

## Bertelsmann im Dritten Reich Conclusion (p. 551-562)

Religious tradition, political conformity, company continuity, publishing innovation, business success: the ideas defining the Bertelsmann firm's history during the Third Reich are not unusual. But they point to a tension that is both characteristic and multi-layered, and that needs renewed consideration at this study's end. Two interlinking questions are central to this summary: the real room for manoeuvre enjoyed by a private publishing house under Nazi rule, and the specific actions and policies of the publisher Heinrich Mohn.

### I.

Starting with its founding in 1835, the C. Bertelsmann publishing house's activities unfolded in one particular context: that of a *Weltanschauung* stamped by narrow ties—indeed, a unity—between strong Protestant faith and belief in the conservative state. Carl Bertelsmann and his descendants printed the uplifting literature, calendars, sermons, school-books and hymn-books of the neo-pietist revivalist movement that had eastern Westphalian Gütersloh as one of its centers, the movement's popular missionary efforts at reform being directed against Biblical-critical ideas linked to the Enlightenment. In this manner, the publishing house developed into the mouthpiece for an anti-liberal, congregation-oriented churchliness viewing the monarchic-authoritarian state as the foundation of worldly order—and as a bastion against the godlessness of modernity.

In essence, this “pious heritage,” taken up by Heinrich Mohn in 1921—the company's fourth generation—was still being maintained the year the Nazis took power. True, in the late 1920s Mohn began carefully expanding the publishing program to include popular literature, but the firm's defining *Weltanschauung* remained unaltered. His personal political views were also in line with those of his ancestors—although in contrast to them, because of fragile health he did not play much of a role in the public life of his native city (since the 1920s a bastion of national-conservative and volkish sentiment). Until 1924, Heinrich Mohn was a member of the German National People's Party, which offered a political home to the old elites of the Kaiser's Germany and conservative Protestantism. The extent to which he later sympathized with the Nazis remains uncertain; in any event he never joined the party.

Heinrich Mohn paid special attention to Bertelsmann's theological program, remaining faithful to its conservative profile throughout his life. In distinction to the scholarly and academic Protestant publishing houses, with their strict focus on modern, critical theological scholarship, the Bertelsmann publications were primarily aimed at clergymen and mildly cultivated laypeople in the congregation. The sorts of direct business developed outside the organized book-trade with such an audience in mind rested on a narrow cooperation with Evangelical clubs and associations; that business would become a model for the popular-literature program that the firm would pursue later with great entrepreneurial energy.

With its Christian apologetics, the “practical theology” propagated by the firm was meant to serve the church's mandate to spread the gospel. The struggle for the nation's “Christian renewal,” likewise a struggle against modern social and political currents, amounted to nothing less than an invitation to theologians and ministers looking for a connection with National Socialism through the volkish movement. Starting in 1933, texts in debt to Nazism and antisemitism found their way to Bertelsmann in this manner. Within the popular missionary

movement, there was a dissolution of borders between theological-churchly apologetics and support of the Third Reich. Heinrich Mohn's personal affiliation was with the Confessional Church in Gütersloh.

Challenged by the German Christians and National Socialist church politics, many Bertelsmann authors viewed the Protestant church and Protestant theology as once again facing the question of profession. Nazism's claims regarding *Weltanschauung* were here perceived in the framework of a specific debate: that unfolding after the First World War over the theological approach to modernity, and in particular over the Enlightenment and its consequences for religion and Christianity. The ideological and metaphysical categories manifest in this context were hardly ever scrutinized according to criteria of politics or justice, while the Nazi regime was appreciated for its corrective potential vis-à-vis modernity.

A confrontation with National Socialism is apparent above all in the so-called brochure-literature, with its discussion of the proper Christian response to ideas such as *Volkstum*, *Deutschtum*, and *Rasse*. The basic position of these texts involved establishing clear distance from the attacks of the German Christians on the Old Testament and their proclamation of a neo-heathen faith; beyond such distancing, the main concern was to harmonize the freedom of the Christian church and the dominance of the gospels with the Nazi movement. Its accession to power was welcomed in view of a hope for "political renewal" in the "führer state" and the future of the popular Christian mission in a unified volkish Germany.

One would search in vain in Bertelsmann publications for an explicit political critique of the Nazi regime going beyond religious-theological interpretation or churchly interests. To be sure, this did not prevent interventions by the censor. The few texts that considered the "Arian clauses" recognized the state's right to take rigid measures to solve the "Jewish question" without posing the question of civil rights within the state—and recommended the spirit of neighborly love within the church. The intensive debates concerning the significance of the Old Testament, defended as part of the Christian Bible but not recognized as the valid Bible of the Jews, were of a different nature. The Christian view of the Old Testament as a revelatory text did not prevent the authors from using antisemitic stereotypes in discussing the Jewish people.

