Since the Internet came under widespread use in the 1990s, alliances between ultraconservative or fundamentalist Christian individuals and groups on the one hand and protagonists and media of the “Intellectual New Right” (Kornexl 2008 coined the term “Intellectual Right”) or even the “Extreme Right” on the other hand have surfaced, not only in the United States, but also in Europe and German-speaking countries, rendering them visible and accessible to a wider and also scholarly audience. Subjecting right-wing Catholic websites to critical scrutiny, reveals the motives behind the religious and political attitudes. While such attitudes in Germany represent the strongly-voiced opinions of a very small minority, they seem to be more widespread among Catholics in some Central and Eastern European countries as well as by parts of evangelical Protestants. “Right-Wing Catholicism” therefore raises critical questions directed at both theology and the Church(es).

1 Far-Right Interests in Forming Alliances with Christians: Cross-Milieu Collaboration

Certainly, collaborations between fundamentalist Christians and protagonists of the “Far Right” have existed before the 1990s and outside the

1 In the German political discourse, the term “extreme right” (Rechtsextremismus) refers to groups threatening the constitutionality of the state and can therefore be banned under German law. The term “radical right” (Rechtsradikalismus) refers to those right-wing groups beyond the political mainstream but are, by the Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (i.e. the German intelligence service), not considered to pose a threat to the constitutionality of the state (cf. Bundesamt). Members of the (Intellectual) New Right may either be extreme right or not (cf. Pfeiffer 2001; Gesserharter/Pfeiffer 2004).

2 In this article, I make use of the term “far right” as an umbrella term to describe radical and extreme right-wing groups. The term “extreme right” is only applied
ternet, but today the Internet itself exerts its influence on these interactions: (1) It increases groups’ and media visibility. Disseminating information as well as promoting own causes is far easier, much less expensive and far more effective in its outreach. (2) The internet facilitates in establishing contacts with other groups and in organising networks. (3) Special dynamics of escalation and self-radicalisation take place. (4) And finally, the Internet enables small groups of people to appear far more numerous than they are in reality, prompting other people to share their positions as well. Right-wing and fundamentalist groups often maintain more than just the one website to create the impression of mass and size and, in so doing, build a “parallel society” (cf. Strube 2017a, 60–64). This strategy known as “astroturfing” is currently employed, for example, by the German politicians Beatrix von Storch and her spouse Sven of the right-wing party “Alternative für Deutschland” (AfD, “Alternative for Germany”), who run a range of various websites not disclosing their affiliation with the AfD (cf. Strube 2017a, 60–63).

Within the right-wing political spectrum, in theory, different tendencies must be distinguished: On the one hand, we can identify protagonists of the “(Intellectual) New Right” attempting to enter mainstream society to wield influence by spreading their ideas among its members and, therefore, seek to create an intellectual and middle-class image of themselves. In order to “own” or – as they call it – exercise power over the discourse, their protagonists have launched their own publishing companies (e.g. “Antaios”, Götz Kubitschek), newspapers, journals (e.g. “Junge Freiheit”, “Die Freie Welt”), political institutes (e.g. “Institut für Staatspolitik”, Götz Kubitschek; “Institut für strategische Studien”, Beatrix and Sven von Storch) and make frequent use of social media in their attempt to recruit an intellectual, middle-class readership. On the other hand, we can observe a vast range of visibly far-right groups who make no secret of their political leanings, acting upon “bar room clichés”, uttering hate speech and, in some cases, even resorting to physical violence. In reality, however, the line between both tendencies is blurred and an overlap exits concerning their adopted attitudes, while their differences mainly pertain to the strategies they employ. The espousal of an ideological “right-wing extremism” to a degree that must be considered to pose a threat to the democratic rule of law is not uncommon in either field. The “Intellectual New Right” performs, as Thomas Pfeiffer labels it, a bridging function by carrying far-
right ideas into the middle of society as well as serving as a vanguard for the Far Right (Pfeiffer 2004). For this reason, creating a semblance of belonging to the middle class or mainstream is, in this day and age, a tried and tested approach among members of the neo-Nazi scene in an attempt to exert their influence (Röpke/Speit 2008 label this phenomenon: “Neo-Nazis in Nadelstreifen” – “Neo-Nazis in Pinstripes”).

