aber hätte ihn von solchen Äußerungen abhalten müssen. Er war daher wegen diesen Äußerungen zu bestrafen. Der Ausschluß des Angeschuldigten aus der NSDAP war nicht aufrecht zu halten; es war ihm wegen seinen disziplinosen Äußerungen ein strenger Verweis zu erteilen."

49 Ministerium für Inneres, Beschwerdekommision, Entscheidung v. 18. Januar, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 4–6.

*abhängigen*; VdU), the forerunner of the Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, or FPÖ), and in 1952 he spoke several times at meetings of the Action for Political Renewal (*Aktion zur politischen Erneuerung*), a right-wing conservative organisation that collaborated with the VdU. With the founding of the *Neuer Klub*, the successor organisation of the *Deutscher Klub*, Borodajkewycz stood by; in 1962 he became the deputy chairman.<sup>50</sup>

The Borodajkewycz affair was due to anti-Semitic and Nazi statements made by the historian in his lectures. These were met with applause by many students, especially from the FPÖ student organisation *Ring freier Studentent*. One participant in the lectures, the later politician Ferdinand Lacina (b. 1942), wrote down the remarks; his friend Heinz Fischer published them. Borodajkewycz then sued Fischer, initially successfully. Fischer did not name Lacina as a source, whose degree would have been jeopardised. In 1965, the cabaret artist Heinz Bronner (1922–2007) conducted a fictitious interview with Borodajkewycz in a television programme. Borodajkewycz was portrayed by an actor and given the notes Lacina had written down as answers. Shortly afterwards, Borodajkewycz held a press conference at the University and repeated his statements to the applause of his supporters, adding (truthfully) that he had voluntarily joined the NSDAP. As this took place before the eyes of the national and international public, demonstrations ensued during which the former communist resistance fighter Ernst Kirchweyer (1898–1965) was so seriously injured by the extreme right-wing student Günther Kümel (b. 1941) that he died a few days later. The sentence against Fischer was overturned in 1965 because Lacina was able to testify after his graduation. After much opposition, Borodajkewycz was compulsorily retired with full pay in 1966 (Kniefacz 2022;<sup>51</sup> Lackner 2015; Pape 2011; Fischer 1966; Gatterer 1966).

### 3. The Public Appearance of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* in 1938

The AGF, which appeared publicly in April 1938, saw itself as a group of priests, although it also included a few lay people. Pircher, who was not yet so clearly recognisable as a leading figure in the *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, now took centre stage as secretary. Van den Bergh was

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<sup>50</sup> Weissenburger to Z[entraleE[videnz]ST[elle], May 24, 1962, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ GA 13.985/Borodajkewicz Taras/1.10.02: 71; Aschenbrenner to ZEST, September 20, 1956, in *ibid.*: 72.

<sup>51</sup> See also the literature cited therein.

part of the group's leadership. In Carinthia (Karl Albrecht; 1899–1975), Tyrol (Franz Prem; 1900–1973), and Styria (Peter Klug; 1903–1990) there were so-called administrators who had received an official mandate from Pircher, possibly in Albrecht's case already through Pischiak.

Born in Andrian in South Tyrol as the youngest of eleven siblings, Pircher entered the *Deutschherrenorden* in Lana at the age of twenty (on Pircher, see Scherzberg 2020a: 110–117). One year later, he took simple vows and received the order name “Emmerich.” He studied theology in Brixen from 1909 to 1912. In 1910, Pircher made solemn profession, in 1911 he was ordained priest, and in 1912 he began serving as a parish priest. In 1914, he went to Silesia, changed provinces, but then left the Order and the region during the war to work in the archdiocese of Vienna under Cardinal Friedrich Gustav Piffl (1864–1932). He did not participate in World War I, but followed particularly closely the course of the war and the battles for his homeland. According to Franz Loidl (1972: 5), he was deeply affected by the defeat and the cession of South Tyrol to Italy. Pircher was appointed as a *Kooperator* (a cleric attributed to a parish priest) in the workers' districts of Gloggnitz, Atzgersdorf, and Schwechat, and was incardinated into the archdiocese in October 1921. In 1923, he worked as a religious education teacher in Schwechat and in 1926 as a catechist at the middle and secondary school in Neuottakring, which was also a workers' district. From 1926 to 1928, he worked as a chaplain in the House of Mercy (*Haus der Barmherzigkeit*), a place founded in 1875 by the *Bruderschaft der Allerheiligsten Dreifaltigkeit* (Brotherhood of the Most Holy Trinity) for poor and seriously and incurably ill people. There, a friendship developed with the younger second parish priest, who in 1971 was able to give Franz Loidl information about Pircher at his request. The Cistercian priest Franz Dutzler attested to his former confrere and friend that he had “always been concerned about social justice.” He had been very interested in politics and had been “deeply shocked by the sad events of July 15, 1927,”<sup>52</sup> that is, the workers' uprising, the burning of the Palace of Justice, and the violent suppression of the uprising. After a dispute with his superiors, which, according to Father Dutzler, was about the unfair treatment of an employee, Pircher had to leave the house and moved to Burggasse 7, the first address of the AGF. Marie Pecarwitz, his housekeeper, who shared his attitude and also worked for the AGF, also left the *Haus der Barmherzigkeit* where she had worked as a nurse.

Pircher joined the NSDAP on April 24, 1933 (membership number: 1,605,856).<sup>53</sup> According to Dutzler's testimony, there had never been any

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52 Dutzler to Loidl, January 15, 1971, in Loidl 1972: 24–27, here 24: “stets auf soziale Gerechtigkeit bedacht”; “tief erschüttert von den traurigen Ereignissen am 15. Juli 1927.”

