

# **Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II**

**Concepts for the comparison  
of dictatorships**

**Edited by  
Hans Maier and Michael Schäfer**

**Translated by Jodi Bruhn**

 **Routledge**  
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# Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II

Available for the first time in English language translation, this is the long-awaited second volume of the three-volume set on *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, edited by the eminent Professor Hans Maier. This represents a major study, with contributions from leading scholars of political extremism, sociology and modern history, the book shows how new models for understanding political history arose from the experience of modern despotic regimes.

We are used to distinguishing the despotic regimes of the twentieth century – Communism, Fascism, National Socialism, Maoism – very precisely according to place and time, origins and influences. But what should we call that which they have in common? On this question, there has been, and still is, a passionate debate. Indeed, the question seemed for a long time not even to be admissible. Clearly this state of affairs is unsatisfactory.

The debate has been renewed in the past few years. After the collapse of the Communist systems in Central, East and Southern Europe, a (scarcely surveyable) mass of archival material has become available. Following the lead of Fascism and National Socialism, Communist and socialist regimes throughout the world now also belong to the historical past. This leads to the resumption of old questions: what place do modern despotisms assume in the history of the twentieth century? What is their relation to one another? Should they be captured using traditional concepts – autocracy, tyranny, despotism, dictatorship – or are new concepts required?

Here, the most important concepts – totalitarianism and political religions – are discussed and tested in terms of their usefulness. This set of volumes is as topical and relevant to current world events in the twenty-first century.

**Hans Maier**, born in 1931 in Freiburg im Breisgau, is Professor Emeritus in Political Science and the Theory of Religion at the University of Munich. He was the Bavarian Minister of Culture and Science from 1970 to 1986 and President of the Central Committee of German Catholics from 1976 to 1986. Major publications include *Revolution und Kirche* (1959), in English, *Revolution and Church: The Early History of Christian Democracy, 1789–1901* (1969). Also *Die ältere deutsch Staats-und Verwaltungslehre* (1966), *Die christliche Zeitrechnung* (1991); *Politische Religionen* (1995); *Welt ohne Christentum – was wäre anders?* (1999) and *Das Doppelgesicht des Religiösen: Religion – Gewalt – Politik* (2004).

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# **Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II**

Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships

**Edited by  
Hans Maier and Michael Schäfer**

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# Foreword

The second volume of the project, *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, contains the presentations and discussion papers from the international conference on 'Political Religions: Research Concept, Results, Open Questions', which took place on 24–26 March 1996 in Tutzing, Bavaria. It also contains further research contributions to a topic of enduring relevance, that of comparing dictatorships.

At the centre is the problem of 'political religions'. Are we permitted to describe political phenomena using religious categories? Do we not fail to capture the political element in doing so? Do we not then debilitate religion? As the following contributions demonstrate, the answer cannot be a simple yes or no. It is necessary to work out both the possibilities and limitations of the concept of political religion and to consider – alongside the classics (Eric Voegelin, Raymond Aron, Lucia Varga) – more recent efforts in the phenomenology of religion, in the sociology of the Church, in history and in political science.

The editors extend their thanks to all who have cooperated in preparing the conference: above all, to Ines de Andrade, Angelika Mooser-Sainer, Karin Osthues, Mathias Behrens and Winfried Hover. Johannes Seidel was kind enough to take on the correction of the galley proofs. Paul Mikat has tirelessly accompanied our undertaking and Heinrich Oberreuter has placed at our disposal the rooms of the Academy for Political Education in Tutzing. The Volkswagen Foundation has provided substantial monetary support for our efforts. All colleagues who participated with written and oral contributions are warmly thanked for their preparedness.

The first volume (2003) set off a lively public reaction. The editors hope that the present volume will receive a similar degree of attention. A third volume, which is planned for 2007, will combine a systematic depiction guided by the source texts with bibliographies of the significant authors.

Hans Maier  
Michael Schäfer  
Munich  
Spring 1997

**Part I**

**Presentations and discussion  
papers**



# 1 Introduction

*Hans Maier*

I welcome you all to the Academy for Political Education and to our conference, 'Political Religions: Research Concept, Results, Open Questions.' I am very pleased that this conference has come into being; what with the current budget problems, it was not entirely easy to gain financing. I would like to thank above all Heinrich Oberreuter and the Academy for Political Education for their help in financing the accommodation and the honorariums. Beyond this, the Volkswagen Foundation has provided a large contribution and the Institute for Philosophy in Munich has also offered a substantial one.

And now, on to the theme of our conference: political religions. In this circle of experts and researchers, I need to make no long introductions – cues might well suffice. Indisputably, there are religious manners of speaking, religious motifs, religious patterns of conduct in Russian Communism, in Italian Fascism, in German National Socialism. There are both religious-like phenomena and church-like phenomena: holy doctrines, holy books, heretics, heretical courts, a care for belief and morals enforced by the threat of punishment; there are heresies, inquisitions, dissidents, renegades, apostates, proselytes – the entire vocabulary of church history can be found here.

That is one thing. The other is that these modern totalitarian systems were at the same time both emphatically anti-ecclesiastical and anti-religious. Neither Lenin nor Mussolini nor Hitler nor Mao understood or wished to understand himself as a religious founder. Lenin hated and derided the so-called god-seekers, the religious socialists who were present at the beginning of the movement in Russia. Mussolini stood within the European Enlightenment tradition; in his youth, by the way, he wrote an anti-clerical piece similar to Machiavelli's *Mandragola*. It is similar with Hitler: one finds here a certain formal respect for the church as an institution, for its organisational coherence and its formative, pedagogical power over souls. Yet this is combined with a sharp rejection of the 'clerics' and a repudiation of the Judaic and Christian traditions; these, in Hitler's view, lead directly to Enlightenment, liberalism and democracy. And Mao, by his own confession, had already lost his faith in his childhood; although he did not place anti-religious zeal on his programme, he expected the extinction of the clan



#### 4 *Presentations and discussion papers*

system and belief in the gods as a natural result of the Communists' victories on the political and economic fronts.

Thus do we have both: a markedly religious language, many formalities of religious and ecclesiastical history and at the same time, the anti-religious face of modern totalitarianisms. This is why the question asking how the two fit together was raised early on. There are many explanatory models. The first states that the modern totalitarianisms attempt to replace religion; and that which one seeks to replace or repress must also be named – hence, the omnipresence of religious vocabulary. Or, it might also be seen as follows: there is simply no other language by which to describe the extraordinary, new ‘super’ human being besides the old religious language. One cannot simply invent a mythology or improvise; and this is why the old religious tradition is also present in the modern totalitarianisms. This ambivalence is also reflected in the genesis of the concept of political religions in the 1930s: at about the same time, the word emerges in the work of Eric Voegelin in Vienna and in that of Raymond Aron in Paris. Whereas Voegelin’s accent is strongly positive about religion, Aron’s tone recalls the Enlightenment. For Voegelin, modern totalitarianism arises as the result of a vacuum – it is both destruction and self-destruction. For Aron, it is the opposite: for him, political religion is an Enlightenment that has not yet been completed – hence, a remainder, a residuum from the past that resurfaces. Likewise do the conclusions drawn differ entirely, and the concept of political religions has received a controversial response at our last conference as well. This was actually the reason why we wanted to devote an entire conference to this second element of our research project devoted to ‘Totalitarianism and Political Religion.’ And we have, to this end, invited colleagues whose own research contributions in this area are distinctive.

Permit me to extend a warm welcome to Klaus Vondung and to ask him to say a few words on the topic, “‘Religious Faith’ in National Socialism’.

## 2 'Religious faith' in National Socialism

*Klaus Vondung*

The topic of my contribution was suggested to me, and I also accepted it as suggested. But on a first reflection, the following question had already posed itself: had the concept for the intended phenomenon been correctly chosen? Why 'religious faith' (*Gläubigkeit*) and not 'faith' (*Glaube*)? Is the concept of 'religious faith' supposed to state that National Socialism involved merely a questionable faith attitude? Does 'religious faith' mark a rank lesser than 'faith' in describing the stance the human being assumes before its divinity in traditional religions? If this were case, then a valuation would have made before the phenomenon had even been described and analysed. In order to avoid this error and to keep the concepts value-free, one path seemed to me to be feasible. It was suggested by the following reflection: in pietism, the concept, 'religious faith' is often used to designate one's own subjective belief-attitude in contrast to the 'faith' of the institutionalised church. Certainly, a value judgement is implicit in the way the concepts are used here as well – albeit the opposite of the one that was suspected at the beginning. The pietistic distinction between 'religious faith' and 'faith' has provided me with a model for an analogous application of concepts – albeit one that is to be strictly descriptive and classificatory. Accordingly, the subjective faith-stance of the individual National Socialist shall be called 'religious faith', and that which the National Socialist regime demanded and launched using various measures to as many members of the society as possible shall be called 'faith'. The topic of my presentation, therefore, would actually have to be 'Religious faith and faith in National Socialism'.

In the case of National Socialism, 'religious faith' undoubtedly cooperated with 'faith'. It was not, therefore, a heterodox phenomenon as it is with pietism; rather, the two phenomenal forms demand different strategies of analysis. Insofar as subjective 'religious faith' entails the gaining of insights into the interior life of the believer, the discovery of his motives, needs and wishes, the perspective of religious-psychology is recommended. With the officially propagated 'faith', by contrast, we must inquire as to the means by which it was demanded and the goals it was intended to serve; here, the function-oriented perspective of political science would be suitable.

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Because the latter object lies more open to our view than the first, I shall turn to it first.

