

Hermann Dörries (1895-1977) – Patristics during the ‘Kirchenkampf’

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ABSTRACT

Patristic research in Germany during the 20th century was deeply shaped by the political changes in this country, of which the biggest was of course the rise and fall of National Socialism (1933-1945). The example of the German church historian Hermann Dörries (1895-1977) shows how Patristic research lost its appeal during the Nazi era, when different historic topics became fashionable, because they could be more easily connected to the current political debates. Before 1933, Hermann Dörries was deeply focussed on his research on the homilies of Macarius or the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. His work on these two topics not only decreased between 1933 and the beginning of World War II, but the works he did publish also convey a completely different idea of the purpose and methods of historical research than the publications before and after. The reasons for these extreme changes lay partly in the fact that with the rise of National Socialism new (pseudo-)historical debates had emerged, for example the question of the compatibility of a Germanic and Christian heritage. But it was not public pressure that led Dörries to partially give up his research and turn to these new questions but rather his personal conviction that it was his duty to engage in these debates and refute false opinions. The example of Hermann Dörries shows how the research of a young, seemingly focussed scholar was driven into new and unexpected directions after 1933 and how his work – even after 1945 – was shaped by the political situation he found himself in.

I. Introduction

In 1959, the German church historian Hermann Dörries presented a paper called ‘The place of confession in ancient monasticism’ at the Third International Conference on Patristic Studies in Oxford.¹ This paper was only one piece of a lifetime’s work on Patristics of this church historian. Hermann Dörries was born in 1895 in Hanover, Germany.² His theology studies were

¹ Hermann Dörries, ‘The Place of Confession in Ancient Monasticism’, in Frank Leslie Cross (ed.), *Papers presented to the Third International Conference on Patristic Studies, held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1959. Pt. 3. Liturgica, Monastica et Ascetica, Philosophica* (Berlin, 1962), 284-311.

² The only available assessments of Dörries’ life and work are Torsten-Wilhelm Wiegmann, ‘Hermann Dörries, ein Göttinger Theologe als Lehrer und Forscher in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus’,

interrupted by the First World War, in which he was severely wounded. In 1929, he became professor of church history at Göttingen University at the Protestant faculty of theology, where he remained until his retirement in 1963. He died in Göttingen in 1977. Today Dörries is mostly known for his work on the homilies of Macarius of Egypt, but he was also an expert on ancient monasticism, Constantine the Great, the medieval central European mission and Martin Luther's theology. During Hermann Dörries' lifetime, Germany underwent massive political transformations, from the Kaiserreich (1871-1918) to Democracy (1919-1933) to Dictatorship (1933-1945) and to the Federal Republic, we know today (since 1949).³ Until now, it has not been examined how Dörries' work has been influenced and shaped by these changes. Such a contextual analysis could not only shed light on the life and work of Dörries, but also on Patristic research in Germany during these decades as a whole. Unfortunately, the history of Patristics in Germany during the 20th century is still waiting for an overall assessment.⁴ But already a quick look into this time period proves how much Patristic research was influenced by political and social transformations, which were accompanied by revolutions of values and social rules. Here, I will only try to give some first thoughts on the following two questions: Which changes, turns and disruptions can we see if we explore Hermann Dörries' work on Patristics from the 1920s to the 1960s? And how can these changes be explained? To answer these questions, I am going to focus especially on Dörries' two main Patristic interests: Macarius' homilies and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

II. Patristics during the ages

Hermann Dörries focussed on Patristic topics from very early on in his career as a church historian.⁵ In connection with his PhD on John Scotus Eriugena, he

Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte 91 (1993), 121-49 and Peter Gemeinhardt, "‘Bekennende Kirche’ in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Hermann Dörries' Erleben und Deuten des ‘Kirchenkampfes’", in Inge Mager (ed.), *Überliefern, erforschen, weitergeben. Festschrift für Hans Otte zum 65. Geburtstag* (Hannover, 2015), 343-60. My current PhD project is the creation of a comprehensive biography of Dörries.

³ Not to forget the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990), of which Dörries was however never a citizen.