53 BArch NSDAP Zentralkartei, Pircher, Johann, 17.5.86.

talk about the NSDAP between himself, Pircher, and other friends in the late 1920s. He attributed Pircher's increasing interest in National Socialism to the rise in unemployment and the social problems associated with it. Pircher had seen in the NSDAP the chance to realise his social ideas: "P[ater] Edmund and I warned Pircher to trust too much in the promises of the NSDAP. But he saw in this party the possibility for achieving his ideas: Social justice, job creation and creating a better understanding between the Catholic Church and the party. The upheaval on March 12, 1938, brought the appropriate situation for Pircher" (Loidl 1972: 25).<sup>54</sup>

According to Pircher, the AGF had more than 500 members and more than 1,800 sympathisers. "In October of that year [1938], 525 priests belonged to the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, who registered in splendid cover letters as *co-workers* for the peace work, and in addition 1844 priests from the religious and secular clergy expressed their joy and sympathy for it in writing."<sup>55</sup> This would have been about twenty-five per cent of the clergy in Austria. For this reason, these figures were often doubted by scholars (Reimann 1967: 179; Kaiser 2017: 281–282; 326; also Veselsky 1981: 539). By all indications, the membership file of the AGF was destroyed after the group was officially disbanded and the file confiscated. Pischtiak reported to *Gauleiter* Bürckel that, on November 3, 1938, the card index and correspondence in the AGF office had been confiscated by two men from the Secret State Police *Gestapo*.<sup>56</sup> Nothing is known about its whereabouts, and the actual number of members can therefore no longer be determined. Through a careful analysis of scattered existing sources, however, I was able to identify more than one hundred priests by name (Scherzberg 2020a: 143–200). These include

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54 "P[ater] Edmund und ich warnten Pircher, allzusehr auf die Versprechungen der NSDAP zu vertrauen. Er sah aber in dieser Partei die Möglichkeit für die Erreichung seiner Ideen: Soziale Gerechtigkeit, Arbeitsbeschaffung und Schaffung eines besseren Verständnisses zwischen der katholischen Kirche und der Partei. Der Umbruch am 12. März 1938 brachte für Pircher die geeignete Situation."

55 Johann Pircher, Berichtigung, 17 October 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 190: "Es zählten zur Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Oktober d.J. [1938] 525 Priester, welche in prächtigen Begleitschreiben als *Mitarbeiter* für das Friedenswerk sich meldeten und ausserdem gaben schriftlich 1844 Priester aus dem Ordens- und Weltklerus ihre Freude und Sympathie für dasselbe zum Ausdruck." See also the almost identical Pircher to Freunde und Mitbrüder, November 11, 1938, in DAW, NI. Rudolf, Kt. 46, Fasz. 4: 4 and Information II über die kirchenpolitische Lage in Grossdeutschland vom Januar 1939: 8, in AT-DAI, 4.1.22.4.9 Akten Franz Prem: "500 co-workers and over 100 from the Old Kingdom are at least a good start [...]" ("500 Mitarbeiter und über 100 aus dem Altreich sind immerhin ein guter Anfang [...]").

56 Pischtiak to Bürckel, November 15, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 147.

prominent persons, such as professors or major church administrators, especially from Fürstbischof Ferdinand Stanislaus Pawlikowski's (1877–1956) circle (ibid.: 185–198; Hofmüller 1997: 84–85, 95–99, 100–110, 159–161; Moritz 2002: 217–218, 230–235). The *Volksliturgische Apostolat* (People's Liturgical Apostolate) in Klosterneuburg joined the AGF in a letter of August 3, 1938, signed by Josef Casper (1906–1951), the right-hand man of the director Pius Parsch (1884–1954), and another employee. What has survived is a copy of the letter set in fracture with letterhead and two signatories explicitly stating that they would join: "Since we feel quite unified, both Christianly and völkisch, and likewise work professionally entirely in this way, we would be gladly prepared to participate in your working group."<sup>57</sup> In the AGF's Instruction Sheet (*Weisungsblatt*) no. 2 of September 1938, the entry of the *Volksliturgische Apostolat* was announced even before the AGF was banned by the Austrian bishops on September 28. After the ban, the Apostolate denied joining in the Vienna Diocesan Gazette of October 15, presenting it as a private initiative of the two collaborators.

2nd explanation! A few weeks ago two employees of the Volksliturgische Apostolat became interested in the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' (Vienna 8, Josefstädterstr. 7). They expressed this interest in a short letter. However, the two employees point out that the People's Liturgical Apostolate has not joined the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden.' Other information and rumours are incorrect.<sup>58</sup>

However, since the publication of the accession in the instruction sheet was not denied, but the objection was only voiced and published after the ban, it can be concluded that it was not a private initiative of Casper and the other employee.

Casper applied for membership in the NSDAP in 1938, presumably in August. The application and the personnel questionnaire are no longer in the Gau file, and the date of the application for registration is not mentioned on the files on the decision-making of the district court (*Kreisgericht*) and the

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<sup>57</sup> Volksliturgisches Apostolat to AGF (transcript), in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 187: "Da wir christlich wie völkisch durchaus einheitlich empfinden, ebenso beruflich ganz in dieser Weise arbeiten, wären wir gerne bereit, in Ihrer Arbeitsgemeinschaft mitzuwirken."