Taking a closer look at these newly-forged alliances between certain Christians and right-wing political groups, their interaction points in two directions: On the one hand, right-wing political groups and media take a keen interest in establishing favourable contacts to certain Christian individuals and groups, even though these right wing groups and media may be oriented towards Neopaganism, just to benefit from the Christians’ reputation. On the other hand, certain ultraconservative, reactionary or fundamentalist Christian individuals, groups and media take an active part in forging alliances with right-wing political groups. Across Europe and within several Europe-wide networks, the common ground these alliances share centre around the following topics: (1) Islamophobia, more precisely described as hostility and hatred against Muslims and Islam; (2) persecution of Christians (mostly treated as an aspect of hostility against Islam); (3) the field of topics which is referred to by the term “anti-genderism” (Hark/Villa 2015), involving taking political action to safeguard traditional family roles and advocate a code of rigid sexual morality, supporting pro-life activities as well as opposing same-sex marriage and sex education. While expressing hostility towards Islam will find favour among evangelical as well as right-wing Catholic believers, being actively engaged in pro-life activities and anti-genderism will go down particularly well with Roman Catholic clerical authorities in Germany.

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3 For example, the weekly newspaper “Junge Freiheit”, which is the most important German publication and voice of the “Intellectual New Right”, decided to collaborate with the evangelical news agency “idea” as well as with several traditionalist priests in the 1990s, even though their readership partly shared anti-Christian, Neopagan beliefs. The favourable effect of also reaching and gaining a Christian middle-class-oriented readership was considered to be of more significance than perhaps losing a number of readers oriented towards Neopaganism (Kornexl 2008; Braun 2007; Strube 2015a).

4 The AfD party declared itself to be the single party taking action for Christian family values by supporting pro-life activities and combatting abortion in an attempt “to get a foot in the door” of the Church(es) – especially of the Catholic Church. However, this attempt seemed to have failed in the run-up to the German federal election in 2017 – due to the racist nature the anti-refugee-campaigns of this party.
The campaign “Demo für alle” (“The Protest for Everyone”) serves as an example both for the strategies pursued by New Rights seeking to forge alliances across milieus comprising persons from conservative Christian milieus to persons with extreme right positions and for the advocacy of a right-wing party by members of the Christian Church(es). The protests initiated by the campaign rally against same-sex marriage and other anti-gender topics, thus emulating the French “La Manif pour tous”. They maintain contacts to their advocators as well as to other anti-gender campaigns – or at least to those within Europe –, though never mobilising large numbers of participants. The German campaign “Demo für alle” was first initiated in 2014 by the “Initiative Familienschutz” (“Family Protection Campaign”), which belongs to the range of campaigns and websites run by Beatrix and Sven von Storch as part of their astroturfing strategy. From the very onset, the campaign “Demo für alle” was, for the most part, run by Hedwig von Beverfoerde, a Catholic and former member of the CDU (until 2016), who is engaged in several of the von Storches’ campaigns. A trademark of the protest marches organised by von Beverfoerde is the gathering together of speakers representing three different institutional backgrounds: These are members from Christian denominations, working professionally in their Church(es) (sometimes in leading positions); politicians from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and CDL (Christian Democrats Pro Life); AfD and JA politicians (“Junge Alternative” = “Young Alternative”). By doing so, von Beverfoerde unites politicians from a far-right party outside the standard political spectrum with politicians from a mainstream party representing the middle of society as well as with several notable members of the Christian Church(es), who, at least apparently, act as representatives of their Church(es). Of the parties involved, the single party deriving any benefit and actually gaining in reputation from this particular constellation is the AfD. On a side note, the “Demo für alle” is also pro-

