

## “Think of Parzival!” The Practice of Race Mysticism in Catholic Girls’ Education in Nazi Germany

Presenter: Martina Cucchiara

Prominent scholars persist in their claim that the Catholic Church succeeded in maintaining separate spheres in the Third Reich and in immunizing the laity against Nazi antisemitism. Mainly resting on the episcopate’s rejection of scientific racism, this claim frequently has relegated discussions of antisemitism to the periphery of scholarship on the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany. This approach also ignores a recent shift in the historiography, which seeks to understand antisemitism in the Third Reich as an emotional practice whose practitioners casually interwove biological and mythical concepts of race. A 1933 Nazi publication stressed the limits of biology to capture the true nature of “Aryan” woman and manhood, positing Nazism instead as a spiritual quest, which could be experienced only through the heart and soul. This paper analyzes the practice of emotional racism or race mysticism in the education of Catholic girls in private Catholic schools in prewar Nazi Germany. Using the lens of race mysticism rather than race science to examine the curriculum and students’ writings illuminates racism as an emotional state of mind that could be honed through the engagement with an imagined ancient Germanic past. It emerges that race did not remain on the periphery in private Catholic schools in Hitler’s Germany. Instead, antisemitic race thinking permeated the classrooms and other school activities, as students and teachers negotiated and appropriated National Socialist ideology with the explicit goal to remain true to their Catholic faith. But Catholic girls’ piety and immersion in the Catholic milieu proved but a blunt weapon against Nazism.