<sup>58</sup> Wiener Diözesanblatt No. 11, October 15, 1938, reprinted in Loidl 1972: 59: "2. Erklärung! Zwei Angestellte des Volksliturgischen Apostolates hatten sich vor einigen Wochen für die 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' (Wien 8, Josefstädterstr. 7) interessiert. Dieses Interesse bekundeten sie durch ein kurzes Schreiben. Die zwei Angestellten machen jedoch darauf aufmerksam, daß das Volksliturgische Apostolat der 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' nicht beigetreten ist. Andere Angaben und Gerüchte sind unrichtig."

Reich leadership. On August 14, 1940, the *Kreisgericht IX* of the NSDAP in the Gau Vienna rejected the application and requested deferral. The applicant had ceased to pay dues to the National Socialist Student Association (*Nationalsozialistischer Studentenbund*) in 1935 and had thus left. He could not provide evidence of “sufficient illegal activity.”<sup>59</sup> However, “the applicant’s political past is not such [...] that it would justify a permanent rejection of the applicant. The district court therefore requests a deferment until the membership ban is lifted.”<sup>60</sup>

On November 2, 1940, the registration questionnaire and the application form were forwarded to the *Reichsleitung* of the NSDAP,<sup>61</sup> which confirmed the decision of the District Court on January 10, 1941, and took the application into the files. The Vienna District Court was referred to “the order 34/39 of the Reich Treasurer of May 10, 1939” in the case of a “renewed application for admission.”<sup>62</sup> This refers to the complete lifting of the membership ban in May 1939 that had been in force since May 1, 1933, and untightened in 1937 (Falter 2020: 48).

In May 1938, the AGF gave information about its self-image in an article in the *Korrespondenzblatt für den katholischen Klerus* (Correspondence Journal for the Catholic Clergy):

The Arbeitsgemeinschaft is not an association with statutes and membership fees, nor is it a subdivision of the NSDAP. However, it has earned the trust of the party during the years of struggle of the National Socialist movement. It is not financially supported in any way by church, state or party agencies, but relies on voluntary contributions from the circle of workers and friends of its effectiveness. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft is really what its name implies: here priests and lay people, who have the religious peace of our people at heart, have come together out of inner drive for free, practical activity in the sense of this goal.<sup>63</sup>

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59 NSDAP Gau Wien, Kreisgericht IX, Entscheidung vom 14 August 1940, in OeStA/AdR, BMI/GA/ 244227/Casper Dr. Josef/2.5.06 (pagination illegible): “ausreichende illegale Betätigung.”

60 Ibid.: “die politische Vergangenheit des Antragstellers jedoch nicht so [...], daß sie eine dauernde Ablehnung des Antragstellers rechtfertigen würde. Das Kreisgericht beantragt deshalb die Zurückstellung bis zur Aufhebung der Mitgliedersperre.”

61 This is evident from a stamp with a registered date on the letter of decision.

62 NSDAP Reichsleitung, Reichsschatzmeister to Gauschatzmeister des Gau Wien der NSDAP, Erich Schulze, January 10, 1941, in OeStA/AdR, BMI/GA/244227/Casper Dr. Josef/2.5.06 (pagination illegible): “neuerlichen Aufnahmeansuchens auf die Anordnung 34/39 des Reichsschatzmeisters vom 10.5.1939.”

63 Was ist und will die Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden, in Korrespondenzblatt für den katholischen Klerus, Wien XIII v. 13. Mai 1938, in DAW, Bischofsakten Kardinal Innitzer, Kassette 18, Fasz. 1: 10: “Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft ist kein Verein mit

A regular newsletter was announced to keep in touch with members and sympathisers. This was kept up with the so-called *Weisungsblätter*, of which, however, only two—in July and September—could be published. It was further pointed out that the AGF maintained an office at Burggasse 7, Pircher's address, with office hours from Monday to Friday from three to six p.m.<sup>64</sup> During the time of the public appearance Pircher and the AGF were able to move into a larger flat in Josefstädter Straße in the eighth district.<sup>65</sup> Consultation hours were held there, groups met, and there was a lot of public traffic. Marie Schulz was the secretary or office helper who managed the money and the membership register.<sup>66</sup> The instruction sheets were printed relatively lavishly. They used a cross surrounded by a swastika as their emblem; the letters of the AGF were also sealed with it. Pircher was temporarily released from his duties as a religious education teacher. In short, the group had financial resources. The fact that it received funds from the *Reichskommissar/Reichsstatthalter* was later claimed by Pircher in party expulsion proceedings brought against him to prove his loyalty to the party (see below).

With this group, Pircher tried to promote co-operation with National Socialism within the Catholic clergy. For him, who was strongly influenced by social reformist concerns and a strong anti-Semitism, National Socialism had solved the social question and united the people. The clerical teacher strove for the establishment of a Nazi priesthood as a National Socialist professional organisation. In his first *Information über die kirchenpolitische Lage* (Information on the Church Political Situation) which was intended for Bürckel and others, Pircher promoted the fact that the party supported the priests of the AGF because of their convictions.

The members of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' will certainly not lack courage and national commitment when it comes to helping to determine the struggle to bring about a sustainable peace between church and state. But according to the facts mentioned, it is above all a question of whether the party and the

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Statuten und Mitgliedsbeiträgen, sie ist auch keine Untergliederung der NSDAP. Allerdings hat sie sich das Vertrauen der Partei in den Kampffahren der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung erworben. Sie wird weder von kirchlichen noch von staatlichen noch von Parteistellen in irgend einer Weise finanziell unterstützt, sondern ist auf freiwillige Zuwendungen aus dem Kreis der Mitarbeiter und der Freunde ihrer Wirksamkeit angewiesen. Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft ist wirklich, was ihr Name besagt: hier haben sich Priester und Laien, denen der religiöse Friede in unserem Volk am Herzen liegt, aus innerem Antrieb zu freier, praktischer Wirksamkeit im Sinn dieses Zieles zusammengefunden."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> AGF, Weisungsblatt no. 1, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNSZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 99–100, here: 100.