5 E.g. Hartmut Steeb – managing director of the “Deutsche Evangelische Allianz” (German Evangelical Alliance), Karin Maria Fenbert – managing director of the Catholic aid organisation “Kirche in Not”/“Aid to the Church in Need”, Bishop Andreas Laun – former Auxiliary Bishop in Salzburg, several Orthodox priests, who maintain close contact to German-Russian immigrants, and Catholic authors writing on the topic of anti-gender such as Birgit Kelle and Gabriele Kuby. Steeb, Kuby and Kelle frequently write for several media of the New Right; Kuby’s books on the topic of anti-gender have been translated in nearly all Central and East European languages and exercise a considerable influence on the Bishops’ Conferences taking place in those regions.
moted by several extreme right groups, in particular by the “Identitarian Movement”, a group maintaining close contacts to at least some party members of the AfD and to more than just a few of the JA. Their members also join the protest marches, walking alongside conservative Christians, though they are not themselves invited to speak at these events.

Activities as those above support the claim that the New Right’s interest in Christian values, concepts and topics is nothing more than a shrewdly calculated strategy enabling them to reach and wield influence over mainstream civil society, to disseminate New Right ideas and to effect a shift in what is regarded as normalcy. However, for this strategy to succeed, it relies on reactionary or fundamentalist Christian persons or groups willing to collaborate with them. Apart from performing a bridging function or from forging a link between Christian milieus and the Intellectual or even Extreme Right, these Christians identify with and represent extremely right attitudes themselves. In an extreme case, right-wing extremism is religiously motivated, based on a skewed understanding of the Christian religion.

2 Examples of Different Forms of “Right-Wing Catholicism”

Networks and collaborations between religiously fundamentalist and extreme right-wing political groups, media and parties exist in all Christian denominations – be it Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox traditions – and in all European countries, in Russia and, certainly, in the USA, too. What is here referred to as “right-wing Catholicism” thus, in turn, neither represents a unique Catholic problem, nor is the problem a specifically German one within the Roman Catholic Church. Quite to the contrary, German Catholicism in all its diversity seems to display a heightened sensitivity to attend to potential threats from the political right and thus less prone to such close identification of faith and nation as, for example, is typical of Polish Catholicism or of German Protestantism pre-1945.

6 Examples for the ties between the Extreme Right and members of the Christian Church are the making and circulation of hateful demagogic media produced by the Extreme Right (e.g. “Politically Incorrect”) promoting so-called anti-abortion “prayer marches” and neo-Nazis participating in them (cf. Strube 2019).

7 My use of the term “right-wing Catholicism” (as well as “New Right Christians”) does not apply to every conservative Christian group, but refers to groups of persons who are religious and consider themselves to be Christians while collaborating with or operating as right-wing political groups or media at the same time.
An analysis of different right-wing Catholic websites reveals strategies as well as political and religious attitudes of right-wing Catholics. Similar as before, two different kinds of approaches must be distinguished: on the one hand, the approach of the “Intellectual New Right”, conveying right-wing attitudes and positions to Christian readerships and, in so doing, building a link and establishing ties to right-wing political media and, on the other hand, overtly displayed right-wing extremism.