Two special focal points of Bertelsmann's theological program were the evolution of the "Luther renaissance" and political ethics. Both had exemplary meaning for the publishing house's chief author, Paul Althaus. Although Bertelsmann-published Luther research was mainly devoted to historical-theological questions, the rediscovery of Luther was placed against secular West European modernism and, beginning in 1933, subsumed to the Nazi movement. Following the First World War, Althaus had set the standard in actualizing Lutheran theology with an underlying anti-modern, anti-democratic tenor. In his political ethics—going beyond avowals of loyalty to the "führer" that were ubiquitous in 1933—he theologically legitimated and valorized the Nazi regime's *Weltanschauung*. His theology of orders of creation saw German *Volkstum* as the concrete locus of divine self-testimony; that theology contributed greatly to increasing the regime's attractiveness within Protestantism.

Bertelsmann's theological program neither rendered the publishing house an organ of the Confessional Church nor of the German Christians. But its "middle line" and traditional orientation did not guarantee any distance from Nazism; to the contrary, they led to the emergence of a political theology with National Socialist leanings.

## II.

This was all the more the case for the popular-literature program that Bertelsmann had embarked on in the 1920s, initially with some caution. The model for the program was furnished by Pastor Johannes Zauleck's edifying and entertaining leaflets; purchased by various parishes, these were distributed by the hundreds of thousands, mainly to children and old people, and assured the firm's survival during the international economic crisis. In 1927, Heinrich Mohn tried to repeat that earlier success with *Der Christliche Erzähler* ("the Christian story-reader"), a magazine whose poetry, stories, and novels defended—sometimes, already, with volkish-nationalistic undertones—traditional Christian values against modernism's cultural and literary dangers.

In autumn 1928, Bertelsmann began to publish serial novels from the *Christliche Erzähler* as individual books. In view of the general "book crisis" of the 1920s (actually a crisis involving social decline of the educated public), this was not without risks. In fact, sales of the first such novel dragged. But thanks to innovative and intensive advertising and distribution efforts, the marketing genius Fritz Wixforth succeeded in transforming C. Bertelsmann into a publisher of popular literature—mass-produced in cheap editions starting in 1933. As with many other publishing houses, after the "seizure of power" commercial success was combined with a readiness to appear, both in advertising and through the publishing program, as a firm tied to "the soil." Being able to take on the influential volkish poet and Nazi publication-functionary Willi Vesper as a Bertelsmann author could only help in this process.

For Bertelsmann's publishing policies, the year 1933 initially did not signify any real break. Both in terms of contents and general *Weltanschauung*, the popular literature remained true to the familiar patterns. In any event, with the publication of war accounts starting in 1934—they were called *Kriegserlebnisbücher*, "war-experience books"—the firm's profile changed. Demonstrative avowals of faith in National Socialism did remain absent: these would mainly appear in war issues of the *Lichte Weg*, the successor to the *Christliche Erzähler*. But emerging from the depths of the provinces and German history, Bertelsmann's trivial literature did in many respects signal sympathy for the new regime. When its authors used literary camouflage, this was done affirmatively—not for the sake of criticism as with the "inner emigration." The shift to doing literary business in the Third Reich posed as little a problem for Bertelsmann and its authors as for most conservative writers and presses.

In the autumn of 1934, the firm's resounding success with *Flieger am Feind* ("fliers against the enemy"), "the Christmas book for Hitler Youth," was understood as a signal. Books presenting autobiographic accounts of the experiences of "German men" in war, the *Freikorps*, or Siberia evidently not only suited the historical moment but public taste. Likewise with nationalistic apologetic interpretations of history. With the new genre, the publishing house now found readers throughout the Reich, thus moving beyond provincial Protestant-family limits. The speed and consequence with which C. Bertelsmann transformed its program of popular literature clearly distinguished the firm from similar private publishers.

Heinrich Mohn's manifest ambition of making his firm—despite its Christian-edifying tradition—into one of the biggest publishing enterprises in Germany could not be satisfied through conventional trivial literature. For this reason, he did not hesitate when in the mid 1930s the upswing in war literature and militarization of society offered a chance to publish mass quantities of books while advantageously maintaining only a small repertoire of titles. The decision may well have been made easier by the fact that it allowed Mohn's participation in the "nation's duty" without recklessly obliging himself to National Socialism.