<sup>66</sup> Report Pischtiak to Bürckel, November 15, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNSZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 147.

state have understanding and trust in the national priesthood and will give it the appropriate support.

I conclude my information with the certainly understandable wish that the Party should as soon as possible approach the idea of establishing a National Socialist Priesthood (NSP) in analogy to the N.S. Teachers' Association.<sup>67</sup>

The relationship with the Church leadership, specifically with Cardinal Innitzer, was not without tension. The more active the AGF became, the more he distanced himself from the group. However, this was not so much due to the group's goal of bringing about and promoting co-operation between the Church and National Socialism—this was what Innitzer himself was striving for. The problems were more of a disciplinary and ecclesiastical nature. In Innitzer's eyes, the episcopate was the one who had to conduct negotiations, not a group of priests who were obliged to obey their bishops. The actions of the AGF were not agreed upon with the ecclesiastical authorities, Innitzer criticised. The AGF had no ecclesiastical mandate to negotiate with state authorities on Church policy. The bishops as a whole also distanced themselves. "The Austrian Bishops' Conference declares that the episcopate alone is called to negotiate religious pacification with the competent authorities. Therefore, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* founded by some clergymen cannot be recognised by the episcopate."<sup>68</sup>

Consequently, the episcopal criticism of the AGF was by no means a criticism of National Socialism. Due to the strategy of the *Reichskommissar* Bürckel, who, like the party leadership, had long regarded Austria as a concordat-free area (Liebmann 1983: 145–189), and the objection of the Vatican, the bishops' efforts to reach an understanding with the Nazi state ultimately failed. Thus the AGF also lost its last support in the Church hierarchy. In

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67 Johann Pircher, Information über die kirchenpolitische Lage, September 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176, 157–169, here: 169: "An Mut und nationalem Bekennterum wird es den Mitarbeitern der 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' sicher nicht mangeln, wenn es gilt, den Kampf für die Herbeiführung eines tragbaren Friedens zwischen Kirche und Staat ermitteln zu helfen. Aber es handelt sich nach den angeführten Tatsachen vor allem darum, ob auch Partei und Staat Verständnis und Vertrauen zur nationalen Priesterschaft haben und ihr die entsprechende Unterstützung wird angedeihen lassen. Ich schließe meine Information mit dem gewiss begreiflichen Wunsche, die Partei möge möglichst bald in Analogie zur N.S. Lehrerschaft dem Gedanken der Einrichtung einer Nationalsozialistischen Priesterschaft (NSP) nähertreten."

68 Wiener Diözesanblatt 1938, August 19, 1938, reprinted in Loidl 1973: 48; as a transcript also in *Akten des Reichskommissars* in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 78: "Die österreichische Bischofskonferenz erklärt, daß allein der Episkopat berufen ist, über religiöse Befriedung mit den zuständigen Behörden zu verhandeln. Daher kann die von einigen Geistlichen gegründete Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden vom Episkopat nicht anerkannt werden."

September 1938, the Austrian bishops finally banned all priests from membership in the AGF. Two days later, this decision was published in the Viennese *Diözesanblatt* but not in the gazettes of other dioceses. The AGF did not receive its own notification.

VIII. Prohibition of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' for priests. The Bishops' Conference finds itself compelled, in implementation of its already declared rejection of the 'Working Group for Religious Peace' of August 19 I. J., to pronounce an express and formal ban on membership of this working group for all world and religious priests. The Bishops' Conference, in implementation of its already declared rejection of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' of August 19, 1930, finds it necessary to pronounce an express and formal ban on membership of this working group for all secular and religious priests. Vienna, September 28, 1930. † Theodor Cardinal Innitzer, h.c. Archbishop.<sup>69</sup>

In pretended obedience, the AGF disbanded. In a letter in the style and layout of the instruction sheets, the signatories van den Bergh and Pircher, invoking discipline, called on the members to comply with the ban but to continue to remain loyal to the Church and the "Führer" as well as to the cause of the AGF: "We therefore see ourselves compelled, in confirmation of our repeated declaration of loyalty to the Church and the Führer, to ask our employees concerned to persevere in their church and state loyalty and, in self-evident discipline befitting their profession, to comply with the ban referred to."<sup>70</sup>

Within the officially disbanded group, a dispute now flared up between Pischiak and Pircher over leadership (Scherzberg 2020a: 215–226). When Pischiak, without Pircher's knowledge, used the group's correspondence for a public anti-church statement in the press, the conflict escalated. Pircher tried to oust the competitor; the latter reacted with a Gestapo operation which

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69 Verbot der 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' for priests, in Wiener Diözesanblatt, September 30, 1938, no. 10: 124–125, reprinted in Loidl 1973: 58. The manuscript is preserved in DAW/Bischofsakten, Akten Kardinal Innitzer, Kassette 18, Fasz. 1: 62: "VIII. Verbot der ›Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden‹ für Priester. Die Bischofskonferenz findet sich veranlaßt, in Durchführung ihrer bereits erklärten Ablehnung der ›Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden‹ vom 19. August I. J. ein ausdrückliches und formelles Verbot der Mitgliedschaft an dieser Arbeitsgemeinschaft für sämtliche Welt- und Ordenspriester auszusprechen. Wien, am 28. September 1930. † Theodor Kardinal Innitzer, e.h. Erzbischof."