⁴ Wolfram Kinzig, 'Evangelische Patristiker und Christliche Archäologen im „Dritten Reich“', in Beate Näf (ed.), *Antike und Altertumswissenschaft in der Zeit von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus. Kolloquium Universität Zürich, 14.-17. Oktober 1998* (Mandelbachtal, 2001), 535-629 offers three exemplary biographies. Thomas Kaufmann and Harry Oelke (eds), *Evangelische Kirchenhistoriker im "Dritten Reich"* (Gütersloh, 2002), explore several church historians but without a specific focus on Patristics.

⁵ As a professor for church history at a German Protestant faculty of theology Dörries had to teach about all areas of church history but it was common to focus one's research on a specific era.

became interested in mystic sources, such as the homilies of Macarius of Egypt. Shortly after his dissertation, he started to collect manuscripts of these ancient homilies to eventually present an overview on the tradition of these texts.⁶ Already in his early years as a professor, when he moved from Tübingen to Halle in 1928, he was considered an expert on Patristics and the Middle Ages, even though he had not published much except the papers necessary for his degrees. A report on him says: ‘Recently he has turned to even more studies on Patristics, also supported by his knowledge of the ancient languages [...]’.⁷ In 1931, he was asked to write the article on Macarius of Egypt in the *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, even though he had not yet published anything on this subject.⁸ But, in the small world of pre-World War II Patristics, everyone in Germany knew that he was working on something big. Dörries used this article to describe in detail, which documents of Macarius’ homilies could be found in which archives. The name Symeon of Mesopotamia does not yet appear – later, Dörries should become famous for attributing the homilies to this author – but he follows Louis Villecourt, who had located the homilies in Mesopotamia.⁹

Before Dörries could finish his long-term-project on Macarius, he found the time to draft a short essay on the topic of ‘Mönchtum und Arbeit’ (‘monasticism and labour’).¹⁰ This was in the year 1931, when Dörries already taught in Göttingen. The article explores how the attitude towards labour changed from the first monks to the times of Pachomius. Dörries presents the *Apophthegmata Patrum* as the prime source for this question. He remarks: ‘Finally, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* sources are preserved, in which monasticism presents itself with the highest faithfulness. They are a standard, by which the reliability of the reports (*Hist. Lausiaca*, *hist. monachorum*, *Cassian*) and biographies (*Vita Antonii*) can be tested. The *Apophthegmata* [...] must form the base of every portrayal of early Egyptian monasticism’.¹¹ For Dörries, apparently without any second thoughts, the *Apophthegmata* represented historical facts. He writes: ‘There is no lack of statement about labour in even the oldest documents. [...] The answers express the character of the different individuals and groups’.¹²

⁶ Dörries describes this in the foreword to his *Symeon von Mesopotamien. Die Überlieferung der messalianischen ‘Makarios’-Schriften*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 55,1 (Leipzig, 1941).

⁷ See the report on possible new professors by the faculty of theology, 29.08.1927, Hermann Dörries’ Kuratoriumsakte Universität Halle, today Archive of the University of Göttingen Kur 10165. All quotes from German sources and texts were translated by me.

⁸ Hermann Dörries, ‘Makarios 1)-3)’, in Georg Wissowa (ed.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 14 (Stuttgart, 1930), 625-8.

⁹ *Ibid.* 626.

¹⁰ Hermann Dörries, ‘Mönchtum und Arbeit’, in Walter Elliger (ed.), *Forschungen zur Kirchengeschichte und zur christlichen Kunst* (Leipzig, 1931), 17-39.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 18.

¹² *Ibid.*

The essay itself is mostly a compilation of quotes and paraphrases of *Apophthegmata*. Dörries does not explicitly address the question of a possible difference between narrative and historic truth, even though he acknowledges that sometimes the *Apophthegmata* might only represent a wish or an ideal.¹³ This assessment was much influenced by William Bousset's book on the *Apophthegmata* from 1923, in which he established the *Apophthegmata* as the prime source for early monasticism.¹⁴ For many decades to come, this conviction should remain the mainstream opinion in *Apophthegmata* research, until it was challenged by researchers such as Samuel Rubenson.¹⁵

So, in the year 1931, Dörries was working diligently with his patristic sources. Be it the Macarius' homilies or the *Apophthegmata*, he was interested in their origin and their tradition because he wanted to gain a picture of history as accurate as possible. He actually planned to write an extensive study of early monasticism 'soon', as a footnote of the paper on monasticism and labour reveals.¹⁶