In order to market the war-theme, Bertelsmann exploited new advertising strategies available in the traditional book trade, but also the potential of both books sold door-to-door and the mail-order business. With the pamphlet-series *Spannende Geschichten*, selling by the millions to male teenagers and, later, soldiers at the front, the publishing house then placed itself in the service of a nationalist, in the end racist and anti-Bolshevik propaganda.

With the start of the Second World War, such tones became increasingly loud in Bertelsmann's popular literature. Booklets by so-called "war reporters" depicted the "blitzkrieg," and in complete harmony with the regime's wishes the war of aggression was depicted as a big adventure with a sure ending in victory by mentally and technically superior German troops. Already in autumn 1939, the firm had begun to offer various of its books in special Wehrmacht editions; beginning in 1942 these would be divided into "field editions," the "small field-post series," and "field-post booklets." While the political and ideological accent of these publications was often less obvious than in the *Spannende Geschichten*, often even superficially harmless material was suited for an underlying volkish-nationalistic message. The selection of titles opted for by the firm was not the sign of any sort of distance, let alone opposition, but the expression of clever adaptation to the evolving reading taste of German soldiers; for this reason, in the context of a "total war" the previously highly popular war stories figured rather less prominently.

There were two main sources for the unusually high number of Wehrmacht-editions (20,000,000), which allowed an explosion of profits and assured C. Bertelsmann first place in the production statistics—far above the Nazi party's central publishing house, Franz Eher. On the one hand, having one's own printing press as well as a skilled stockpiling of paper meant a considerable production capacity. On the other hand, the firm arranged contracts with presses in occupied Holland and behind the eastern front.

Against the impression created by the firm's directors after the war, cooperation with Wehrmacht offices and the propaganda ministry largely proceeded without complications. The conflicts Bertelsmann found itself in with censorship authorities on account of its popular-literature program had disparate causes. The military censors thus intervened when an issue of the *Spannende Geschichten* and Fritz Fechner's *Panzer am Feind* ("tanks against the enemy") revealed details of strategic importance for German war-operations. In the case of Fritz Otto Busch's *Narvik*, a depiction of the invasion of Norway, the "führer" himself was upset by some Christian-colored passages, and there were also problems with the rather wilful *Englische Rede* by Hans Grimm, who was otherwise highly esteemed in the Third Reich. It is clear from such cases that official interference was by and large no sign of a capacity for resistance, rather resulting from the unpredictability of a control-system doing without pre-censorship: in face of this system, mistaken estimates of available maneuvering space were practically unavoidable, particularly while getting started and against the war's backdrop. Possibly, in individual cases the mistakes also reflected an awareness by C. Bertelsmann of its founding *Weltanschauung*—this despite all of its ready conformity with the new system.

Starting in 1943, the firm was embroiled in criminal-legal proceedings, concluding mildly with a fine imposed shortly before the war's end. But these proceedings were themselves not grounded in any oppositional stance vis-à-vis the regime. Quite to the contrary: they resulted from an effort to continue with the lucrative, ideologically conformist production unhindered, despite demands made by the bureaucracy responsible for the war economy, under the sign of "total war." The charges leveled against Bertelsmann's directors were not unjustified: the improper use of so-called paper checks belonging to the

Wehrmacht and the hoarding of paper, as well as personal enrichment. At present, it remains unclear whether C. Bertelsmann's business practices in the confused and messy war-economy were unique or had their counterpart in other German publishing houses. What is clear is that the theological press that Heinrich Mohn had acquired in 1939, the Rufer Verlag, was closed in 1943 in the framework of "totalizing" the war effort—and that in 1944 even very influential intercessors could not prevent closure (equally war-linked, but doubtless facilitated by the ongoing legal proceedings) of C. Bertelsmann itself. Notably, this closure hardly affected the firm's technical operations. The external factors leading to it stand in direct contradiction to the company legend of a shut-down resulting from steadfastness of *Weltanschauung*, indeed resistance. It is in any event not improbable that the closure, imposed as it was on an agile and exceedingly successful Protestant family enterprise, lay in the interest of many party offices and competitors, above all the Eher concern, owned by the Nazi party. To this extent, there is possibly a grain of truth in the glossy self-depiction that Bertelsmann promoted after the war over some decades—even though no documentation suggesting as much is available .