Certainly, some classifications of a religious-scientific character – if one does not like to see them within a broadened horizon of political-scientific interest, that is – will still be required before the function-oriented analysis can proceed. If a particular faith is investigated using terms of religious studies, then this is only possible in relation to its object. Only then do both its unique character and its differences from belief-attitudes in other contexts, in other religions, concretely emerge. To the extent that National Socialism, too, should be understood as a religious phenomenon, therefore, we should inquire as to the contents of its faith.

In regarding National Socialism as a political religion, I follow Voegelin's interpretation of 1938 and the distinction he made between 'supra-worldly religions' like the Jewish or Christian ones and 'inner-worldly religions'. In the latter, the divine is found, not in an ultimate transcendent ground, but in a partial content of the world.<sup>1</sup> The partial content of the world that National Socialism elevated to the *realissimum* was the national community as a unity of common blood. In distinction to the universal *ecclesia* of Christianity, for example, Voegelin characterised the National Socialist national community as a 'particularist ecclesia'. He further characterised it as a 'radically inner-worldly ecclesia' in which 'the community itself' assumes the place of God 'as the source of the legitimacy of the communal person'.<sup>2</sup> As a symbol of the community's 'sacral substance', he described the 'national spirit' – as well as other words of the vocabulary of German Romanticism – as a '*realissimum* that endures in time and becomes a historical reality within individual human beings, beings regarded as members of their nation and its works'. Through 'political organisation', the members become a national community a 'nation of unity', an historical person. The 'Führer' is the organiser; he is 'point at which the spirit of the people breaks into historical reality'.<sup>3</sup> Being bound to the blood, the national spirit is an inner-worldly sacral substance; 'by virtue of his racial unity with the nation', the Führer 'becomes the spokesman of the national spirit and the representative of the nation'.<sup>4</sup>

Voegelin's interpretation captured important characteristics of the inner-worldly political religion of National Socialism. Although the symbol of the national spirit was well loved in the milieu of the National Socialist educated middle-class, however, it played for most National Socialists a smaller role than Voegelin assumed. The *realissimum* of the National Socialist religion was the common blood and the national community that had been constituted by it. This fact, moreover, was stated openly. Hitler himself almost always directly described the 'sacral substance' of the order of being he had proclaimed. In a speech shortly before his assumption of power, for example, he states: 'estates pass, classes change, human fates are transformed. But what remains for us and must remain for us? The nation as such, as a substance of flesh and blood.'<sup>5</sup> Although we can exclude the

possibility that Hitler possessed a differentiated knowledge of the philosophical or theological concept of substance, the meaning of this sentence can still be recognised. Hitler's eclectic education also speaks for the likelihood that he knew and sought to express the meaning of 'substance' as something essential and foundational, even as something absolute and divine. In this sentence, it also becomes clear that the people are in fact elevated to the status of an inner-worldly ecclesia that is based upon the realissimum of shared blood and endures through time. It is through this new status of the people that the ecclesia is legitimated.

(In parentheses, it should be noted that the occasional invocations of God or the Almighty by Hitler and other National Socialists does not contradict this finding. Such references were rhetorical clichés or propagandistic means by which to mislead the listeners. Although it was different with the Christians who thought it possible to reconcile Christianity and National Socialism in some way or another, I cannot enter further into this topic at present.)

As Voegelin realised, the elevation of an inner-worldly entity to the *realissimum* results in re-crystallisation of reality in terms of sacrality and value. Further, it leads to the production of countless sacral symbols that surround the sacral centre. With National Socialism, the centre is the blood. As the substantive carrier of the blood, there is the nation. Thence follow as sacred symbols the soil, as the land upon which the nation was nourished, the Reich, as the unit in which it was politically actualised, the Führer, as the representative of both nation and Reich, and the flag. There were also further symbols, some of them – like sun and fire – having a cosmological character others and – like the *Feldherrnhall* – being of historical origin.

The leaders and spokesmen of National Socialism presented the sacralised sphere of reality as being objects of faith. Here, we have reached the official faith of National Socialism as an inner-worldly ecclesia, the way in which the faith was propagated and demanded and the goals it pursued. 'Faith' was a central term, one that was frequently used in the National Socialists' discourse. Hitler himself repeatedly spoke of his faith in Germany and the German people and of the importance of faith. Other National Socialist spokesmen and authors referred to the faith of Hitler in speeches and publications, and required not only National Socialists, but all Germans to believe in the sacralised entities as the faith-contents, in a certain sense, of the National Socialist religion: blood and soil, people and Reich, Führer and flag. Even National Socialism and its political organisation – religion and church, as it were – could itself as a whole be elevated to the object of belief. The address of a political leader at a thanksgiving celebration, for example: 'I believe in National Socialism and in the Party as bearer of these ideas!'<sup>6</sup>

The most important instrument used by the nationalist regime to propagate and demand faith was celebrations. These celebrations, which encompassed a broad spectrum from the large, spectacular events like the Reich party

## 8 *Presentations and discussion papers*

conventions to the morning calls of the Hitler Youth in the celebration grounds, represented the cult of the inner-worldly ecclesia. Like the cults of other religions, the National Socialist celebrations served to proclaim the faith-contents, to recall them in symbol and ritual and to provide liturgical forms through which to confess the National Socialist faith.

These cultic functions were realised in an exemplary way in the choral poem, *Die Verpflichtung*. The author, Eberhard Wolfgang Möller, wrote it as a liturgical text to accompany the compulsory celebrations of the Hitler Youth and other structures of the Party. The first performance of this poetic work was on 24 January 1935, the anniversary of the death of Hitler Youth member Herbert Norkus, at a *Jungbannfahrtenweihe* in Marienburg; the celebration was carried by all radio stations in the Reich and, as was customary, could be incorporated into the local compulsory festivals of the Hitler Youth as a ‘reception into the community’. The liturgical text has heralds requesting the pronouncement of faith-truths that, like revelations, have been ‘seen’:

Say what you saw and announce what you believe,  
that we might confess what we want to believe.<sup>7</sup>

Thence follows the kerygma, with its three ‘proclamations’ by individual speakers followed by three concluding confessions of faith spoken by all believers:

We believe in the blood ...  
We believe in the land ...  
We believe in the nation ...<sup>8</sup>

In other liturgical texts, Hitler is consecrated to the status of a holy person, occasionally through use of Christian symbols: ‘And know that we have need of him/like bread and wine’.<sup>9</sup> The Führer thus appears as a new Messiah embodying the answer to the existential questions of both individual and community. The veneration of the Führer – which always concluded the celebrations in the canonised orders of service – stated: ‘You give our life happiness and purpose.’<sup>10</sup> As the incarnation of the *realissimum*, the Führer also draws to himself confessions of faith; the *Deutsche Gebet* by Herbert Böhme was the preferred text used for this:

Let us profess under the standard:  
We are Germans.  
We follow our Führer  
As the incarnate command  
Of a higher law  
That hovers over and in us  
That we intuit

And in which we believe.  
We believe in our Führer  
As in a revelation  
Of this law  
For us,  
His people.<sup>11</sup>

Three major kinds of celebration were developed during the Third Reich: the 'annual celebrations of the National Socialist year' analogous to the canonical liturgical year of the churches; the 'celebrations of life' analogous to baptism, wedding nuptials and Christian burial; the 'morning celebrations' analogous to morning service and Sunday worship. During the war, the great imperial festivals of the National Socialist liturgical year – First of May, Thanksgiving celebration on the *Bückeberg*, the Reich Party Convention, etc. – had to be abandoned. In place of these, the steering organs for festival arrangement (chiefly Goebbels' Reichspropaganda leadership and Rosenberg's department) were occupied all the more intensively with arranging celebrations on the lower levels and in local groups of the party. The planning of the annual celebrations, life celebrations and morning celebrations was united into one, and new kinds of celebrations were introduced. The longer the war lasted, the more there were: celebrations of school dismissal, celebrations of the release of apprentices and recognition of masters, celebrations of acceptance into the party, *Weltanschauung* ceremonies, celebrations honouring mothers, celebrations honouring the fallen heroes, memorial celebrations for the victims of the air war, celebrations for soldiers in the armed forces, village community evenings and even National Socialist family evenings. By the end of the war, the steering organs had planned a thick net of National Socialist festivals that was to encompass the whole of social life. In practice, certainly, the celebrations were realised to a lesser extent. But their resonance in the population was not all that great, as can be recognised from the *Meldungen aus dem Reich* and the *SD-Berichte zu Inlandsfragen*. Only the celebrations in honour of the fallen – for which the propaganda had prudently been placed in the background – enjoyed a certain modest success for a time. Nonetheless, the political planning still shows the direction in which things were supposed to move: National Socialism was to be established in fact as a comprehensive inner-worldly ecclesia complete with a cult penetrating all areas of life.

