Although the efforts to reorganize Strasbourg’s parochial system after 1890 were ultimately unsuccessful, the attempt itself was emblematic of the spirit of the times, and not merely within church circles. Throughout the Wilhelmine era, bourgeois reformers took a decidedly structural approach to their visions for social, political, and cultural change. Men like Friedrich Naumann and Werner Sombart argued that existing institutional arrangements, most notably in political life, prevented the development of effective strategies for dealing with contemporary problems like urban poverty and workplace conditions. They also regarded institutional reform as an essential precondition to effective change. Whether this occurred via constitutional reorganization or, as in the case of the antipolitical reformers that Kevin Repp has recently studied, via the creation of think tanks and new bureaucratic agencies, the premise was the same: even if restructuring something like poor relief would not solve the problem of urban poverty, keeping matters as they were would certainly not improve the current state of affairs.1

Similar sentiments also existed within the world of German Protestantism, where the very institution of the church seemed to be increasingly anachronistic. Pastors like Emil Sulze, of Dresden, argued that only by reshaping their public image and removing the structural barriers to involvement in their activities could the churches hope to regain some of their lost attractiveness (especially on the part of men) and carry out their mission effectively.2 After 1890, the notion that church reform would be desirable for pragmatic reasons also caught on in

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2 Emil Sulze, Die evangelische Gemeinde (Gotha, 1891); for a discussion of Sulze’s proposals from the standpoint of liberal Protestantism, see Hübinger, Kulturprotestantismus, 219–33.
Alsace-Lorraine. Because of the Fabri Affair (see Chapter Two), many church leaders were still reluctant to pursue changes that would require amending extant church law. The passage of the synodal legislation for the Reformed Church in 1905 effectively removed this obstacle, and from 1906 until the outbreak of the First World War, first the Lutheran, and then the Reformed Church devoted considerable energy to the task of devising churches for modern times.

At no time during the reform discussions did either Protestant church lose sight of the practical religious concerns that launched the entire process. The lower instances of the church organization, the parishes and consistories, would be defined as bodies with religious and not just administrative responsibilities. The churches sought to remove many of the obstacles to formal participation in church life, for instance, by allowing younger adults, resident aliens, and even women to vote and be elected to parish boards. Both churches also used the reform campaign to address specific problems or inequities that had cropped up over the years. The Reformed Church, for example, proposed that the Synod be granted the same rights as the Lutheran Superior Consistory to approve materials for religious education in the public schools.

The reform proposals generated after 1906 strove to modernize the two churches, above all by urbanizing them. At the most basic level, this meant including provisions that spoke to the particular needs of the territory’s cities, Strasbourg in particular. The Lutherans made the geographically-defined, district parish the norm for the entire church and created a new “Strasbourg Church Commission,” which had the authority to act on behalf of all the city’s parishes. The suggestion that women should have the right to vote and be elected was largely driven by the urban parishes’ need to involve all active parishioners in formal church life. The very spirit of the reform plans was also strikingly urbane. The Churches called their proposals “church constitutions.” They infused them with liberal principles such as due process and governmental transparency. In addition, the reforms strove to remake the church along the lines of a voluntary society, a move that required (in the churches’ eyes) a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between church and state.

The progressive, even daring elements of the campaign for Protestant church reform generated considerable controversy in Alsace-Lorraine, and not just within church circles. It attracted the attention of church officials and politicians in other parts of the Empire, in no small part because these discussions unfolded at the same time as negotiations for