### III.

In view of National Socialism's hostility toward the church, it soon became clear in 1933 that the ideas with which Heinrich Mohn came to Bertelsmann in 1921 had been unrealistic. But if Mohn then showed himself ready for a far-reaching accommodation with the changed political circumstances, this was in part due to a sense—not untypical for nationally oriented Protestants—of being able to harmonize his ideas with the ideas of the "new state." In Mohn's case, such a conceptual juncture was informed by economic calculation, partial political assent, and an at heart religiously motivated sense of duty, accompanied by the hope of enriching Nazi social-organizational aspirations with Christian elements. The juncture is most evident in the style of the firm's stewardship. Heinrich Mohn's notions of social care, achievement, and duty showed themselves largely compatible with Nazi communal concepts. The points of passage were fluid between the company-head's patriarchal leadership, the paternalist benevolence his firm traditionally nurtured, and the Nazi regime's social-political premises, with which C. Bertelsmann in many respects complied.

When the firm celebrated its hundredth anniversary in the summer of 1935, swastika-flags were hanging at its headquarters, and although church dignitaries dominated the ceremony the festival halls had something of the aesthetic atmosphere of the "new state." At the inauguration of the new press-building four years later, in April 1939, local Nazi prominents were very well represented. The addresses of the local branch leader and the mayor of Gütersloh both drew a parallel between the successful evolution of the publishing house and the rise of Hitler's Germany, and the works-council head of the German Labor Front attested to Heinrich Mohn's intact "allegiance" ("in respect to what accords with his convictions") along with a "capacity for economic achievement."

In actuality, increased orientation toward Nazi ideas of company management can be discerned starting roughly in 1937. The firm's self-perception as a superbly operating and producing communal structure—a sort of *Gemeinschaft* in the volkish, Nazi sense—is not only documented in the still extant *Gemeinschaftsbuch* of the German Labor Front. With increasing frequency, Mohn himself now personally confirmed the harmony between his house's tradition and the regime's economical and socio-political maxims.

We have few details concerning either the climate at Bertelsmann in this period or the political orientation of the employees and their membership in Nazi organizations. A company regulation from 1940 obliged employees to join the

German Labor Front and the welfare organization for party members and their families, the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*; for apprentices membership in Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls was obligatory. From 1937 onward, participation in the “production struggle of German enterprises”—pursued by Heinrich Mohn with great engagement—led to numerous improvements in daily work-life. Employees thus came to enjoy a broad palette of voluntary social benefits; beyond this, the “company leader”—*Betriebsführer*—paid special attention to strengthening the feeling of belonging: work-pauses and festive evenings were spent in the newly furnished common-room, with its portrait of the “führer,” along with the swastika-flag on special occasions.

In the Mohn family’s private life, the Third Reich was present above all in the activities of the six children: the younger ones belonged to Hitler Youth, the eldest—Hans Heinrich, then Ursula—to the Nazi party. Heinrich Mohn largely limited his own membership to Nazi organizations that were professionally necessary. Alongside the Reich Literary Chamber, he belonged to some professional organizations under the auspices of the Reich Chamber of Culture. He donated money to whatever organizations his children were active in—Hitler Youth, League of German Girls, the National Socialist Fliers’ Corps. In addition, he belonged to the patrons’ circle of the general SS, to which he regularly paid dues.

Heinrich Mohn adherence to National Socialism’s basic approach to labor is evident; his attitude toward the Third Reich’s anti-Jewish policies is far less so. In 1938, about fifty Jews lived in Gütersloh—a town where the November pogrom unfolded with special violence. It is unknown how the company-head reacted to the events, which would long remain a topic of local conversation. It is in any case clear that he did not participate in the subsequent “Aryanization” of Jewish real estate, and there is also evidence of his engagement on behalf of an employee whose wife was deported to Theresienstadt in the last months of the war. Mohn’s offer of help to the family after the war appears to suggest that direct confrontation with the anti-Jewish actions prompted him to act; this also seems suggested by his employment of two girls from Gütersloh who were Jewish *Mischlinge* according to the Nuremberg laws.

The Second World War dramatically altered the employment situation at C. Bertelsmann, as elsewhere. Initially, there was a steady year-long rise in the number of those employed, the figure reaching 440 in 1939; but by the middle of 1940 call-ups to the Wehrmacht and so-called service obligations for the armaments industry had moved things in the opposite direction. This, however, did not mean a fall in production: intensified production demands by the state combined with the threat of fines, as well as double and triple work-shifts, actually led to increased output.