The most important cultic function of the National Socialistic celebration was the profession of National Socialism as a confession of 'faith'. From this confession, the psychosocial and political functions arose as a logical consequence. That the National Socialistic celebrations were intended primarily as 'confessions of faith' and that the assembled were to be formed into a 'confessional community' was underscored by the incessant suggestions and guidelines for the planning of celebrations.<sup>12</sup> The steering organs also made it unmistakably clear why this was so important. Not only were

ideological and political responsibility at stake here; much more were the celebrations, as ‘confessions of faith’, supposed to encompass the *entire human being*. This was repeatedly underscored during the war. Thus, for example, did a foundational article on the planning of festivals invoke in 1942

the growing connection of political celebrations with those of the family and the course of the year, the unstoppable permeation of our entire life-expression with the idea of movement and, thereby, the winning of the entire German human being for the totality, the unity and the exclusivity of our *Weltanschauung*.<sup>13</sup>

In that same year, the guidelines for the planning of National Socialist morning celebrations explained it thus:

according to a basic principle of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, the body, soul and spirit of the human being form an indivisible unity. This is why, logically, the National Socialist movement makes the unconditional claim to care for the German nation in a comprehensive way – one that applies to each individual national comrade and, further, to the entire human being.<sup>14</sup>

The psychosocial function of the celebration as a ‘confession of faith’ and the political goals pursued by it were precisely described:

so should these morning celebrations, alongside the assembly for the enlightenment of the people and the rousing proclamation, be a regular, obligatory and ceremonious call upon the strength of soul of every individual member of the Party and the nation. The strength of one’s faith, reinforced by the repeated recurrence of the community confession, might then be let to stream out into the national community; all half-heartedness in the environment might then be overcome, and the energy of the nation made stronger and stronger.<sup>15</sup>

The ‘*Grundsätze*’ article concludes with a fitting slogan: ‘he who has faith in his heart has the strongest power in the world!’<sup>16</sup>

Faith, therefore, was to be the vehicle by which to enlist the entire human being completely. This is why the steering organs repeatedly emphasised that the celebrations served ‘faith in Führer and people and’ – accordingly – ‘the will to commit and to act’.<sup>17</sup> More clearly still, the confession was thought to follow from the faith and the preparedness for sacrifice from the confession.<sup>18</sup> The sequence of faith-confession-preparedness for sacrifice became particularly relevant during the war. At New Year 1942/43, even Martin Bormann intervened in the planning of celebrations. In an announcement dated, sensibly enough, 24 December 1942 and in an order of 11 March

1943 that reinforced this announcement – Stalingrad had occurred in the meantime – Bormann emphasised the importance of planning celebrations, especially within the local groupings. Above all, the festivals for the fallen soldiers would have to be arranged in such a way that they would yield 'both consolation for the bereaved and a confession of loyalty for the survivors'. On the whole, it is crucial

that the cultural work become one of our most important and significant instruments – and this precisely in the further course of the war. The hearts and souls of our fellow people desire reinforcement and direction. With understanding, we must take this into account.<sup>19</sup>

As late as 1944, Bormann ordered – as the crowning of the effort to capture the people totally, as it were – the introduction of National Socialist family evenings 'as a further means of leading the people'. The fifth year of the war was said to require the political leadership to 'do everything to incorporate family life into the political work – more than it has been in the past'. The following basic principle applied, that 'the families, including those of the Hitler Youth and the girls belonging to the *Bund deutscher Mädel*, are assembled and are familiarized with National Socialist ideas together'.<sup>20</sup>

I now come to the subjective 'religious faith'. Voegelin's study, *Die politischen Religionen*, also provides a useful approach by which to analyse the internal religious life of faithful National Socialists. In a short concluding chapter entitled 'Faith', Voegelin traced the 'movements of the soul'<sup>21</sup> that will be called here 'religious faith'. He used *Die Lieder vom Reich*, a brief collection of poetry by the National Socialist writer Gerhard Schumann, as the basis of his analysis. I do not know whether Voegelin had studied Schumann in more detail or whether this slim volume of 1935 poems had fallen into his hands by chance; in either case, he had selected a faithful National Socialist *par excellence* with Schumann. Schumann might serve as a representative for many National Socialists of the younger generation, above all, for a group of National Socialist writers born between 1905 and 1914: for example, Hans Baumann, Herbert Böhme, Kurt Eggers, Herybert Menzel, Eberhard Wolfgang Möller, Hans Jürgen Nierentz, Baldur von Schirach. Although they were predominantly educated as professionals, not all of them had concluded their courses of study. Their formative years as youths and young men, the years of their study or of attempts (often vain) to find a vocation fell in the period between the world economic crisis and 1933. Most of them gained employment only after 1933, when they were favoured by the party or served as party functionaries. As writers too, they became publicly known for the first time in the Third Reich. What distinguishes all of the authors named above is that they expressed National Socialist 'religious faith' in their literary works. All of them wrote poems for the celebration of the National Socialist cult.



Born in 1911, Gerhard Schumann was not entirely untalented as a lyricist. In 1934, he broke off the studies that he had begun in 1930. This was done in order to pursue a political career alongside his authorial activity. This career led him into a number of offices that were, in part, of a high rank – in the NSDStB, the SA, the leadership of the Reich’s Propaganda Ministry and of the Reich’s Chamber of Culture. Following two years of service in the war, he became head dramaturge of the *Württembergisches Staatstheater* in Stuttgart; later, he was its acting general intendant. He was at this time scarcely thirty. Schumann also wrote a large number of texts, mainly choral verses, for National Socialist festivals. Both these texts and Schumann’s lyric poetry grant us insight into their author’s subjective religious faith.

In his interpretation of Schumann’s *Lieder vom Reich*, Voegelin revealed the ‘experience of creatureliness’ to be the root of the religious stimuli that can be observed in the poems.

The fundamental stimulus of creaturely desolation is described as a state of dreamy unreality, of coldness, of encroaching loneliness. From it, the soul breaks, burning, in order to unite with the sacral whole; a hot stream of excitement tears it from its individualisation

and causes it to ‘flow into the totality of the nation. In finding and uniting, the soul is depersonalised; it is liberated completely from the cold ring of itself. . . . In losing itself, it ascends to the greater reality of the people.’<sup>22</sup>

Before I take Voegelin’s interpretation of Schumann’s religious excitations somewhat further still, I would like briefly to turn to another writer as proof that the same characteristic and motif of National Socialist religious faith that Voegelin had laid bare in Schumann can also be found in the National Socialists of an older generation. Hanns Johst, born in 1890, represents a generation of National Socialists who were born in the decade before 1900. These too were professionally educated, had literary ambitions and were hindered in their careers by war and the post-war depression; Goebbels and Rosenberg also belong to this generation.

Like Schumann, Hanns Johst saw that he should combine his writing career with a political one. Already in 1928, he anticipated that National Socialism – as a new community of belief – would deliver one from need and despair. In a book with the telling title, *Ich glaube!*, he wrote: ‘The need, despair and misery of our people requires help. And ultimately and in the deepest sense, help does not come from begging for banknotes of high value; rather, help comes from the rebirth of a community of faith.’<sup>23</sup> In order to render the salvation within the community of faith experienceable as the abolition of loneliness, Johst propagated a new cult: “‘the masses will be lonely”, Jeremias predicts, “until the spirit is poured down from the heights.” The masses are lonely and the spirit from the heights will bring a cult, the sites of which need not worry us!’<sup>24</sup> Johst described the basic principle that Voegelin later established to be creaturely desolation as

'disquiet', 'torture', 'loneliness', 'childlike helplessness': 'we all move in a racing whirl of incomprehensible hustle and bustle'. He anticipates 'relief and deliverance' in the absorption of individuals by the expected new community of faith, 'in the community of the like-minded, the like-determined, the like-believing'. In the cult of this new community – so he forecast – the impetus of the search for salvation would come to rest in a 'new, incomparable feeling of well-being'.<sup>25</sup> As Johst propagated in 1928, the new cult was indeed introduced and with the function that he had intended. In a direction for Thanksgiving celebrations by the Reich's propaganda leadership in 1939, an SA or SS man speaks the slogan: 'We are all one. And no one is "I" any longer.'<sup>26</sup>

But now, back to Schumann and to my intention to add some further aspects to Voegelin's interpretation. We have in view Schumann's National Socialist religious faith, regarded as a movement of souls in which the search for deliverance from creaturely desolation comes to an end with the dissolution of the ego. The experience of creaturely desolation, of creatureliness in general, finds its most intensive form in death. Death is at once the strongest impulse for the search for salvation and the most comprehensive symbol of the calamity of the *conditio humana*. Under the title *Siegendes Leben*, Schumann collected two choral pieces – *Tod und Leben* and *Größe der Schöpfung* – for National Socialist festivals. In these poems, the movement of the soul can be traced from protest against death up to the finding of salvation. The special character of the religious faith that is expressed thereby can then be characterised.

In the mysterious poetic work, *Tod und Leben*, an anonymous figure – 'the man' – fights against the allegorical figure of Death. He already threatens to succumb, but then 'the comrades' gather around him, protecting him. When these too are one by one carried off by the touch of Death, the 'Chorus of the Dead' finally comes to the aid of the living and takes over the flag that had previously been passed from one hand to another.

If one of us falls,  
The next steps up mutely.  
If all break, the blood  
Still wafts in the cloth  
Engendering the banner forth.<sup>27</sup>

Evidently, more than mere ideology is involved here. The images betray the existential impetus: 'Like a tower, this faith rises up from me'. – 'Have I not carried before myself a will stretched up high like a banner?' – If 'the banner stands', 'the human stands in the sun-storm of lust' and 'breathes, in flaming copulation'.<sup>28</sup> It would be premature to conclude from these images only that the young author has projected his sexual drives upon National Socialism, thereby at once sublimating and repressing them. Indeed, the sexual images, for their part, express a desire that is even stronger than

the sexual one: one that entails, ultimately, neither clever propaganda for an ideology nor a sublimating release of sexual drives, but in fact – as the work's title makes clear – life and death. That is, the central question of existence is at stake here; in spite of death, life can still assert itself. Or – to the extent that death itself should be understood symbolically – a saving way out of the calamity of creatureliness can indeed be found. Both the images of phallic erection and the tone of religious fervour are supremely intense expressions of the wish to be alive, the desperate desire to overcome death as an index of salvation: 'as the shaft stretches up to the sky, . . . the cloth that resurrects the dead'.<sup>29</sup> The interlacing of religious arousal together with sexual arousal betrays that the answer that the author has found is of the greatest existential significance.