But this prospect changed almost overnight. In January 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and Dörries, who had been a supporter of the Nazi-Party at least since the year before, joined the party in March 1933.¹⁷ However, this sympathy should not last long. In just a few months, Hitler turned democratic Germany into a dictatorship. His radical reforms did not exclude the churches: State officials and many members of the church aspired the formation of a protestant state church, which would be a pillar of support for the new state – and could also be controlled more easily. But other voices opposed this idea and endorsed the ideal of an independent church. The rift between these two groups ran through the different territorial churches and local communities. Over the next years, two rivalling parties formed: the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians), who supported a strong national church closely linked to Nazi ideology, and the *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church), which supported an independent church, only grounded in the gospel. The Nazis tried to control the situation in their interest, which among other measures led to the detainment of several church officials. The struggle between the two church parties and the Nazi state apparatus as a third party is today known as the *Kirchenkampf* (church struggle).¹⁸ Dörries, appalled by Hitler's attempt

¹³ *Ibid.* 19.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Bousset, *Apophthegmata: Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen, 1923).

¹⁵ Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*, Bibliotheca historico-ecclesiastica Lundensis 24 (Lund, 1990), 152-7.

¹⁶ See H. Dörries, 'Mönchtum' (1931), 18 n. 1.

¹⁷ In 1932 Dörries published an appeal to vote for the NSDAP on the front page of the local newspaper *Göttinger Tageblatt*, see Hermann Dörries, 'Ein Appell an die Unentschlossenen', *Göttinger Tageblatt* (22.4.1932), 1. His party membership card from 1933 bears the number 2372330, see NSDAP-Zentralkartei BArch R 9361-VIII Kartei/6601656.

¹⁸ A short account of the *Kirchenkampf* can be found in Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided. German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), 15-41. Older but

to control the church, became an opponent of Nazi church politics and published several works, which were implicit critiques of a state church.¹⁹ Correlating with this change in political opinion were Dörries’ changing research interests. In 1934, an acquaintance of Dörries wrote to fellow theologian Hans Lietzmann (1875-1942) that the book on Macarius would be finished in the following year.²⁰ In the end, the book came out in 1941 and Dörries admitted in the foreword, that the work on Macarius ‘had had to step back behind daily business for some years’.²¹ What was this daily business, which distracted Dörries from his earlier interests? From 1933 to 1945, Dörries published an immense amount of smaller works on two topics, on which he had not written before at all: Martin Luther and the mission of the Germanic people.²² These two topics were closely linked to the political events of the decade: Luther played a prominent role in the discussion of the question of confession during the *Kirchenkampf*. Luthers doctrine of the two kingdoms became the most important argument in this debate. The other struggle that the church historians faced was a heated discussion between scholars of religious studies, church historians and members of the so-called New-Germanic religions. With the rise of National Socialism, several groups and individuals wanted to create a new state religion, which was based on the Germanic religion, the religion of the German elders so to speak. These ideas were a challenge for the churches because they casted doubt on the compatibility of Germanity and Christianity.²³

That church historians commented on current political developments, especially, if they concerned the relationship between the state and the church, had not been unheard of before. The defeat in World War I, which was experienced

still unsurpassed in its attention to detail is the unfinished study by Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich* (London, 1987 and 1988).

¹⁹ E.g. Hermann Dörries, ‘Äußere Ordnung und lutherisches Bekenntnis’, *Junge Kirche* 5 (1937), 582–6. In 1935, Dörries might even have become a member of the *Bekennende Kirche*. This is suggested by the testimonial of Dörries’ close friend Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen in his memoirs, see Hans v. Campenhausen, *Die ‘Murren’ des Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen. ‘Erinnerungen, dicht wie ein Schneegestöber’*, edited by Ruth Slenczka (Norderstedt, 2005), 157, but until today no official document confirming his membership has been found.

²⁰ Compare Einar Molland to Hans Lietzmann, 12.5.1934, in Kurt Aland (ed.), *Glanz und Niedergang der deutschen Universität. 50 Jahre deutsche Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Briefen an und von Hans Lietzmann (1892-1942)* (Berlin, 1979), Nr. 866.

²¹ H. Dörries, ‘Symeon’ (1941), V.