70 AGF, Mitteilung October 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 177: "Wir sehen uns daher veranlaßt, in Bestätigung unserer wiederholten Loyalitätserklärung der Kirche und dem Führer gegenüber unsere betroffenen Mitarbeiter zu bitten, in ihrer kirchlichen und staatlichen Loyalität zu verharren und in selbstverständlicher standesgemäßer Disziplin dem erwähnten Verbot Folge zu leisten."

led to the closure of the office and the confiscation of the card index. However, Pischtiak thus no longer got through to *Gauleiter* Bürckel, for whom he was presumably no longer useful.<sup>71</sup>

The power struggle between the two men also reveals their different assessment and use of the AGF. For Pischtiak, it was a party instrument, a kind of task force of experts on religious issues, which could intervene in the ecclesiastical sphere if necessary. Pircher, in contrast, aimed for a professional and mass organisation with a focus on priests. Pischtiak had presumably become useless to Bürckel after the failed negotiations and the tightened course against the Church. Pircher's aspirations, in turn, could be attractive neither to the party nor to the Church.

Sometime later, with the knowledge of the party authorities, Pircher and close confidants founded a group working conspiratorially towards the Church. In the meantime, the group had expanded beyond Austria into Germany. Richard Kleine, a priest and religious education teacher from Duderstadt, became a determining figure. Pircher remained in contact with *Gauleiter* Bürckel, who occasionally supported the group financially. However, the group did not receive an official mandate from the Nazi party or from the Church.

#### 4. The Successor Organisation to the AGF

The covert group was constituted in 1939 after many discussions and meetings between Pircher and his friends. An important role was played by the Augustinian canon Alois Nikolussi (1890–1965) of St. Florian, who does not appear in the files on the public effectiveness of the AGF but was known for his contacts with the NSDAP. Nikolussi suggested early that a kind of conspiratorial group be set up.

Now the ordinariates will want to shoot us down one by one. [...] Do we want to become illegal in secret? I would have the greatest desire to do so. If only the state would give us the means for a press. And the necessary trust. Without that, it won't work. [...] Dear Pircher Hans! It is the last stand. Let's retreat in the utmost secrecy. Then we begin to prepare the ground psychologically.<sup>72</sup>

71 Pischtiak to Bürckel, November 15, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 147; Anordnung Pischtiak without date, in *ibid.*: 204.

72 Nikolussi to Pircher, October 11, 1938, in AT-OeStA/AdR ZNsZ RK 2513/0, Kt. 176: 192: "Jetzt werden die Ordinariate uns einzeln abschießen wollen. [...] Wollen wir in aller Heimlichkeit illegal werden? Ich hätte größte Lust dazu. Wenn uns nur der Staat die Mittel zu einer Presse in die Hand gäbe. Und das nötige Vertrauen. Ohne das geht es nicht.

Pircher and Kleine, together with the Cologne layman Alois Brücker (1894–?),<sup>73</sup> who was a convinced National Socialist and had therefore lost his job as an editor (he then worked for the municipal health insurance company), developed into a kind of leadership circle. On the one hand, the covert organisation saw itself as a comradeship and conspiratorial community; on the other hand, it showed a clear hierarchy with regard to communication and the passing on of information. A small circle, for example, received the *Informationen zur kulturpolitischen Lage* written by Pircher.<sup>74</sup> In these, clear names were mentioned in the reports. They were intended for the *Gauleiter* to inform him about the situation in the clergy, but also to criticise anti-clerical attacks by state agencies or party authorities.

An extended circle was formed by the members of the group, who were sent the newsletter *Kameradschaftlicher Gedankenaustausch* (Comradely Exchange of Ideas). A large part of this newsletter has been preserved in the Kleine legacy; through this and other archive finds, twenty-seven issues of it could be almost completely evaluated. Due to inaccuracies in the dating, it remains unclear whether another issue existed. All recipients could participate in the *Kameradschaftlicher Gedankenaustausch* with reports, articles, poems, and sermon examples. The names of the authors were encoded—many can be decoded or resolved with the help of the correspondence between Kleine and Pircher. Kleine's contributions can also be recognised by their style. Certain aliases could not be resolved because too little information was available. In 1940, the group made a major gain with the accession of the prominent Tübingen theologian Karl Adam (1876–1966) (Scherzberg 2001; 2020a; 2023).

The group subsequently came into contact with the *Deutsche Christen – Nationalkirchliche Einung* in Thüringen and a *völkisch*-religious group around Ernst Graf zu Reventlow (1869–1943) (Scherzberg 2020a: 351–393; 2012: 327–333). The first joint meeting took place at the end of 1939, and

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[...] Lieber Pircher Hans! Es ist das letzte Aufgebot. Ziehen wir uns in allergrößte Heimlichkeit zurück. Dann fangen wir an, den Boden psychologisch vorzubereiten."

<sup>73</sup> Alois Brücker was born on April 25, 1894, in Steinenbrücke and joined the NSDAP in 1932 (membership number: 1,323,373). See BArch, NSDAP-Gaukartei. He was resident in Cologne throughout the period covered here. In the Gau file his occupation is given as writer. The correspondence available shows that he worked for a municipal institution.