As a symbol of 'victorious life', the banner represents National Socialism. This means that Schumann regards National Socialism not only as ideology and political movement, but also ultimately as a power that can defeat death and promise salvation. Yet how does this faith come into being? The *content* of the answer that is found in National Socialism is meagre; it consists solely in the idea that one lives on in one's offspring – hence, in 'biological immortality'. In light of death, which threatens one's own ego, 'biological immortality' is indeed a weak consolation; the ego must therefore search for its own salvation along other paths. It finds this salvation in sacrifice. The solution is paradoxical, for sacrifice again means death for the individual. In justifying the sacrifice, Schumann can only refer to life 'as such', although 'biological immortality' offers no kind of logical justification for the necessity of sacrifice:

Life lives because one who loves the  
Fluttering banner more than one's own self wastes it  
The storm-tossed life, which never ends  
So long as one offers oneself up as a sacrifice.<sup>30</sup>

Obviously, justifications in terms of content do not matter. It is much more decisive that the preparedness for sacrifice communicates the *feeling* of deliverance; and this feeling arises through the particular way in which the preparedness for sacrifice is actualised. It is the preparedness to relinquish one's ego. The dissolution of the ego, which liberates it from its limitations, is experienced as lustful. The desire for vitality betrays itself in phallic images that can be regarded as an expression of the ego-related will; repeatedly, these images flow into images of self-abandonment and of the 'wasting of oneself' in 'a shining wafting away'.<sup>31</sup> On 23 June 1935, the poetic work *Größe der Schöpfung* was broadcast on all German radio stations as a morning celebration of the Hitler Youth. Here, images of the dissolution of the ego, of losing one's boundaries and of flowing are even more pointed: 'you should exude like the current exudes'. – 'Give yourself, surrender yourself, pour yourself'. 'To cease is to separate, lose yourself

mutely – absorbed into the greater reality'.<sup>32</sup> These images gain their seductive charm because they are images of the dissolution of the ego in the act of love. This is demonstrated by comparison with a love poem of Schumann that bears the title *Hingebung*:

No longer I and Thou. – We end,  
To abandon ourselves to the whole  
In the star-fires of our lust.<sup>33</sup>

The lust to give up one's own ego is actualised aesthetically in the festival. The individual, 'the man' who is already without individual features in any case, dissolves in the 'chorus' of the comrades, which represents the new, National Socialist community. His self-sacrifice is a 'sacrifice of his self' in the literal sense. The choral community, too, is without content. It is celebrated as a form that indeed possesses a high functional value: the absorption into this form can be experienced as lust-like dissolution of the ego in the act of sexual union. Such absorption grants – to cite Johst once again – a 'new, incomparable feeling of well-being'. On the basis of this feeling, the form into which the ego is absorbed, the 'community of like-minded, like-fated, like-believing' can be experienced as representing the entire national community, as a *realissimum* promising salvation.

It hardly needs to be mentioned that those prepared to sacrifice themselves in order to gain a feeling of deliverance and psychic security can be enlisted to all kinds of political goals. Hermann Broch drew attention to the connection of psychic needs and political instrumentalisation in his study *Massenpsychologie*. In his opinion, the European democracies of the 1920s did not see the psychological significance of his postulate of the 'psychic and ethical uncertainty of the modern masses'. But

the dictatorships, by contrast, recognised the eminently psychological content of the question; they recognised that rational and material solutions might have been of lesser importance than psychic ones; these could be bridged with promises (even unfulfillable ones). It was the ethical uncertainty of the masses above all that would have to be eliminated if they were to be made to obey. With an astonishing psychological gift of empathy, therefore, they helped their own regulative principles gain unconditional totalitarian validity. This occurred, not primarily because they were supposed by rational truths, but because they enlisted every means, to which of course those of terror also belonged, to bring the panicked masses to adopt emotive attitudes, thereby bringing them back into action: the result was a maximum political effectiveness, both internally and externally.<sup>34</sup>

Broch's remarks provide the occasion for me – in the context of the preparedness to self-surrender established by the examples of Schumann and

Johst – to offer a concluding reflection on the relationship between faith and religious faith in the sense described here. The impression may have arisen that the two dispositions were strictly separated from one another and would therefore have been distributed among different circles of people. On the one hand, there would have been the political leaders, who with cool skill and a gift for ‘psychological empathy’ communicated National Socialist ideologemes, as faith-contents, in a propagandist way; and this would have been done according to a purely functional standpoint and for the purpose of heightening political influence. On the other hand, there would have been the ‘followers’, who compliantly allowed themselves to be manipulated in their subjective religious faith. Undoubtedly, the cynical National Socialist functionary who believed in nothing other than power existed; likewise, there was also the technocratic administrator whose psychic movements did not exceed the mechanism of command and obedience. On the other hand, there was also the believing SS man or Hitler Youth who was prepared to sacrifice his life for his Führer even in April 1945. More decisive for the phenomenon of National Socialist religiosity, however, were the persons for whom faith and religious faith interpenetrated. Namely: almost without exception, those who helped National Socialist religious faith gain expression in the first place – an expression on the basis of which we can capture it all – were also functionaries who contributed to the propagandistic communication of National Socialist ideology as ‘faith’. This holds for Schumann, Möller, Böhme and Johst (whom I drew into my interpretation); it also holds for the other authors of the younger generation; it also holds for Goebbels and Rosenberg and for many others I did not mention. Conversely, one can assume of most of the political leaders and propagandists that they in fact believed, in the sense of subjective religious faith, the ideologemes they communicated as ‘faith’ – some perhaps less, others perhaps more. At the most, the difference between believing adherents and political leaders was that, with the latter, there was to be found less desire for self-surrender and much more hunger for power and activist energy. (Of course, there were also situations of psychic mixture on this count: apart from their desire to dissolve their egos into the greater community, Schumann and Johst both evinced an entirely ego-related will to power as far as their political careers were concerned. And on the other side, someone like Goebbels, for example, betrayed an almost erotic self-submission to his Führer in his dairies.) And even Hitler himself – I think there can be no doubt about this – believed in the ‘counter-race’ as an ‘evil enemy of humanity’.<sup>35</sup> Without the existential impulse of religious faith in the sense described, the deeds that correspond to it could hardly be explained.

To sum up: with regard to the institutionally propagated and demanded ‘faith’ of National Socialism and the subjective ‘religious faith’ of many National Socialists, the concept of ‘political religion’ is entirely suited to characterising both specific aspects of National Socialism. Certainly,

National Socialist ideology was not stringent and coherent enough to form a systematic and nuanced 'dogma'. The divinisation of race, however, along with the faith-contents that followed from such divinisation, formed a religious core *sui generis* – and this should not be interpreted as mere 'ersatz religion' either. To be sure, Hitler rejected 'mystic elements' in the party, kept his distance from Rosenberg's 'myth' and made fun of Himmler's Germanic religiosity; yet he still promoted the cultic celebrations – primarily, of course, those of his person. Admittedly, he said at the 1938 Reich Party Convention that, 'not mysterious premonition, but *clear knowledge* together with *open confession* rest at the pinnacle of our programme'.<sup>36</sup> Yet this statement at the same time confirms that, for all his rejection of the mystic, something centrally politically religious – the confession, the complete submission of the entire person – was crucial to him. Certainly, the religious language of National Socialist politicians often served strictly propagandistic goals. Yet there are also many other statements that must be taken seriously as statements of 'religious faith' in the sense described above. And finally: National Socialist faith may have had various accents, and National Socialism may have served for many only as a projection screen for various kinds of desires for salvation. Yet it was desires for salvation that were brought to it, after all, and it knew to convey at least the *feeling* of salvation.

#### Notes

- 1 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Vienna, 1938), 16.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 47, 54.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 5 Speech of Hitler on 2 November 1932 in Berlin. Cited according to 'Das Dichterische Wort im Werk Adolf Hitlers', *Wille und Macht* (special volume of 20 April 1938).
- 6 *Vorschläge der Reichspropagandaleitung zur Nationalsozialistischen Feiergusaltung*, August 1939, 10004 e verso; countless examples for the proclamation of 'faith' in the above-named objects, also corresponding citations from speeches of Hitler and other National Socialist leaders, are to be found in both this organ and its successor, *Die neue Gemeinschaft. Das Parteiarchiv für nationalsozialistische Feier- und Freizeitgestaltung* (1937–45).
- 7 Eberhard Wolfgang Mölle, *Die Verpflichtung* (Berlin, 1935), 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 8, 10, 13.
- 9 Gerhard Schumann, *Gedichte und Kantaten* (Munich, 1940), 44.
- 10 *Die Neue Gemeinschaft* (August 1944), book 8, 365.
- 11 Herbert Böhme, *Das deutsche Gebet* (Munich, 1936), 7.
- 12 *Vorschläge der Reichspropagandaleitung zur Nationalsozialistischen Feiergusaltung*, April 1935, 3; Karl Seibold, 'Die Grundsätze der Feiergusaltung im Schlungslager', *Fest- und Freizeitgestaltung im NSLB*, 1st issue for 1936/37, 10. This is repeated in a similar way in other organs of the leadership, above all in *Die neue Gemeinschaft*.
- 13 *Die neue Gemeinschaft* (May 1942), no. 5, 213.
- 14 *Die neue Gemeinschaft* (November 1942), no. 11, 595.