²² The most prominent publications are: Hermann Dörries, *Luther und Deutschland*, Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 169 (Tübingen, 1934); Hermann Dörries, ‘Germanische Religion und Sachsenbekehrung’, *ZGNKG* 39 (1934), 53-83; Hermann Dörries, ‘Germanische Nationalkirchen’, *Junge Kirche* 6 (1938), 8-23, 56-69.

²³ The only study of this debate with a specific focus on the role of church historians is Hanns Christoph Brennecke, ‘Der sog. germanische Arianismus als “arteigenes” Christentum. Die völkische Deutung der Christianisierung der Germanen im Nationalsozialismus’, in T. Kaufmann and H. Oelke (eds), *Evangelische Kirchenhistoriker* (2002), 310-29.

as an overall cultural shock in Germany, had prompted several developments in the whole field of theology, the most influential being the emergence of the Dialectical Theology. In the area of church history, Karl Holl's (1866-1926) new reading of Martin Luther, later called the *Lutherrenaissance*, tried to find a new relevance of Luther's theology specifically in a demoralised Germany.²⁴ In the year 1920, Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972), a student of Holl and later colleague of Dörries, published – as a church historian – a book with the title 'Germany's destiny'.²⁵

When the political developments suddenly accelerated in 1933, many church historians saw the need to comment on the situation. This can be exemplified by the many speeches on Martin Luther, which were held during the year, which marked the 450th birthday of the Reformer.²⁶ After the temporary wave of excitement in 1933, the ways in which church historians commented on the political situation with their works differed. They all had to form opinions concerning two major questions: They had to decide whether to oppose or support the Nazi state. And as Protestant theologians they were asked to speak about the inner-church controversies and about the question how closely related church and state should be. The individual positions varied immensely. Concerning the attitude towards the Nazi state, Wolfram Kinzig shows examples from 'active opposition' (Hans von Soden, 1881-1945) and 'distanced-critical back room diplomacy' (Hans Lietzmann) to 'active support' (Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, 1898-1942).²⁷

Whatever the individual position was, it must have been clear to all church historians, that their publications could be interpreted as statements concerning the political situation, whether or not they wanted it. Hermann Dörries chose the active way and began publishing works that he intended to be seen as comments on current affairs. It seems obvious that with a work on early monasticism or Macarius, this effect could not be achieved. Instead, Dörries turned to studies about Luther or the Christianisation of Germany. Not only Macarius vanished from Dörries' publication list, but also early monasticism and the

²⁴ A short introduction into the Lutherrenaissance is Heinrich Assel, 'Die Lutherrenaissance in Deutschland von 1900 bis 1960. Herausforderung und Inspiration', in Christine Helmer and Bo Kristian Holm (eds), *Lutherrenaissance. Past and present* (Göttingen, 2015), 23-53.

²⁵ Emanuel Hirsch, *Deutschlands Schicksal. Staat, Volk und Menschheit im Lichte einer ethischen Geschichtsansicht* (Göttingen, 1920).

²⁶ These speeches have mostly been examined in biographical works of the respective church historians, e.g. Karl Heussi's (1877-1961) speech in Peter Gemeinhardt, 'Karl Heussi, der Nationalsozialismus und das Jahr 1933', *ZThK* 104 (2007), 287-319 or Hanns Rückert's (1901-1974) speech in Berndt Hamm, 'Hanns Rückert als Schüler Karl Holls: Das Paradigma einer theologischen Anfälligkeit für den Nationalsozialismus', in T. Kaufmann and H. Oelke (eds), *Evangelische Kirchenhistoriker* (2002), 273-309. Dörries' speech on Luther from 1933 is – for this time – quite a clear rejection of the state's efforts to control and remodel the protestant churches in Germany, see H. Dörries, *Luther und Deutschland* (1934), especially 13.

²⁷ W. Kinzig, 'Evangelische Patristiker' (2001), 599.

Apophthegmata.²⁸ The extensive volume on early monasticism, which he had promised in 1931 and in which the *Apophthegmata Patrum* were supposed to feature prominently, was never published.