<sup>74</sup> A total of seven such writings from the years 1938–1940 are available. See Gauge-richt Wien (Nosko) to OPG, June 7, 1941, in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (b. 17.5.86): 1: "According to *Pircher*, the 'Informationsdienst' was intended for the *Gauleiter* and some offices known to the *Gauleiter* and is said to have been produced only in an edition of eight copies" ("Der 'Informationsdienst' war nach Aussage *Pirchers* für den *Gauleiter* und einige dem *Gauleiter* bekannte Stellen bestimmt und ist angeblich nur in einer Auflage von acht Stück hergestellt worden").

others followed, including in Austria. The three groups were intended to initiate an understanding between the churches or between all religious Germans on the basis of the “*Volksgemeinschaft*.” Jews were by definition excluded from this *Volksgemeinschaft*. The meetings were characterised by the search for common ground, but at the same time by an interest in maintaining one’s own confessional identity. For the Catholic group, this vitally included the understanding of the Church and the priesthood, which they emphasised above all to their Protestant interlocutors. The *Deutsche Christen – National-kirchliche Einung* found an important protagonist in the Klosterneuburg pastor Otto Riedel (1878–1965) (Scherzberg 2020a: 64–66; 354–356). Riedel wrote reports to the Thuringian headquarters and was in close contact with the *Eisenach Institut zur Erforschung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das kirchliche Leben* (Institute for the Study of Jewish Influence on Church Life) (on the Institute, see Schuster 2017; Arnhold 2010a; 2010b; Heschel 2012; 1999). Riedel organised lectures with speakers from the Eisenach Institute, such as Walter Grundmann (1906–1976). Pircher was in close exchange with the Klosterneuburg pastor.

As World War II progressed, the group also suffered setbacks: there were no new members, there was no official mandate from the state or the party, and the usual support fell away when the *Gauleiter* changed. Moreover, many of the journals in which there were opportunities for publication were banned (Scherzberg 2020a: 428–444).

Finally, the group was shaken by party expulsion proceedings against Pircher, its secretary, and orchestrator. Presumably because of Pircher’s complaints against attacks towards the Church, in which he also very clearly named persons, the new *Gauleiter* Baldur von Schirach (1907–1974) instigated the proceedings against him.<sup>75</sup> In one of his *Informationen zur kulturpolitischen Lage*, Pircher had harshly criticised the obstruction of religious education in the Gau of Vienna.<sup>76</sup> To the *Gauleiter* Bürckel, for whom the information was intended, he argued that people blamed the *Gauleiter* for the abuses, sometimes even Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) himself, but actually only subordinate forces were responsible. Therefore, he said, this burden on National Socialism must be urgently remedied. Presumably one of those “blackened” in this way took advantage of the change of *Gauleiter* to complain.

Pircher was summoned to appear before the *Gaugericht* on May 21, 1941. There, in an unrecorded conversation with the presiding judge Karl Nosko,

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75 [Karl] Nosko (Gaugericht Wien) to Oberstes Parteigericht, June 7, 1941, in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (b. 17.5.86): 1–2.

76 Johann Pircher, Information V on the cultural-political situation in the Ostmark, Vienna, January 1940, pp. 9–10, in JAM, NL Kleine.

he was asked to make a written statement. Pircher defended himself vehemently in this statement, which he sent to the *Gaugericht* on June 5. He referred to his national sentiments from his early youth and his commitment to the party during the illegal period, as well as his activities in the *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and the AGF. He had never done anything with the intention of harming the party. The criticism he had voiced here and there had been based on objective facts. Moreover, his writings had only been written for the *Gauleiter* himself and a small circle.

I have been in contact with the National Socialist movement since 1928 and have belonged to the N.S.D.A.P. since 1932. Not only did I always remain loyal to the party in my attitude and inner stance, but during the difficult illegal period in the Ostmark I continued my efforts to promote the party among my colleagues – priests and teachers [...].

Originally I worked with a circle of party comrades in the Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft, in which racial, cultural and economic questions were dealt with. On the day of the upheaval, I came to the fore as secretary of the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' and placed myself at the service of the movement in this matter. The then Reichskommissar and Gauleiter Bürckel personally paid tribute to this working group in a public speech and granted me a monthly allowance to cover my travel expenses, which I made for the purpose of providing information. These information pamphlets were therefore intended neither for the people nor for the church authorities, but first and foremost for the party leadership, i.e., for the Gauleiter himself, and were known only to the very narrowest circle of my co-workers—all of them P[artei]g[enossen] or n[ational]s[ozialistisch] minded people.<sup>77</sup>

Already the president of the *Gaugericht* had certain reservations about opening proceedings. Therefore he forwarded all the documents to the Supreme

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<sup>77</sup> Pircher to Gaugericht Vienna, June 5, 1941, BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (b. 17.5.86): 3–4: "Mit der nat[ional]soz[ialistischen] Bewegung stand ich seit dem Jahre 1928 in Verbindung und gehöre seit dem Jahr 1932 der N.S.D.A.P. an. Ich blieb nicht nur in Gesinnung und innerer Haltung der Partei stets treu, sondern bemühte mich über die schwere illegale Zeit in der Ostmark fortgesetzt im Kreise meiner Amtskollegen–Priester und Lehrer–für die Partei zu werben, [...]. Ursprünglich arbeitete ich mit einem Kreis von Parteigenossen in der nationalpolitischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft, in welcher Rassen- Kultur und Wirtschaftsfragen [sic!] behandelt worden sind. Mit dem Tag des Umbruchs trat ich als Sekretär der 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden' in den Vordergrund und stellte mich der Bewegung in diesem Belange zu Diensten. Der damalige Reichskommissar und Gauleiter Bürckel zollte persönlich in einer öffentlichen Rede dieser Arbeitsgemeinschaft Anerkennung, billigte mir monatliche Zuschüsse zur Bestreitung der Reisespesen zu, die ich zum Zwecke der Information machte. Diese Informationsschriften waren also weder fürs Volk noch für die Kirchenbehörde, sondern an erster Stelle für die Parteiführung dh. für den Gauleiter selbst bestimmt und nur im ganz engsten Kreis meiner Mitarbeiter–durchwegs P[artei]g[enossen] oder n[ational]s[ozialistisch] gesinnte Leute–bekannt."