18 *Presentations and discussion papers*

- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., 596.
- 17 Claus Dörner (ed.), *Freude – Zucht – Glaube. Handbuch für die kulturelle Arbeit im Lager*. Published by the commission of the leadership of the Reich's Youth of the NSDAP (Potsdam, 1937), 71.
- 18 Seibold, 'Die Grundsätze der Fei ergestaltung', 8.
- 19 *Die neue Gemeinschaft* (Jan. 1943), vol. 1, 7; see also May/June 1943, vol. 5/6, 258.
- 20 *Der Leiter der Parteikanzlei*, order 74/44 of 3 April 1944; Institute for Contemporary History, microfilm archive MA 452/2528–2532.
- 21 Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen*, 57.
- 22 Ibid., 57.
- 23 Hanns Johst, *Ich glaube! Bekenntnisse* (Munich, 1928), 36.
- 24 Ibid., 30.
- 25 Ibid., 73–75.
- 26 *Die neue Gemeinschaft* (August 1939), 10004 c verso.
- 27 Gerhard Schumann, *Siegendes Leben. Dichtungen für eine Gemeinschaft* (Oldenburg and Berlin, 1935), 17.
- 28 Ibid., 13, 10ff.
- 29 Ibid., 25.
- 30 Ibid., 27.
- 31 Ibid., 11.
- 32 Ibid., 45, 34, 43.
- 33 Gerhard Schumann, *Wir dürfen dienen. Gedichte* (Munich, 1937), 58.
- 34 Hermann Broch, *Massenpsychologie. Schriften aus dem Nachlaß. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (Zurich, 1959), 56ff.
- 35 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1933), 724.
- 36 *Der Parteitag Grossdeutschland vom 5–12 September, 1938*. Official report on the course of the Reich Party Convention with all Congress speeches (Munich, 1938), 81ff.

## 3 Discussion of Chapter 2

### Harald Seubert

Perhaps as a supplement to your lecture, I would like to remind you of a very simple finding. You have very impressively interpreted these texts by Gerhard Schumann and Hanns Johst, yet these texts also stand in a formal connection, or a formal historical connection, with something like Expressionism. Johst begins as an Expressionist; he also begins as an extreme leftist. Here too – or with Arnolt Bronnen – we find similar phenomena: literary texts are, as it were, liturgically functionalised; they make use of liturgical linguistic forms. This is one connection, and I would ask how you would understand political religions in terms of this connection. For this too is political religiosity, even if not the religious faith that was specific to National Socialist or to Communist goals. One might also recall Georg Kaiser's *Gas* or a whole variety of Expressionist texts.

Of course, the other context in intellectual history is the question of a new mythology. This goes back to early Romanticism and to the oldest systematic programme. Manfred Frank has traced it up to Johst in both its affiliations, whereby it seems to me that the following line would be very interesting: to see how this search for the coming god is less and less a mythology of religion. In addition, one might ask how the question of the ego increasingly disappears from this conception. It would interest me very much, therefore, as to how the concept of political religion that you have brought to bear upon these texts would perhaps have to be read somewhat differently in these two horizons.

### Klaus Vondung

I will turn to your reference to Expressionism first: this is an important reference, which certainly opens up a wide field. Johst began as an Expressionist; Schumann might be described as an imitator of Expressionism in some respects, as, by the way, several other of the so-called 'young team of National Socialist writers' might be. Böhme and Möller, among others, are in fact indebted to Expressionism, even though National Socialism had



rejected it as degenerate and un-German. That which now binds people like Johst and Schumann to Expressionism, beyond the formal aspect, is at base the desire for salvation – a phenomenon that can be observed in a variant of Expressionism known as ‘Messianic Expressionism’.

In my book on apocalypse, I have traced the lines of tradition and filiations of apocalyptic desires, hopes and speculations; and it is interesting here to see that there are political divisions running from Expressionism – in its apocalyptic hope for a completely renewed way and the destruction of the old after the First World War had come to an end – both into National Socialism and into Communism. With both Johst and Schumann, by the way, as well as with many others who were addicted to salvation, we can find clearly apocalyptic speculations, with the entire arsenal of relevant symbols. I have not mentioned this theme here at all.

On the left, we find this with an entire series of writers – Expressionists who converted to Communism after the First World War. A very prominent example is Johannes R. Becher, who, incidentally, also did things that were formally similar: choral poetic works like *Der große Plan* for the celebration of the Soviet Union’s first Five Year Plan. Here, we can observe things that were similar to the National Socialist liturgical pieces. Thus, we have, first – because you have stated the cue-word, I want to pick up on it – the intellectual-historical context of such an apocalyptically marked desire for salvation when it broke out at the time of Expressionism and gained expression in many Expressionist poems. This then became affiliated either with National Socialism or with Communism. At the same time, we have a filiation in terms of formal history: namely, we also have corresponding stylistic and formal continuities that, in many ways, have not yet been captured so precisely.

What this might now mean for the concept of political religions, I am still a little bit unsure of at the moment. I think, for example, of Ernst Toller, with whom we also find a very strong religious desire for salvation as well as the corresponding apocalyptic images; I think that phenomena like those that are to be found in Expressionism could also be captured by the concept of political religions – for this desire for salvation also had political consequences. Toller himself was active as a politician. To this extent, I think, the concept of political religion could in fact be conceived more broadly still; but then it would definitely have to be differentiated even further, so that it does not become a catch-all formula.

### **Michael Ley, Vienna**

I am entirely in agreement with your interpretation of self-sacrifice. It is very typical for male societies and homophilic organisations, not only for National Socialism. I wish only to point out the fact that an entirely different victim was much more important for National Socialism: the foreign victim. Very many organisations have self-sacrificers: the entire lyric poetry

as well as certain novels of the First World War handle the salvation of the Fatherland through self-sacrifice. Decisive for National Socialism, however, is not self-sacrifice, but sacrifice of the other: that is, Auschwitz, the murder of a counter-race that is not a race, as Hitler concedes, but a counter-religion – Judaism. And Herr Bärsch has referred to Goebbels's diaries. When we read them, Goebbels returns repeatedly this idea: to the necessity of the victim, the necessity of the sacrifice of the Jews. That is what constitutes National Socialism: the belief in human sacrifice. This signifies a relapse beyond even Christianity, which still entails this notion of human sacrifice in the idea that 'Christ sacrifices himself for humanity'. The Nazis go one step further; they no longer maintain the sacrifice idea symbolically, but really sacrifice. They see in real human sacrifice the decisive prerequisite of being able to save humanity. This is no ideology; it is faith. This is their political religion.

### **Hans Maier**

Just one interruption, Herr Ley. Is that still a sacrifice? Sacrifice assumes a religious connotation; but Auschwitz is pure destruction.

### **Michael Ley**

Yes, but sacrifice is the fundamental human institution: the sacrifice of others. And the Nazis go back to this original sacrifice, to human sacrifice.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

First, I would like to follow up on this extremely complicated theme of the sacrifice. One should distinguish between sacrifice (*Opfer*) understood as a mere victim (*Opfer*) of violence and the *sacrificium*. With the latter, the sacrificial process is understood as the surrender of a good of one's own for the purpose of benefiting either oneself or another. Self-sacrifice in the sense of human sacrifice would entail the surrender of one's own life for the sake of benefiting – usually someone else, but also oneself. We could understand a foreign, human sacrifice to entail the destruction of foreign life to the end of one's own benefit. The sacrificial process, which usually aims at influencing the causal course of events, gains a religious dimension only if the destruction of a thing or life is believed to influence supernatural powers. Undoubtedly, self-sacrifice has a central significance in the self-understanding of National Socialists. This can be supported and analysed on the basis of the diaries and publications of Goebbels. For Adolf Hitler himself, the 'will to self-sacrifice' and the 'capacity for self-sacrifice' (*Mein Kampf*, 326ff.) is the decisive reason behind the superiority of the Aryan – only the 'Aryan' possesses the capacity of cultural creation and legitimation. Can it then be established that Hitler perceived the 'Jew', the counter-race, in a

way that went beyond the profane significance of the concept of ‘victim’ and wanted to destroy it accordingly? On this question, I mention only this here: according to Hitler, ‘the Jew’ marks the ‘most powerful contrast to the Aryan’. With ‘no other people’ is the ‘drive for self-preservation more strongly developed than with the so-called elect’ (*Mein Kampf*, 329). Yet the ‘will to self-sacrifice of the Jewish people does not go beyond the individual’s naked drive for self-preservation’ (330). In the same context, Hitler explains that ‘Judaism’ was ‘never a religion’. The ‘Jew’ could ‘never possess a religious institution’ because to him, by contrast to a religion ‘according to an Aryan understanding’, the ‘belief in a beyond is completely foreign’ (336). For Hitler (and also for Goebbels and Rosenberg), the ‘Jew’ is the incarnation of evil (*Mein Kampf*, 68, 332, 339, 355). The Aryan, by contrast, is ‘the highest image of the Lord’ (*Mein Kampf*, 421, 196, 445). And he believes himself ‘to act in the sense of the omnipotent creator’ when he adds: ‘when I ward off the Jew, I fight for the work of the Lord’ (*Mein Kampf*, 70). With respect to the question of the victim, I interpret Hitler such that the destruction of evil is the condition of one’s own (Aryan) well-being. The sacred goal sanctifies the means of destruction. To this extent, the phenomenon of the foreign victim is present with a religious dimension that goes beyond the profane significance. Of course, this complex still requires a clarification that would be considerably more differentiated. In addition, one would have to draw in and analyse the pattern of cognitive perception of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, for example. In the context of the National Socialist world-view, we can ascertain the phenomenon of inversion on the basis of a subject-centred causality-modus. The National Socialists have a geo-centric image of the world, so to speak. ‘Self’ and ‘other’ – for us – are exchanged to the extent that the National Socialists believe that the causal course of the world is centred upon itself like a sun. This is why, in the place of the ‘self’ as both subject and object of the victim, the ‘other’ moves as a means and object – to the end of one’s own well-being.