Heinrich Mohn used foreign workers in Gütersloh beginning in August 1943; at least nine so-called civil workers can be documented, all coming from the Netherlands, hence classified relatively highly in the Nazi racial hierarchy as belonging to a “Germanic” people. They were far better treated than the army of millions of East European forced laborers used by German industry. The use of printing facilities in other countries led to an additional—indirect—employment of workers from “alien nations.” Hence between 1941 and 1942 presses were active for Bertelsmann in Lithuanian Vilna, and these made use of Jews from the local ghetto. The same can be assumed, but not proven, for Riga. Because of the paucity of sources, it is also unclear if C. Bertelsmann had any influence on the work conditions in these presses—and if, on account of the use of cheaper (Jewish) forced labor, the move to the Baltic for printing meant saving money.

The end of the Third Reich saw Bertelsmann again becoming a bourgeois family enterprise: itself a sign that the special economic conditions tied to military preparation and war were what had led, above all else, to so much profit over a ten-year period.

#### IV.

If, at the end of this book, we again ask how it came about that a provincial Protestant press still publishing exclusively religious material long after the First World War could become a mass supplier of nationalist literature in the Second World War, then perhaps the answer is present in an episode occurring in the first weeks after the Third Reich's defeat. In the summer of 1945, Heinrich Mohn and his associates turned to Hans Grimm and Will Vesper, over recent years the two most high-profile authors within what was viewed as Nazi high culture, in order to tie their names to the house in future years as well. This intention not only underscores, once again, the absence of any capacity for literary-aesthetic judgment; it also points to the unshakeable "national" sensibility shared by Mohn since the period of the Kaiser—a sensibility that he wished to maintain.

Such a mental continuum reveals an absence of any sense of the dimensions of the recently experienced political and moral catastrophe. To be sure, Mohn's capacity and readiness for conformity in the interests of his business would soon stand in remarkable contrast to that continuum. Without the determined will to place business goals above all other considerations, the firm would have never been able to build itself up—it would have hardly survived the economic crises and political turning points in the years between 1918 und 1948. Only a mixture of flexibility and persistence assured its success.

The mixture was supplemented by a particular feeling of solidarity manifest not least of all in the reaction to the bombs that hit the publishing house in the war's final days. Even before the Allied arrival, Mohn's brother-in-law Gerhard Steinsiek asked the local authorities for support in rebuilding the company—something meant to proceed as speedily as possible in line with "allegiance." Now as before, C. Bertelsmann stood under a spell stemming from an unusual combination of family tradition, religious sensibility, and nationalist ideology. This inner continuity had its outer counterpart: an understanding of its own public centered first on the readers' circle of the *Volkskirche*, then members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. With the book-club, such an understanding would find its postwar echo. In the years under discussion here, it was indisputably Heinrich Mohn, supported by a handful of long-term directors (some of them his relatives), who pushed the company forward in this direction.

In the case of C. Bertelsmann, a widespread *Weltanschauung* fusing conservative Protestantism and German nationalism was supplemented by an almost intuitive talent for collaboration with the Nazi regime. In the person of Heinrich Mohn, this talent found its expression in an ambiguity that appears to have been nothing less than a matter of principle. True, he never joined the Nazi party, but his membership in the SS patrons' group signalled his readiness for a political arrangement; true, he was a member of the Confessional Church and did not allow his son to be confirmed by a pastor of the German Christian persuasion, but to ever-greater extent his publishing program had a volkish and Nazi content; true, as far as can be seen he never openly expressed himself ideologically, but his children brought members of Hitler Youth together in the "brown room" of his private apartment-house's cellar.

Lying beyond a strategy of conformity that was certainly highly successful, but in the end not so unusual, is the antisemitic dimension of the books produced by

Bertelsmann. Clearly, a long tradition of Christian anti-Judaism stamped Mohn's religious views concerning Judaism; for many centuries, anti-Jewish writing had emerged from that tradition. At first little changed here when Heinrich Mohn took over responsibility for C. Bertelsmann. But with the public incitement against the Jews and the concrete persecution starting with the Nazi "seizure of power," antisemitism took on another sense: for the publishing house, it now signalled a willingness to see its own products linked to the backdrop of a discrimination steadily growing in virulence. As far as one can tell, Mohn did not see this as a moral burden.

It is unclear whether Mohn read any of the increasingly strident antisemitic texts making their way into the popular-literature program over the years—perhaps he left selection of these titles to his editor. On the other hand it is improbable that he was unaware of the anti-Jewish theological literature published by Bertelsmann; and nothing whatsoever indicates ignorance of the firm's purchase of licenses for books that had already enjoyed success elsewhere because of their aggressive Nazi ideas and antisemitism. At this point at the latest, opportunism had shifted into direct ideological and propagandistic backing of the regime.