Party Court (*Oberstes Parteigericht*; OPG) and requested a decision. In the final paragraph, Nosko dispensed with the referential presentation according to Pircher's statements and adopted his view:

In view of the fact that *Pircher* carried out the activity he is now accused of with the knowledge and financial assistance of the Gauleiter *Bürckel* and in view of the fact that he cannot be accused of any public activity beyond this which would be directed against the aims of the NSDAP, I am in doubt as to whether I should comply with the Gauleiter's request even by opening proceedings. I therefore ask for your decision.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the letter from Judge Walter Knop (1906–1991) to *Gauleiter* Baldur von Schirach, the files of the Supreme Party Court contain revealing notes about Pircher's genuine National Socialist sentiments, which almost certainly came from this judge. In the letter he informed von Schirach that he did not consider party court proceedings necessary or expedient.

Pircher is a Catholic priest and thus strictly bound by confession. However, since he has been a Party member since 1932, he cannot be removed from the Party for this fact alone, unless he has been active in an anti-movement sense. It is true that one could infer from individual phrases of his that he is working against the Party's endeavours in this field. But if one reads his statements in context, this conclusion cannot be drawn at all. The basic tendency of his whole endeavour is obviously to make the Church, and especially the Catholic clergy, an instrument useful to the National Socialist state. His discussions of the political situation in the Church are deeply serious and repeatedly emphasise the Church's culpability for the way things are developing.<sup>79</sup>

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78 [Karl] Nosko (Gaugericht Wien) to Oberstes Parteigericht, June 7, 1941, in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (geb. 17.5.86): 1–2, here p. 2: "Mit Rücksicht auf den Umstand, dass *Pircher* die ihm nunmehr zur Last gelegte Tätigkeit mit Wissen und finanzieller Hilfe des Gauleiters *Bürckel* ausgeübt hat und mit Rücksicht darauf, dass ihm eine über diese hinausgehende öffentliche Betätigung, die gegen die Ziele der NSDAP gerichtet wäre, nicht nachgesagt werden kann, bin ich im Zweifel, ob ich dem Antrag des Gauleiters auch nur mit Eröffnung eines Verfahrens nachkommen soll. Ich bitte deshalb um Ihre Entscheidung."

79 [Walter] Knop (OPG) to Baldur von Schirach, July 5, 1941, in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (geb. 17.5.86): 7–8, here p. 7: "Pircher ist zwar katholischer Priester und insofern konfessionell streng gebunden. Da er seit 1932 Parteigenosse ist, kann er jedoch allein wegen dieser Tatsache nicht aus der Partei entfernt werden, es sei denn, dass er sich in bewegungsfeindlichem Sinne betätigt hat. Nun könnte man zwar aus einzelnen seiner Redewendungen entnehmen, dass er dem Bestreben der Partei auf diesem Gebiete entgegenarbeitet. Wenn man jedoch seine Ausführungen im Zusammenhang liest, kann diese Folgerung keineswegs gezogen werden. Die Grundtendenz seines ganzen Strebens geht offensichtlich dahin, die Kirche und insbesondere den katholischen Klerus zu einem dem

His intention to establish a Nazi priesthood was “a crooked path,” but it also showed “his serious endeavour to bring the Church into harmony with National Socialist thinking.”<sup>80</sup>

The notes are particularly interesting in relation to Pircher’s criticism of anti-clerical measures. The note at the top reads: “P[ircher] wants an NS priesthood,” and “[h]e places the main blame for the deplorable conditions on the *Church*, on the clergy!”<sup>81</sup> Further down, written with a different pen, are the explanatory statements:

I see the basic endeavour of the party in the religious field as being to overcome confessional thinking and to oppose by all means any attempt to endanger the hard-won unity of the people by reviving religious disputes. In this respect, however, Pircher is not working against us, but for us. His occasional moderate criticism of the state should be overlooked with the greatest tolerance, because here and there in individual cases may indeed have been made unwise statements or taken unwise measures.<sup>82</sup>

The OPG asked *Gauleiter* von Schirach to review the matter and then to indicate whether the application for expulsion from the party would be upheld. After a relatively long time, the *Gauleiter* withdrew the application.<sup>83</sup>

Through the *Deutsche Christen – Nationalkirchliche Einung*, there was also more intensive contact with the anti-Semitic Eisenach Institute. Pircher, Kleine, and other priests met with the initiators Siegfried Leffler (1900–1983) and Julius Leutheusser (1900–1942). Kleine corresponded frequently with the scientific director of the Institute Walter Grundmann. Kleine and the priests Franz Sales Seidl (1904–1994) from Hohenwarth am Inn and Anton Würzinger (1905–1991) from Eggfing am Inn participated in the Institute’s

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nationalsozialistischen Staate nutzbaren Instrument zu machen. Seine Erörterungen über die kirchenpolitische Lage sind von tiefem Ernst durchdrungen und heben immer wieder das Verschulden der Kirche an der Entwicklung der Dinge hervor.”

80 Ibid.: “ein schiefer Weg” and “jedoch auch sein ernstes Bestreben, die Kirche in Einklang mit nationalsozialistischem Denken zu bringen.”