I would like now to make a few comments on Klaus Vondung’s final thesis. Can one separate faith and religious faith so strictly from one other? On the basis of my own investigations, I have become convinced that the representatives of the National Socialist ideology held their *Weltanschauung* to be true and beyond empirical experiences and logic. That the leading representatives of the NSDAP were not opportunists can be ascertained in the best of the essays and speeches that were published before 1933. They could not have known that they would be successful. Faith in terms of religious faith can be ascertained in the cases of Dietrich Eckhart, Joseph Goebbels, Rudolf Hess, Julius Streicher, Alfred Rosenberg and Adolf Hitler in particular – as well as in that of Baldur von Schirach, to whom the characteristics that you worked out for Schumann in your lecture also apply. I refer here to the volume of poetry, *Die Fahne der Verfolgten*. In my opinion, Rosenberg has religious faith, because he hopes for a ‘German religious

movement that will develop into a people's church' (*Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 608). In my opinion, he takes it seriously, because he explains, 'we have not yet been granted a true genius that can reveal the myth and instruct us according to the type' (*Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 601). By this, he means a second Meister Eckhart.

In my opinion, our central problem consists in answering the question as to what a political religion is. Or, what should we understand by political religion? Although I would not like to enter into this yet, I can mention here already that I maintain a certain distance from Eric Voegelin – who was my doctoral supervisor and whose student I regard myself as having been. In my opinion, it is not true that the National Socialist political religion is characterised by a sheer immanentisation of transcendence. Even if they do so in a primitive way, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, Julius Streicher and Adolf Hitler, for example, believe in a transcendent and omnipotent God, in a cosmic divinity. It is much more a partial immanentisation that is present here.

### **Michael Schäfer**

Right at the beginning of our conference, I would like to indicate a problem. If we speak of political religions, then we speak of religions; religion is a component of this compound expression. In the one lecture and the few comments that have been made to this point, I have detected at least three entirely different images of religion. First, the lecture of Professor Vondung entailed analogies taken from church sociology – thus, from the Christian religion. But there was also talk of a kind of basic dogma of National Socialism, of the 'dissolution of the ego' – an image that is incompatible with Christianity and would perhaps better be classified within the Buddhist world of images. Herr Ley and Herr Bärsch then spoke of a religiosity that includes foreign sacrifices, thus of a phenomenon that might be found in the realm of natural religion. I fear that a concept of religion that seeks to integrate these very different, even contradictory images will be diffuse and empty; in any case, it will lose its capacity to function in our comparative and systematising approach.

### **Klaus Vondung**

I turn first to Michael Ley's objection. In my view, what you have said does not contradict that which I have attempted to explain. It is, rather, a supplementation to which I agree, disregarding the fact that I too would be averse to using the concept of the 'foreign victim' because I also believe that the Holocaust is not a sacrifice in any traditional understanding, but simply destruction. Even if the apocalyptic components are kept in view – and at your conference in Vienna, I indicated precisely this aspect of the political religion of National Socialism – annihilation of the evil enemy is never a

sacrifice in the apocalyptic tradition. The smashing of the statue in Daniel 2 or the destruction of the animal that climbs out of the sea in Daniel 7, the annihilation of the anti-Christ in the Revelation of John, and so on in the apocalyptic tradition: these are never understood as sacrifices in the sense that one sacrifices a lamb or the like in order to appeal for God's grace. Rather, these represent the annihilation of the counter-principle, the destruction – as Hitler then called it – of the evil enemy of humanity. In my view, the apocalyptic form is in fact also part of the political religion of National Socialism and characterises it in an entirely decisive way. Whether one should call this a sacrifice of the other, I am not in complete agreement with you here. In my lecture, I found it important to analyse the subjective religious faith of convinced National Socialists like Hanns Johst or Gerhard Schumann; but this sphere plays no role here. Here, a different question is involved, namely, how did it happen that a young man like Schumann – I said that he was only 22 years old in 1933 – believed with such glowing enthusiasm in that which National Socialism represented for him? And, what did this belief mean to him? This was the question I posed, and the annihilation of the Jews plays no role here. This is why the Holocaust never came up, not because I do not believe that the will to apocalyptic destruction was the decisive identifying mark of National Socialism, and this according to the aspect of political religions as well.

To Claus Bärtsch, the thing about an immanentisation that was solely partial – I believe that this is a difficult question. Of course, Hitler and others constantly spoke of omnipotence and providence, but whether it can be concluded from this that they were thinking of some kind of transcendent God – of whatever type, a ruler over Valhalla or something – is very doubtful. All this is rather too diffuse for me, and that of course is the problem. To speak now directly to Michael Schäfer's objection, it is true: that which we attempt to conceive of as religious in the political religion of National Socialism is, in part, very vague.

Hans Mommsen finds the decisive objection to applying the concept of political religions to National Socialism in the fact that National Socialism possessed no proper, clearly delineated ideology that would have formed the dogmatic structure, so to speak, of this secular religion. This is his objection. I do not believe it is a convincing one. It is in fact the case that the matter is diffuse and vague, and then intersections and overlaps come into play for which one cannot always say precisely what is meant. Is it partially immanentised or is it completely immanentised? This then differs with the various people. There exists a wide spectrum, extending to weird occultism – I did not have this in mind at all in the perspective from which I examined the political religion of National Socialism. What someone like Himmler did, did not interest me in this context. What interested me were the following questions: on the one hand, what were the politics, the socially relevant politics? What did they attempt to launch, to establish in the society, to show to its best advantage by means of political measures? My

other question was: what was psychically wrong with certain people? (But these, of course, also represent only a certain segment; a person like Gerhard Schumann is of an entirely different orientation than someone like Himmler. In this sense, one cannot then say that he represents National Socialism as a whole.) To this extent, it is correct that National Socialism is a diffuse structure and has no clearly delineated ideology. This, perhaps, is why one cannot also say that the political religion of National Socialism looks so-and-so, has these and those dogmas, these and those rituals and forms, possessed these and those faith-contents – this probably doesn't work. But despite this, the concept of political religion – if one concentrates on a series of characteristic elements – is meaningful and capable of expressing a great number of phenomena that are otherwise difficult both to capture and to explain.

### **Hans Maier**

The discussion has shown that the topic is boundless, and this is why I would make a small interjection as to how it might be restricted. First, such rituals do not spread in a vacuum, but against the background of a pre-existing religiosity that is present to varying degrees. But the following question then arises: do the old forms of religiosity and the new co-exist – as, by the way, was the case at the time of the Jacobins during the French Revolution? Or do we find a competition to suppress one another? Which is left over at the end? Is the goal the substitution of an old political belief with a new one?

And second, I would like once again to justify why I insisted on this expression of 'religious faith'. A small hypothesis lies behind it. Namely, there was in National Socialism – by contrast to Communism – a great deal of religious faith and very little faith in a formal, dogmatically closed sense. With reference to the literary texts, this has become very clear. Summarily stated, National Socialism was not catechistic. Nor was it capable of being catechised; for one thing, it lasted too briefly and, for another, the background of the German tradition – in terms of both intellectual history and literature – was different to that of Russia. If we can follow this comparative standpoint a little bit, then perhaps the field will gain some order and lose its formlessness.

## 4 Liturgy in the service of power

### The National Socialist cult of the dead as a secularised Christian paschal celebration<sup>1</sup>

*Hansjakob Becker*

He will clothe himself in the form of the Lord  
And he will speak his sacred language  
And audaciously perform his office  
And gain power over the people.  
And become a priest, if his reputation rings out,  
Smash their machine upon his feet  
The artists and the wise ones tipple with him  
The mouths of poets sing out his praises.  
And no one suspects that Satan speaks from him  
And of the miraculous construction of his temple at a price  
That demands the souls that he has snared.  
Only when he seeks to press upward into the light  
Will the lightning flash hurl him, from the highest circle  
Into the darkness from which he came out.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the communal expressions describing the relation of human being to the Absolute, 'cult' is probably the clearest one. It thereby becomes the most important manifestation of the *homo religiosus* for theology and anthropology. In the study of religion, an analysis of the phenomenon of the cult cannot be avoided. This obtains whether faith and its forms of expression are understood to be a necessary but nonetheless transitional level that is to be transcended in the history of human development, or whether one shares the opinion of dialectical theology that Jesus Christ has permanently superseded every cult – like the law. One cannot avoid facing the cult, and certainly not in a time when worship has shifted from being an unquestioned fact to a quantity that is questionable in growing measure. At the same time, new cults shoot up from the ground like mushrooms in totalitarian systems on the one hand and in esoteric circles on the other.

The central topic of liturgical science is the history, meaning and formal possibilities of structuring the Christian service of worship. If this is the case – or, better, because this is the case – liturgical science cannot lose sight of the anthropological connection between the Christian service and extra-Christian cults.

Of no lesser significance here than the religious cults are the pseudo-cults of the ersatz religions.<sup>3</sup> Among these, National Socialism is particularly informative for various reasons:

Historically: the celebrations of the Third Reich are the most fully developed and best documented form of secularised liturgy.<sup>4</sup>

Anthropologically: the brown cult, with its great influence on millions of people in our era and cultural realm can be interpreted as a positive answer to Guardini's question on the occasion of the Liturgical Congress in Mainz, 1964. Guardini asks, namely, whether the human of the industrial age is still capable of cultic acts.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, theologically: as an ersatz religion, National Socialism can open our eyes to what the church liturgy, as an expression of Christian faith, signifies. This it can do precisely because it is an anti-liturgy that perverts the Christian one.