The continuum of *Weltanschauung* within which the Bertelsmann house operated even favored conformity where Heinrich Mohn could have distanced himself from the regime without any great problems: in the *Kirchenkampf*, representing a true dilemma for a portion of German Protestantism. Here, as well, Mohn found his way to a characteristic ambivalence, publishing some works by authors from the Confessional Church—above all Wilhelm Florin's *Rosenbergs Mythos und evangelischer Glaube* ("Rosenberg's myth and Evangelical faith") while simultaneously collaborating with that movement's opponents—and friends of the Nazi party—the German Christians.

However closely we scrutinize the history of C. Bertelsmann in the Heinrich Mohn era, in the end it is not easy to say how much the firm's underlying Protestant stamp actually meant to him. In any case, the decision to abandon a self-imposed limitation to religious publishing and the embrace of popular literature was the clear sign of a resolutely business-oriented policy. What before 1933 could be understood as a purely economical response to the crisis of the book market was politics thereafter.

Nevertheless, particularly in view of the war literature the question needs to be addressed of whether Heinrich Mohn was pursuing other than business goals, and if so, of their nature. Presumably, it would be exaggerated to discover a wholehearted identification with Nazi war-aims in the new program. But it does seem that Mohn considered it both important and proper to supply the German reader with military literature, thus offering a contribution to the "final victory." That at the same time the publishing house played down its new business orientation in official self-descriptions was no sign of ashamed reticence. Rather, it was tactics: neither the competition belonging to the party nor the financial authorities were meant to notice the social climber from the provinces.

When quite soon after Germany lay in ruins, Mohn changed the accent once again: in face of the English occupation authority, he stressed his firm's Christian tradition—a tradition purportedly only interrupted in the last years of the war as a result of political interference. In this very serious crisis, the future of Bertelsmann—closed since 1944—hanging in the balance, stressing religious roots seemed the most auspicious path to a new beginning. Mohn thus did not hesitate to suppress or gloss over information about activities by the firm or his personal role in the Third Reich that might well have been compromising in the military government's eyes.



## V.

The growing inclination of Germans in the postwar period to see themselves and their nation above all as victims of Nazi rule had one particular expression at Bertelsmann: a self-interpretation excluding any critical reflection about the firm and its publications or the behavior of its directors in the Third Reich. There was certainly a recognition of the need to adapt formally to the new political realities; but to Heinrich Mohn and his colleagues, a basic rethinking of, say, the program's format did not seem required. Instead, they concentrated on continuity of business policies and substance—and on a resistance to all organizational demands from the occupying powers that might disturb such continuity. In this framework, the transferal of the company's leadership from Heinrich Mohn to his son Reinhard in the autumn of 1947 did not signify, at first, a caesura; rather, it was aimed solely at continuing a company that was in political trouble.

Doubtless, Bertelsmann shared its intransigence vis-à-vis Allied efforts at democratization with the main part of German commerce and industry, which in this respect was reflecting the mood of a *Volksgemeinschaft* that had just been released from Nazi expectations. In 1945, the rejection of anything that could be understood as an admission of political guilt and moral failure was not unique to big business, but rather the expression of a social mentality whose dismantling would accompany the Federal Republic through several long decades. But because such a transformation is manifest not least of all as a media-transmitted communicative process, it cannot be surprising that in a media-based company it would be at work as it were doubly—in book production and business behavior. For this reason, when a publishing house is at issue there are special grounds to explore the connections between the history of its management, its production, and its politics, as has been the case in the final chapter of this study.

The economic success realized by the Bertelsmann house in the Third Reich, its sometimes explosive growth, were grounded in a pronounced will—and in the capacity—to seize on the ideologized expectations of a politically regulated market in awareness of one's own strengths as an enterprise. Set against other private German publishing houses active in the same period (these in any case still need suitable study), we can speak in C. Bertelsmann's case of a special conformist dynamic—one necessarily also involving the publications' contents. Considering the Gütersloh firm's production in terms of its long-term history, what is constantly striking is a steady orientation toward a potential "mass market": from the edifying pamphlets to the popular functional literature and Wehrmacht entertainment, and beyond to the book-clubs of the 1950s. Put pointedly, Bertelsmann had a particularly attractive publishing answer ready for both the market and the ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*—an answer that was already present in Germany as a political concept before 1933 and that was not yet finished with in 1945.