81 “P[ircher] will eine NS Priesterschaft” and “[e]r gibt die Hauptschuld an den mißlichen Verhältnissen *der Kirche*, dem Klerus!”

82 Handwritten notes [Knop], in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (geb. 17.5.86), without pagination: “Ich sehe das Grundbestreben der Partei auf religiösem Gebiete darin, das konfessionelle Denken zu überwinden und jeden Versuch, durch Wiederaufleben von Religionsstreitigkeiten die mühsam gewonnene Einheit des Volkes zu gefährden, mit allen Mitteln entgegenzutreten. In dieser Hinsicht aber arbeitet Pircher nicht gegen uns, sondern für uns. Seine dabei gelegentlich erfolgte maßvolle Kritik auch gegenüber dem Staat sollten wir aber schon deswegen mit größter Toleranz übersehen, weil hier und da in Einzelfällen tatsächlich unkluge Äußerungen oder Maßnahmen erfolgt sein mögen.”

83 Scherübel (Gaugericht Wien) to OPG, December 15, 1941 (receipt stamp December 18, 1941), in BArch, OPG Akten, Pircher, Johann (geb. 17.5.86): 9.

*Arbeitskreis für katholische Fragen* (Working Group for Catholic Issues).<sup>84</sup> The Institute's intention to eliminate any reference to the Jewish roots of Christianity—to “cleanse” biblical texts and liturgy—was not only shared by them, but also put into practice by themselves (Scherzberg 2020b: 469–487; 2020a: 483–494).

In 1944, the work of the priests' group was very much affected by the war situation (Scherzberg 2020a: 558). Meetings could no longer take place, correspondence was delayed, and contacts were limited to the inner leadership circle. The *Kameradschaftlicher Gedankenaustausch* was still published in a few editions and was mainly filled with contributions from Kleine, but Pircher was already feeling resigned. He wrote to Kleine that he had often been asked whether he was thinking of fleeing.<sup>85</sup> Brücker, in contrast, fanatically believed in victory, in which Kleine followed him. Brücker recommended further attempts to gain support from the episcopate, but Kleine, in turn, considered those efforts hopeless. However, he obviously hoped until the end that he would somehow be able to get through to important party positions.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The roots of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden* reach far back before 1938 and into many political and social networks. The *Nationalpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* worked as a taskforce for the NSDAP and consisted of party members who in turn had extensive contacts within the

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<sup>84</sup> Anton Würzinger was born in Kößlarn and ordained priest in 1931. He was cooperator in Markt and Neuötting, among others, and expositus in Eggfing (Lautenschläger 2011: 461–462 n. 108); von Hehl and Kösters 1996: 1275: “1937 house search by the Gestapo with confiscation of a cassette. In Eggfing, complaint about too frequent pastoral visits to the Polish camp. This was interpreted as espionage” (“1937 Haussuchung durch die Gestapo mit Beschlagnahme einer Kasette. In Eggfing Beanstandung wegen zu häufiger Seelsorgsbesuche im Polenlager. Dies wurde ihm als Spionage ausgelegt”). Franz Sales Seidl was born in Passau and ordained priest there in 1938. He was cooperator in Waldkirchen, Frauenau, Winzer, Pocking, and Altötting, and since 1938 in Hohenwart. In 1943, Seidl became parish priest in Landau an der Isar (Lautenschläger 2011: 461 n. 8; Spicer 2008: 290–291). After 1945, Seidl remained unchallenged in office as the city pastor of Landau, maintained good ecumenical relations, and received honorary citizenship of the Isar city (Scherzberg 2020b: 469; 487). In the directory *Priester unter Hitlers Terror* (Priests under Hitler's Terror), he is listed as persecuted by the Nazi regime because he was imprisoned for a few days in September 1941 because of a campaign for the school crosses (von Hehl and Kösters 1996: 1270; Janik 1980: 36).

<sup>85</sup> Pircher to Kleine, December 9, 1944, in JAM, NI. Kleine.

Church and its social environment. There were some priests among the members, but they were not in the foreground and did not shape the character of the group as one of priests. With the invasion of the German troops, the task of the group was deemed accomplished and it was disbanded. At this juncture, the priest Johann Pircher saw that his time had come. He changed the character of the group to a priests' group with a movement character, took over the leadership and coordination, and initially successfully recruited members and sympathisers. He envisaged the establishment of a Nazi priesthood as a National Socialist professional organisation—a plan that met with no approval from either the NSDAP or the Church as it was incompatible with the self-image of both organisations. Pircher repeatedly emphasised his loyalty to the NSDAP and the National Socialist idea, but also his loyalty to the Church. He would have never become a “renegade” priest, nor would his comrade-in-arms Richard Kleine. When the negotiations between State and Church failed, the group lost value for the *Reichskommissar* who had supported it—for the Church, this and the increase in anti-church measures made the concern of the priests' group implausible and bound to appear reality-blind. The ban on the AGF was the logical consequence, although it should be emphasised that it was not pronounced given that National Socialism as such was rejected. The covert group was still able to achieve some success but, in the end, it was caught between two stools. It did not receive the longed-for mandate from the party or from the Church, and the less the prospect of it, the more radicalised it became, especially in its anti-Semitism.

### List of Abbreviations

AGF	<i>Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den religiösen Frieden</i> (Working Group for Religious Peace)
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> (Freedom Party of Austria)
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
OPG	<i>Oberstes Parteigericht</i> (Supreme Party Court)
VdU	<i>Verband der Unabhängigen</i> (Association of Independents)

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Nachlass Prälat Karl Rudolf
- Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut* (JAM)  
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