On 9 November 1923, at 12.30 in the afternoon, certain men fell in front of the Feldherrnhalle and in the courtyard of the former Ministry of War in Munich. Falling in loyal faith in the resurrection of their people, these men were the following . . .

Thus begins the list from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which is reproduced below. This text is more than a recollection of the story of 9 November 1923, when 16 men were shot in Hitler's failed attempt at a national revolution; it is a proclamation. The language demonstrates it, Hitler's speeches prove it; the National Socialist cult confirms it (see Figure 4.1).

We turn first to the language.<sup>6</sup> By means of a ceremonial style and Christian vocabulary (resurrection, blood witness), a profane event is to be given religious consecration.

That this text consecrates history to render it salvation history is demonstrated by Hitler's speeches about November 9th.<sup>7</sup>

The torchlight procession through Brandenburg Gate on the day of the seizure of power (30 January 1933) had bathed the bloody end of the march on the Feldherrnhalle in a transfiguring light. The anniversary of the death of the 16 became the birthday of the Reich; the catastrophe had revealed itself as a mysterium. 'The blood they shed has become the baptismal water of the Third Reich',<sup>8</sup> Hitler declares in 1934. And one year later, in the hymnic language of a high prayer, he praises the unique transition 'from servitude to freedom',<sup>9</sup> from 'life to death'. Further, he celebrates the sacrifice – worthy of both reflection and gratitude – as the miraculous origin of the victory and resurrection:

Truly, the death-palls of these sixteen fallen have enjoyed a resurrection that is unique in world-history. They have become the banners of the freedom of their nation. And the miraculous thing is that that this great unity in Germany, this victory of a movement and the responsibility of the entire nation came from this sacrifice.<sup>10</sup>



Because ‘the strength for new sacrifices can issue only from the sacrifices of the first fighters’,<sup>11</sup> ‘all of Germany must celebrate this sacrifice on this day throughout the millennia’.<sup>12</sup> This ever-new recollection transpires in the cult.

In the celebrations on the ninth of November, the commemorative plaque is a canonical festival text. The cultic application of this text confirms its interpretation as salvation history: as with the ‘on the evening before his suffering’,<sup>13</sup> so does the ‘on the ninth of November’ indicate, not time, but holy time. And just as the canonical list of the martyrs<sup>14</sup> serves not personal memory but cultic remembrance, so does the listing of the names of the blood-witnesses perform the same function. The commemorative plaque is the *Pascha-Haggadda*<sup>15</sup> of National Socialism. What has been said is summarised in Figure 4.2.

The connection portrayed in Figure 4.2 will be illustrated in what follows on the example of the ninth of November celebration. First, however, some preliminary remarks.

The broad spectrum of the National Socialist festivals extends from spectacular holy services on state and Party holidays through celebrations of life at births, marriages and deaths up to the simple morning services of the party structures.<sup>16</sup> Certain party offices publish guidelines and exemplary programmes that are comparable to congregational rites and supervise the planning of the festival.<sup>17</sup> It was attempted to develop ‘celebratory forms of a liturgical character’. Sayings of the Führer, songs and the like serve as liturgical texts. Several holy places, ritual actions and solemn requirements intensify the cultic form.<sup>18</sup>

Simplified, the history of the National Socialist cult can be classified into three phases:

- 1 1920–33: Hitler (symbol-friendly party rally). Beginning with his knowledge of mass psychology and stimulated by the symbol-friendly proclamations of the Communists, he drafts the swastika flag and creates a new style of demonstration characterised by uniforms, flags, calls and music.
- 2 1933–39: Goebbels (theatre-like cult of the Reich). Following the seizure of power, he develops the party rallies into the Reich festival. He understands ‘holy hours’ to be a ‘sharp weapon of political propaganda’<sup>19</sup> and he stages them as subtle theatre.
- 3 1939–45: Rosenberg (service-like celebration of local groups). He gains a decisive influence during the war, when the Reich festivals were no longer possible and the final victory took its time in coming. Due to its simplicity, its type of morning worship – a mixture of ideological edification hour and artistic matinee – was established for all National Socialist festivals.

This offers a general, historical background. We turn now the history of the ninth of November festival,<sup>20</sup> the milestones of which are presented below:

- 1926 Second Reich Party Convention of the NSDAP in Weimar.  
1935 'The Celebration of the Victory and the Resurrection' in Munich.  
1943 The ninth of November as a memorial day for the dead.

At the beginning stands the Party Convention of 1926. Here, the *Blutfahne* of 1923 were raised to the rank of a relic and the ninth of November was proclaimed a day of mourning in the Reich. On the day of the seizure of power, the 'Good Friday of the Party'<sup>21</sup> became the day of Germany's 'victorious resurrection':

Do you hear the daffodils  
Rejoice?  
So today, as at no other time,  
Have we understood the meaning of  
The celebration. . . . For Germany itself,  
Shining, has risen.  
Do you hear the daffodils  
Rejoice?  
Germany, too, suffered its Golgotha,  
And was nailed to the cross –  
But now, the bitter thing that befell it,  
Has borne magnificent fruit.  
Do you hear the daffodils  
Rejoice?  
Germany, too, had many mothers  
With the sword in bleeding heart –  
But now, the high Easter purpose  
Makes them forget all pains.  
Do you hear the daffodils  
Rejoice?  
Germany, too, has an empty grave:  
The nation has found its way home –  
And tho the stone was so heavy,  
It has overcome it.  
Do you hear the daffodils  
Rejoice?  
So have we at no other time  
Understood the message so deeply –  
For Germany, like the Holy Christ,  
Shining, has risen!<sup>22</sup>

The historical event had been elevated into the religious sphere and, 'in the sign of pseudo-religiosity, the November Passion Play then first hit the streets in the "capital city of the movement"'.<sup>23</sup> Let us briefly move to the structure of the festival:

Am 9. November 1923, 12 Uhr 30 Minuten nachmittags, fielen vor der Feldherrnhalle sowie im Hofe des ehemaligen Kriegsministeriums zu München folgende Männer im treuen Glauben an die Wiederauferstehung ihres Volkes:

Alfart, Felix, Kaufmann, geb. 5. Juli 1901  
Bauriedl, Andreas, Hutmacher, geb. 4. Mai 1879  
Casella, Theodor, Bankbeamter, geb. 8. Aug. 1900  
Ehlich, Wilhelm, Bankbeamter, geb. 19. Aug. 1894  
Faust, Martin, Bankbeamter, geb. 27. Januar 1901  
Hechenberger, Ant., Schlosser, geb. 28. Sept. 1902  
Körner, Oskar, Kaufmann, geb. 4. Januar 1875  
Kuhn, Karl, Oberkellner, geb. 26. Juli 1897  
Laforte, Karl, stud. ing., geb. 28. Oktober 1904  
Neubauer, Kurt, Diener, geb. 27. März 1899  
Pape, Claus von, Kaufmann, geb. 16. Aug. 1904  
Pfordten, Theodor von der, Rat am obersten Landesgericht, geb. 14. Mai 1873  
Rickmers, Joh., Rittmeister a. D., geb. 7. Mai 1881  
Schubner-Richter, Max Erwin von, Dr. ing., geb. 9. Januar 1884  
Stranfsky, Lorenz Ritter von, Ingenieur, geb. 14. März 1899  
Wolf, Wilhelm, Kaufmann, geb. 19. Oktober 1898

Sogenannte nationale Behörden verweigerten den toten Helden ein gemeinsames Grab.

So widme ich ihnen zur gemeinsamen Erinnerung den ersten Band dieses Werkes, als dessen Blutzengen sie den Anhängern unserer Bewegung dauernd vorleuchten mögen.

Landberg a. L., Gefängnisanstalt, 16. Oktober 1924.

Adolf Hitler.

Figure 4.1 List of the fallen from *Mein Kampf*.

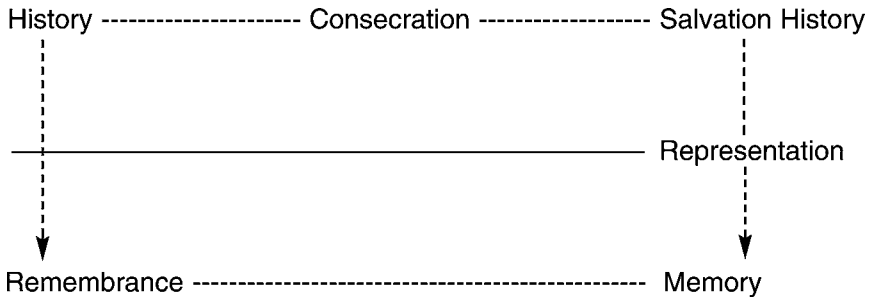


Figure 4.2 *Mysterium*. History is consecrated to become salvation history {-} that is, the profane becomes the sacred. This salvation history is represented in remembrance {-} that is, the past becomes present. In personal memory, this present is called, *today*, as opposed to *yesterday* and *tomorrow*; in cultic memory, by contrast, it is *today* in the sense of *always*.

***Festival of the Ninth of November, 1935<sup>24</sup>***

*The evening before*

- 1 Return of the exhumed corpses of the sixteen fallen to the Feldherrnhalle
- 2 Commemorative speech by Hitler at the Bürgerbräukeller.

*In the night*

‘Night of the Consecration of the Dead’ at the Feldherrnhalle.

- (a) Honouring of the dead by Hitler
- (b) March-past of the SA and the SS
- (c) Hitler Youth’s vigil by the bodies.