The privately-operated Catholic website “kath.net” is representative of an extremely conservative Catholic milieu, flourishing and also expanding in sheer number during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. The website claims to be based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, albeit remaining critical towards its implementation. It sympathises with traditionalist positions, but, at the same time, keeps its distance from the schismatic traditionalist Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X (FSSPX). The editors of kath.net purposely establish connections with media of the “New Right”, for example the weekly “Junge Freiheit” and the internet platform “Die Freie Welt”, reprinting articles from the mentioned sources and depicting the AfD party, without exception, in a favourable way in their own reports. Close ties are maintained with the evangelical news agency “idea”. The majority of articles published on the site display a marked bias, with readers’ comments mirroring an array of right-wing positions (cf. Strube 2017b; Strube 2018a). Even though kath.net claims to be firmly based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, it distinguishes between “the words of the council” and the “so-called ‘spirit of the council’”, the latter being an errant interpretation of the council by progressive “lukewarm” Catholics. In fact, in some cases the phrase “Gespenst des Konzils”, meaning “spectre/spook of the council” is applied instead of “spirit of the council” (in German: “Geist des Konzils”). Prior to the inception of the pontificate of Pope Francis, “loyalty to the pope” and “submission” to the doctrines and teachings of the Papal authority described the fundamental religious identity markers of the Catholic milieu represented by kath.net. However, since Pope Francis commenced his papacy, the tone has changed within this Catholic milieu, becoming increasingly critical and harsh in tone, at times even hateful, against this Pope, an effect that can, on a psychological level, be explained as directing “authoritarian aggression” towards Pope Francis as a “violator of norms” (cf. Strube 2018a). As this dismissal of the Pope and his teachings clearly demonstrates, these Catholics do not give their religious submission to the Pope or the Papal supremacy, but abide to certain rules, norms, contents of the religion as well as to church structures, which are considered inerrant, eternal and unalterable.
The website “katholisches.info” is representative of a slightly different milieu within the right-wing Catholic sphere. This website combines traditionalist, anti-modernist theology with intellectual New Right political thinking. Its theological contents and positions are closely related to those of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X (FSSPX), and Pope Francis has come up against strong opposition from this website since day one of his papacy. The positions taken by this website and its readership and background milieu that it is representative of, are both more radical with regard to religious views and political opinions than kath.net and more sophisticated, at the same time. Reaching an intellectual and well-educated readership, is the obvious aim of this website, as, for instance, extremely conservative priests or other men (!) in leading positions.

An example for the espousal of a form of right-wing extremism that is punishable under law in combination with religious topics was the anonymous website kreuz.net, which was active between 2004 and 2012, before it was finally taken down. This website claimed to be hosted by orthodox Catholics officially working for the Roman Catholic Church, with their operators having close insight into and receiving internal information about ecclesiastical affairs. From a theological perspective, the website presented traditionalist, anti-modernist positions as are characteristic of the fundamentalist Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X (FSSPX); whereas, on a political level, kreuz.net was representative of anti-constitutional right-wing extremism (cf. Strube 2014, 182–187). Its propagation of antisemitism, Holocaust denial and incitement of the masses constituted an offence punishable by law, but, over the course of several years, it was impossible to get hold of the website operators. Finally, in 2013, the flats of two Roman Catholic priests, who also ran the right-wing Catholic website “gloria.tv”, were searched by the police and the computer hosting kreuz.net and storing the website platform and files related to it was located and confiscated, putting criminal proceedings into motion in the aftermath (cf. Kölner Stadtanzeiger 2013; wikipedia 2018).

On radical websites, such as kreuz.net, the political and ethical problems are easily discernible, whereas more moderate websites exercise influence in a more subtle way and, by doing so, reach and affect a broader readership. Even though a distinction between these different milieus and the expressed degree of right-wing positions and radicalisation can and must be made, various readers as well as authors accessed or rather were involved in publishing content on all three websites, thus demonstrating that the distinctions between them will blur and, as a consequence, self-radicalisation may occur more frequently than expected.
With regard to Germany, attitudes as these are not typically a prominent feature of German Catholicism, but represent the strongly-voiced opinion of a small minority. Nevertheless, such trends and tendencies can be spotted in various Catholic milieux across the globe, and the World Wide Web and social media make networking a simple endeavour. It is common among fundamentalist circles to brook no dissent in their personal views on religion and to not accept any half-hearted compromises, but intend rather to dictate the course of the official Church. One powerful means to put bishops and bishops’ conferences under the pressure of public opinion, for example, is in the form of social media campaigns, letters from readers or, simply, so-called “shitstorms”. However, what must be taken note of is the radical religious opposition building among a couple of leading clerics of the Roman Catholic Church against Pope Francis, who, to a greater or lesser extent, sympathise with milieux and movements like the ones outlined above in an overt manner. In the United States, for example, where the Religious Right, over decades, has remained a strong political force to be reckoned with, private Catholic websites, such as “Church Militant”, not only apply pressure on bishops to enforce their positions, but openly display their political sympathies with Stephen K. “Steve” Bannon and his alt-right movement (Martin 2017). Bannon, in turn, collaborates with the private right-wing Catholic “Dignitatis Humane Institute” in order to win influence on Rome and the Vatican (Müller-Meiningen 2017; idem/Löbert 2017).