The situation changed only after the outbreak of World War II. In 1939, Dörries published a small pamphlet called ‘Das Bruderwort’.²⁹ The text was simultaneously published in the journal *Junge Kirche*,³⁰ which was known for its closeness to the *Bekennende Kirche*. This article addresses the high value, which the word of someone close to you – a brother – can have in dark times. As the title suggests, this is in fact not a historical treatise but a work of pastoral care. One can imagine that in late 1939, when the first news of fallen soldiers came from the front, the need for such pastoral essays was evident. It is nevertheless surprising, that a church historian saw himself in the role of a pastoral carer. The essay itself is a collection of sayings and anecdotes that are supposed to give a moral uplift to the readers. The first paragraph is dedicated to the *Apophthegmata*. But Dörries is no longer interested in exploring the history of ancient monasticism. Instead, he now presents the *Apophthegmata* as a means of pastoral care. He frequently uses phrases like ‘it does still speak to us, if Antony, [...] reminds us: “Life and death depends on the neighbour”. Because, if we win the brother, we win God. But if we scandalise the brother, we sin against God’.³¹ Or, ‘we need no explanation if the same [*i.e.* Antony] praises someone else with the words: “A true human, who can heal and save”’.³²

So, Dörries has not only left the *Apophthegmata* behind for several years, he now has a completely different approach to them. No longer are they mainly a reliable witness of early monasticism, but they are now primarily a signpost for the Christian today; comparable to other edifying texts such as the bible. ‘Perhaps’, Dörries writes, ‘this remote district [*i.e.* the desert fathers] is not as foreign to us at it may first seem’.³³

This change becomes even more evident if we look at Dörries’ work after the fall of Nazi Germany in 1945. Overall, the impression is that the years between 1933 and 1945 never happened.³⁴ Dörries, no longer obliged to fight against Germanic propaganda, turned again to the *Apophthegmata* and early monasticism and now could dig deeper. In 1947, he published an article on the Bible in earliest monasticism, which in its style is similar to the one on labour from 1932.³⁵ In 1949, he published a book on the *Vita Antonii* in which he

²⁸ If you discount book reviews (s.b.).

²⁹ Hermann Dörries, *Das Bruderwort* (Göttingen, 1940).

³⁰ Hermann Dörries, ‘Das Bruderwort’, *Junge Kirche* 7/8 (1939/1940), 858-930.2-8.

³¹ *Ibid.* 920, Antony 9 in the Migne Edition.

³² *Ibid.* Antony 29.

³³ *Ibid.* 919.

³⁴ This is not to say that Dörries had fallen silent about his life during the Nazi era after 1945, which he did not, or that he abandoned his newfound interests. In fact, Luther and the medieval mission remained topics he published on but not as frequently and especially not as politically as before.

³⁵ Hermann Dörries, ‘Die Bibel im ältesten Mönchtum’, *ThLZ* 72 (1947), 215-22.

wrote a lengthy paragraph on Antony's *Apophthegmata*, which mainly repeated the arguments for their reliability.³⁶ And in 1953, Dörries was asked to write the encyclopaedia article on the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in the new edition of 'Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart', which shows that he was considered an expert on this subject.³⁷ Not to forget the paper on confession in ancient monasticism that Dörries presented at the Patristic conference in 1959, also largely based on the *Apophthegmata*.³⁸

As to Macarius, it seems no coincidence that Dörries finally managed to publish his first monograph on the homilies in 1941. With the beginning of the war, almost everyone lost interest in the debates which had concerned theologians during the later 1930s. The church and theology as topics were ultimately marginalized, the student population dropped to one-digit numbers and some faculties were even closed.³⁹ Under these circumstances, Dörries finally managed to secure a sabbatical semester and finished his book. After the war he was able to make the homilies his major focus. He collaborated with other historians and theologians and published several more works on the homilies.⁴⁰ It is obvious that these collaborations just by their scale would not have been possible during the Nazi era.

To summarize, it is evident, that with the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship there was a huge shift in Dörries' work interests, which affected the choice of topics he worked on, how he did it, and to which aims. It is also evident that there was another shift after the war, even though one could also argue that the situation already changed during the war. The question that follows is how did this change come about?

III. What influences a church historian?

As I have already alluded to above, Dörries did not turn away from Patristics but rather gave up this area in favour of new topics. Most definitely, it was not state censorship or political pressure, which influenced Dörries in his research turns.⁴¹

³⁶ Hermann Dörries, *Die Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle*, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 14 (Göttingen, 1949).