3 Some Remarks Concerning Catholicism and Nationalism

At present, the German Catholic bishops take a clear stand against the Pegida movement and the AfD party, opposing right-wing politics and nationalism especially when the agitation their advocators stir up is directed against refugees. Though some dioceses made their rejection of right-wing anti-gender mobilisation heard, others have not exhibited their position in quite such a clear and audible fashion. Several bishops have, on several occasions, made it very clear that nationalism is not a Christian attitude. To this effect, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Chairman

8 www.dignitatishumanae.com.
9 See e.g. the guidance document of the German Bishops’ Conference: Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, Dem Populismus widerstehen. Arbeitshilfe zum kirchlichen Umgang mit rechtspopulistischen Tendenzen.
of the German Bishops’ Conference, declared in an interview he gave in July 2018: “A Catholic cannot be a nationalist”, thus directly levelling criticism at the current politics not only of the AfD party, but also of the Christian Social Union (CSU) party (KNA/Kirche und Leben 2018). From a theological perspective the Christian belief in all human beings being created in likeness to God as “imago Dei” (Gen 1,26f.) implies rejecting all kinds of racism and discrimination, as it is also explicitly stated in chapter five of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration “Nostra aetate”. As a global organisation, the Roman Catholic Church unites members of all cultural backgrounds and will not grant one nation more privileges than another or give one nation preference over another.

While German Catholics have had less opportunity of identifying faith with national identity, at least since the Prussian governance that was dominated by Protestantism, in some Central and Eastern European countries, the connection between nation and Catholic religion seems much more closely entwined in the public awareness, e.g. in Poland, where being Polish is typically identified with being Catholic. Moreover, the Catholic Church served as a guarantor of national identity during the time of Partitions and foreign hegemony, when Poland was “wiped off the political map” between 1795 and 1918. This background may be a reason why Polish nationalism draws less criticism from representatives of the Polish Church.

Expressing their concern, the Polish bishops, for example, wrote in an official pastoral letter dating from December 2013 that what is referred to as “gender ideology” not only “poses a threat” to families, but also to “our fatherland” (Hirtenwort der polnischen Bischöfe 2013). Addressing the same topic in December 2013, bishops from Slovakia declared the “culture of death” to pose a threat to “the existence of a nation. Facing such a threat, former generations did not hesitate to give their lives for the protection of their homeland” (Hirtenbrief der slowakischen Bischöfe 2013). To the vast majority of German Catholics, such sentences have a distinct nationalist – or even what we refer to as “völkisch” – ring to them. Drawing a line between the “Christian Occident” and Islam based on diverging religious-cultural identities might catch on within some Christian milieux, yet nationalism among Catholics seems a more widespread phenomenon in some Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Slovakia or Croatia (cf. Anic 2015; Choluț 2015). However, to prove the validity of this assumption, native speakers will have to conduct further research on this matter.
Even though right-wing attitudes pose a problem in certain milieux of the Catholic Church, in my estimation, nationalism plays a minor role compared to other factors. Assessing the religious profile of radical right-wing Catholic websites, such as kreuz.net and katholisches.info, they share common ground in strongly rejecting interreligious dialogue and ecumenism, degrading other denominations and religions, including Judaism, and denying the right of freedom of religion for all other denominations except the own. This devalorisation of other denominations is justified with the pre-conciliar concept of religious exclusivism, maintaining that there was no redemption and salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church (“extra ecclesiam nulla salus”). However, their mutual rejection not only refers to other denominations, but also to other moral practices and lifestyles, too, and those adhering to them, depreciating and even verbally humiliating them. Degradation concerns progressive Catholics, too, including anyone holding a liberal democratic worldview and believing that an open society is a viable option (Karl Popper). It even goes as far as condemning the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) declaring the freedom of religion a fundamental human right and promoting ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. These websites and their milieux legitimise their use of harsh anti-Jewish, antisemitic, Islamophobic, homophobic, sexist and anti-emancipatory attitudes by claiming to act on a sound religious basis. These positions, to which the term “Group-Focused Enmities”\textsuperscript{10} (Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit) applies, merge seamlessly with typical extremely right-wing ideologies of inequality as well as with anti-democratic attitudes and worldviews. Both the long-standing proximity of the schismatic Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X to extreme right-wing parties and regimes as well as the denial of the Holocaust by prominent members of the Fraternity have been well and repeatedly documented in academic literature (cf. for example Damberg 2009; Priester 2009).

Similar to the schismatic Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, the mentioned Catholic milieux build their theological foundations upon anti-modernist and anti-Enlightenment sentiment and theologies prevailing during the so-called “Pian Era” of the Roman Catholic Church (between

\textsuperscript{10} Group-Focused Enmity/Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit: technical term coined by Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Institut für Interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung, Universität Bielefeld: https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/ikg/.
1850–1950) as well as upon doctrinal documents dating from the same time, especially the Papal Encyclical “Quanta Cura” and its accompanying “Syllabus of Errors”, both promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1864, the anti-modernist Papal Encyclicals “Pascendi” and “Lamentabili” (1907) and “The Oath Against Modernism” (1910) by Pope Pius X. On a related note, it must be emphasised that the right-wing attitudes prevailing in certain Protestant and evangelical milieus are legitimised by religion, too, even though their Churches’ structures as well as their sources, i.e. doctrines, they draw their religious legitimacy from differ very much from the Catholic sources mentioned above.

All right-wing Catholic websites, even the less radical ones, including their users, at least as far as their comments reveal, display traditionalist and anti-modernist tendencies and, apparently, consider the anti-modernism of the “Pian Era” as the best, if not the only viable form of “true Catholicism”. Wolfgang Beinert, Martin Kirschner, Stefan Goertz and other theologians identify these anti-modernist, traditionalist views shared by the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X as well as by members of Roman Catholic chat groups on the Internet as the specifically Catholic form of religious fundamentalism (cf. Beinert 1991; Kirschner 2006; Goertz et. al. 2013). Catholic traditionalists pick out one single era – the era of anti-modernism – from within the broad Catholic tradition and recognise this tradition as an absolute source of validity, disregarding, in so doing, the Catholic theological concept of tradition, which is why Beinert refers to attitudes like these as “heresies” (Beinert 1991, 81).

However, the anti-modernist era of the Roman Catholic Church and the documents originating from this period constitute part of the Church’s history and, to some extent, its presence. Even though the decisions of the Second Vatican Council mark a fundamental turning point and an “anti-fundamentalist caesura” (Goertz et al. 2013, 36), it is still practiced to refer from a theological perspective to anti-modernist documents in a pure affirmative, and therefore unhistorical and uncritical way. Furthermore, the decisions of the Second Vatican Council were implemented with a varying degree of forcefulness in different regions of the world, on account of specific political situations, such as the communist rule, then prevailing in Central and Eastern Europe. For this reason, discovering new, democratic ways of dealing with these source texts pertains not only to certain sectarian milieus but to the Roman Catholic Church at large.
5 Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation as Psychological Motives of Fundamentalist Religious and Political Attitudes