³⁷ Hermann Dörries, 'Apophthegmata patrum', in Ernst Kutsch, Kurt Galling and Hans von Campenhausen (eds), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* 1, 3rd ed. (Tübingen, 1957), 496.

³⁸ H. Dörries, 'The Place of Confession' (1962).

³⁹ See Kurt Meier, *Die Theologischen Fakultäten im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1996), 437-65.

⁴⁰ Among them Hermann Dörries, Erich Klostermann and Matthias Kroeger, *Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, Patristische Texte und Studien 4 (Berlin, 1964); Hermann Dörries, 'Urteil und Verurteilung. Ein Beitrag zum Umgang der Alten Kirche mit Häretikern', *ZNW* 55 (1964), 78-94.

⁴¹ Of course, censorship took place and also affected Dörries: His article on Germanic Arianism, H. Dörries, 'Germanische Nationalkirchen' (1938), could not be printed as a reprint because the

Indeed he would probably have gained less attention and criticism from Nazi authorities, if he had kept on working only on Patristic topics. He himself decided to enter new and current debates, which the new form of government had initiated, and was ready to delay his former projects. This thesis is underlined by the fact, that Dörries did indeed publish some book reviews on books about the *Apophthegmata* and early monasticism.⁴² He was still interested in Patristics, but he decided to use most of his time to work on publications about other periods.

The motivation to contribute to current debates rooted deeply in Dörries’ self-understanding as a theologian. Already in 1932, he described the role of the theologian as an admonisher and counsellor to the politicians.⁴³ And in 1933 he wrote: ‘Out of this grows the task for the universities to interpret the past, so that the great dead, unseen but nevertheless visible to us, can become counsellors and admonishers for their faithful grandchildren’.⁴⁴ It was Dörries’ deep conviction, that he as a theologian and church historian could have an influence on the political debate and that he should use this influence to the benefit of the church and the Christian community. 1933 obviously marked a huge change in politics and society in Germany, especially concerning the role of the churches. Motivated by the wish to influence or even prevent some of these changes, Dörries began to purposely use history as arguments in a current political debate.

Then in 1939, the situation changed again: On the one hand, the outbreak of war increased the demand of pastoral literature and Dörries, having been a soldier himself in World War I, saw it as his duty to step in and write texts like the ‘Bruderword’.⁴⁵ On the other hand, with the beginning of the war, the debates about the Kirchenkampf and the Germanisation of Christianity began to become irrelevant. This gave Dörries time and space to focus again on his Macarius project. However, the Nazi era had shaped Dörries’ work interests for good: After 1945, he managed to combine his interests in Luther and the medieval mission with his works on Constantine, Macarius and monasticism.

As a church historian in 1930s Germany, Dörries found himself in an area of conflict, in which it was not possible to remain neutral. A future thorough

censors deemed it too critical of the idea of a state church. Dörries tried to intervene at the responsible ministry but was unsuccessful. His private correspondence reveals that he experienced this incident as a nuisance but not a threat. The documents of this process are preserved in Dörries’ estate in Bundesarchiv N 1271/69.

⁴² Hermann Dörries, ‘Rezension zu Karl Heussi, Der Ursprung des Mönchtums’, *ThLZ* 62 (1937), 101-3; Hermann Dörries, ‘Rezension zu Herwegen, Vätersprüche’, *ThLZ* 64 (1939), 175-6.

⁴³ See Hermann Dörries, ‘An die Kritiker des Nationalsozialismus: Ein Schutzwort statt einer Kritik’, in Leopold Klotz (ed.), *Die Kirche und das Dritte Reich. Fragen und Forderungen deutscher Theologen 2* (Gotha, 1932), 38-46, 44.

⁴⁴ H. Dörries, *Luther und Deutschland* (1934), 3.

⁴⁵ See letter from Dörries to Hans v. Campenhausen, 25.11.1939, estate of the von Campenhausen family, located at the Herder-Institut Marburg, nr. 1407a.

investigation of the history of Patristics during 20th century Germany could show how the church historians of these days positioned themselves between the aspiration for historic accuracy, the ideological demands of the day and the wish to serve the church and their communities. This last question is also a question that we could ask ourselves today. In my view, Dörries' example reminds us of always taking the political and social background of the individual into account when we assess the work of our predecessors.