By analysing the styles of religious thinking and speech expressed on right-wing Christian websites, the following characteristic features can be identified (cf. Strube 2015b, 2018a, 2018c): (1) a very negative worldview, pessimism, distrust, including what social psychologists refer to as a “dangerous worldview”; (2) dualistic thinking, meaning that the world is perceived as either friendly or hostile, holy or evil and other persons are considered either as friends or enemies; (3) moral rigorism and strict moral conformity; (4) the demand to monitor the observance of norms by others; (5) the demand for severe punishment of anyone breaching norms (partly advocacy of death penalty; demand for excommunication of differently-minded Catholic believers); (6) harsh rejection of differing opinions; (7) use of harsh critique and hate speech; (8) ridicule of people with differing opinions (including Pope Francis); (9) scandalisation of petty and unimportant things; (10) preoccupation with topics related to sexuality and homosexuality; (11) use of patriarchal and sometimes misogynous speech (thus providing proof for the patriarchal nature of fundamentalist religion, as outlined by Riesebrodt; cf. Riesebrodt 1990).

At least several of these attitudes define fundamentalist religious styles (cf. e.g. Goertz et. al. 34–5); at the same time, they can all be identified as features characterising, according to Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford (Adorno et. al. 1950), the so-called “Authoritarian Personality”. Based on findings of my studies (cf. Strube 2015b; 2018a-c), the religious attitudes that the comments of both the editors as well as the users of right-wing Catholic websites display are characterised by authoritarianism, especially according to Adorno’s description of the concept, for it includes more aspects than just conformity, authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression, as is the case with current socio-psychological studies on authoritarianism (cf. Iser 2006, 82–85). Adorno’s broader concept of authoritarianism offers an explanation for people rejecting all kinds of dialogue with differently-minded people and who are, in general, dismissive of diversity and of an open society at large. It also accounts for the orientation of right-wing Christians towards authoritarian structures in religious

11 See also the ideology of Carl Schmitt, Catholic theorist of the “conservative revolution” undermining the first German democracy of the Weimar Republic, who has the greatest say within the Intellectual New Right while also providing the ideological background.
as well as political contexts. Findings from studies I have conducted on this topic, suggest that authoritarianism also explains or may even predict fundamentalist religious attitudes (cf. Strube 2018a).

In social-psychological studies, a further predictor for right-wing attitudes is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius/Pratto 1999). On account of its hierarchical structure, the Roman Catholic Church, in particular in its pre-Conciliar form, may attract persons oriented towards exercising power, personal achievement and performance as well as being drawn towards hierarchies and being on top of these hierarchies. Some right-wing Catholic internet platforms and campaigns display Social Dominance Orientation, for example the “Society for Tradition, Family and Property” founded by several persons descending from noble families such as Mathias von Gersdorff and Paul von Oldenburg, a cousin of Beatrix von Storch. However, the concept of authoritarianism seems more fitting to account for the religious fundamentalism as well as right-wing attitudes prevailing among certain Catholic and other Christian believers.

6 Conclusion

The challenge and task faced by the Church(es) and Christian groups and communities at large is to encourage and support styles of religiosity leading to less fundamentalism and right-wing attitudes, less prejudices, less Group-Focused Enmity, less hostility and misanthropy (Klein 2017; Klein/Streib 2014). This task includes confronting the authoritarian structures within the own religious tradition. For the Roman Catholic Church this also means clarifying how it will handle the ecclesiastical documents and positions of the anti-modernist era both today and in the future. In some regions across Europe and beyond, the close identification of the ideas of nation and faith or of nation and denomination must be challenged.

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12 With offices in Germany, Austria and several other countries: http://www.tfp-deutschland.de/links_3.html.


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