*The morning*

- 1 Commemorative march from the Bürgerbräukeller to the Feldherrnhalle
- 2 Honouring of the dead at the Feldherrnhalle
- 3 Triumphant march from the Feldherrnhalle to Königsplatz
- 4 Celebration of the Resurrection at Königsplatz
  - (a) Last Call
  - (b) Eternal Vigil
  - (c) Closing Proclamation.

*The night*

The swearing in.

On the evening of 8 November 1935, the coffins of the exhumed blood witnesses were carried through the Siegestor to the Feldherrnhalle and laid out before 16 burning ceremonial goblets. Following the traditional commemorative speech in the Bürgerbräukeller, Hitler is driven down Ludwigstrasse. Alone, he strides up the stairs of the Feldherrnhalle; he kisses the bloodied flag and greets each of the dead with a raised arm. At midnight, the Hitler Youth takes over the vigil beside the dead. A silent march-past of 60,000 SA and SS men accompanied by countless flags concludes the ‘Night of the Consecration of the Dead’.

On the morning of the following day, the commemorative march from the Bürgerbräukeller to the Feldherrnhalle takes place: at the lead is the Blood Flag, then the old fighters who had been honoured with the Order of the Blood. Dark red flags with sacrificial runes decorate the processional path lined with 400 *Opferschalen*, each of which bears the name of a fallen member of the movement. As the names are called out, the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* plays without interruption. Sixteen cannon shots at the Feldherrnhalle make the participants contemporaries of the re-presented sacrificial deaths of the 16 blood-witnesses.

By contrast to 1933, the procession does not end with the honouring of the dead at the Feldherrnhalle. Instead, it proceeds to Königsplatz, down streets decorated with swastika flags and accompanied by the increasingly loud strains of the German anthem. The new celebration does not remain with death; rather, the ‘sacrificial path of the blood-witnesses’<sup>25</sup> is transformed into the ‘victory march of the movement’.<sup>26</sup>

At Königsplatz, the Last Call begins. When the names of the 16 blood-witnesses are called out, the Hitler Youth answers with a ‘Here!’ that is called 16 times by 1,000 voices.<sup>27</sup> The dead are thereupon carried into the temple of the Eternal Vigil where they are honoured by Hitler’s placing of a wreath upon each coffin. The following proclamation, which summarises the ‘festal mystery’, serves as the conclusion:

Germany has risen again. The most loyal fighters of the Führer hold an Eternal Vigil for Germany.

The Last Call is concluded. The National Socialists who were shot dead by the Red Front and the reaction on the ninth of November, 1923, twelve years ago today, have risen again in the third year<sup>28</sup> of the Third Reich, in the year of freedom, 1935. They have held an ‘Eternal Vigil’ at Königsplatz in Munich. Attention! Raise the flags!<sup>29</sup>

This funeral, officially described as a resurrection celebration, was the most impressive festival that Goebbels ever dreamed up. Even the great rallies of the Reich Party Conventions pale in comparison to it.

Let us now turn to the interpretation of this celebration and pick out four points: the flag, the march, the sacred place and the symbolism. The 1935 celebration is not primarily linguistic, but pictorial. This is why the analysis

must concentrate predominantly on the rites and symbols. The cultic representation occurs through ritual repetition of the sacred event at the sacred time and place and is renewed every year.

Stated beforehand: the ninth of November is sacred time. According to Rosenberg's *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, sacred places are 'those at which German heroes ... died ... and sacred days are those on which they once fought with the most passion'.<sup>30</sup>

The sacred event, which is reactualised in the ninth of November celebration, is the march with the flag to the Feldherrnhalle. First, the symbol of the flag:<sup>31</sup> everything that cross and Eucharist signify for the Christian faith is represented for National Socialism by the swastika.<sup>32</sup> With its red cloth symbolising blood and fire, it connects the idea of sacrifice with that of victory.

Its original symbolic image is the flag that was consecrated by the blood of the martyrs of 1923. This 'is the testament with which the Reich begins'<sup>33</sup> and, like all 'flags whose first bearers fell, ... noble and holy, like a sacrament'.<sup>34</sup> As 'remembrance'<sup>35</sup> and 'legacy',<sup>36</sup> this *Blutfahne* becomes the 'shrine'<sup>37</sup> of the people. It becomes all the more sacred by being shown only twice a year: on 9 November and at the Reich Party Convention, where Hitler consecrates the new flags by touching them with the *Blutfahne*, 'for they bear the power of the *one* flag'.

Because the basic articles of National Socialist symbolism – God, Führer, nation and blood – have real presence in the symbol of the flag, it becomes the object of veneration and confession. These connections are portrayed in Figure 4.3.

Having addressed the symbol of the flag, we now turn to the ritual of the march. The basic form of most National Socialist rituals is the sacred march. The most consecrating effect is the march of an individual. If Hitler, as the high priest of the nation, enters the holy of holies *alone* once a year and proceeds *alone* up the steps of the Feldherrnhalle to the coffins of his martyrs, then this marching has a consecrating function. That Hitler enters the sacred place *alone* shows that he is elevated far above the masses:

You sense the sacredness of the Feldherrnhalle,  
What matter supplications, mass prayers, incense swung about?  
Empty shells against the dull rhythm of our drums,  
When our Führer strides to the steps.<sup>40</sup>

The most solemn form of the march of many is the procession. It is a visible form of self-presentation, a statement that the sacred wants to conquer the world, an invitation to spectators to join the movement. An intensification of its consecratory character is achieved by carrying along a holy of holies, the *Blutfahne*: the commemorative march to the Feldherrnhalle becomes an imitation of the Corpus Christi procession.

Let us now turn to the sacred place and observe Figure 4.4 in doing so.

The holiest of all holy places is the Feldherrnhalle.<sup>41</sup> When ‘the flag, completely soaked with blood, canonised the steps of this hall’<sup>42</sup> on the ninth of November, this historical, profane place became transformed into a sacred place. It was the day of the consecration of the church. Afterwards, the Feldherrnhalle reminded one of the sacrifice of the ninth of November: it is ‘sacrificial death become stone’. At the same time, it is the ‘German high altar’<sup>43</sup> upon which this sacrifice is repeatedly re-enacted in the cult:

Earlier generations  
Created domes,  
But our altar is the steps  
Of the Feldherrnhalle.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, it points to the fruit of this blood sacrifice and thereby becomes a vision of the ‘eternal *Feldherrnhallen* of the Reich’<sup>45</sup> – a vision reminiscent of the reading at the mass of church consecration (Revelations 21, 1–5):

And suddenly stands before us, above the throng  
Of haste, command and work raged-through torrent  
Lonely and large on the burst-open sky  
The image of the red-lit Feldherrnhalle.<sup>46</sup>

If the accent lies on the idea of sacrifice with the Feldherrnhalle, the Eternal Vigil is a ‘symbol of eternal life’. At the Last Call, the resurrection of the blood-witnesses and the eternal youth of the German nation are symbolically expressed by the call upon the 16 men.

As sites of revelation and cult, sacred places are distinct from their surroundings by virtue of their providing a special connection between heaven and earth. In the history of religion, the image of the ladder to the sky or the opening of the temple roof expresses this connection. In the context of the Feldherrnhalle, the ‘stairs into eternity’<sup>47</sup> are spoken of and the dead of the Eternal Vigil are said to lie ‘under God’s free sky’.<sup>48</sup> Whenever this is said, this motif or architectonic symbolism expresses the idea that the kingdom of heaven has come down to this earth with the Third Reich.

Thus does Figure 4.5 show how the Feldherrnhalle and Eternal Vigil, as holy place and holy symbol, connect both past and future and heaven and earth. At the same time, the entire symbolism makes clear the extent to which the entire festival is marked by a polarity of ‘sacrificial procession’ and ‘triumphant progress’. It is, therefore, a paschal celebration – change from mourning to joy, transition from death to life.

The ninth of November could no longer be celebrated in this way during the war. The festival’s form was then adapted to the usual morning services and celebrations in honour of the heroes; the theme was broadened to include a general day of remembrance of the dead. In the following, the

basic elements, general structure, and formal and material relation to the Christian service<sup>49</sup> of one such morning services, celebrated on 9 November 1943, will be investigated.

- 0 Instructions for the planning of celebrations
- 1 Fanfares of the Hitler Youth
- 2 Entry with the flags.

The fanfares (1) perform the same function as the ringing of bells and the organ prelude. The entry with the flags (2), which goes back to the movement's period of struggle, corresponds to the solemn entry procession. Here, the site of the celebration is consecrated to become a holy site through the entry with the flag.

- 3 Common song

When the flags and standards  
Fly before us proudly, like eagles,  
Our hard, defiant hearts stormily  
Beat their tact with them.  
A thousand years of muted yearning  
Rages from the red cloth.  
Blood and defeat and tears,  
Smoke and rubble, suffering, hate and curse.  
And then an early red dawning,  
A wild fury of a rising,  
Which seeks, with spellbound pounding  
Power and soul – and only Germany.  
That which one thousand years awaited,  
the Führer has forced in our time.  
With the flags and standards,  
It draws us, roaring, to eternity.<sup>50</sup>

As with the Christian service, song 3 has the task of accompanying the entry and constituting the celebratory community in common song.

- 4 Call

The flag march, which weighs more than songs,  
The solemn striding through the hall,  
How it whips us up, again and over again –  
As strongly and hotly, as though it were the first time!  
For flags are not shaft alone and silk,  
Good, as beautiful broaches, for light fests –  
On their cloth hangs much dark suffering,  
And some flags know red blood.  
And this, comrades, we wish never to forget



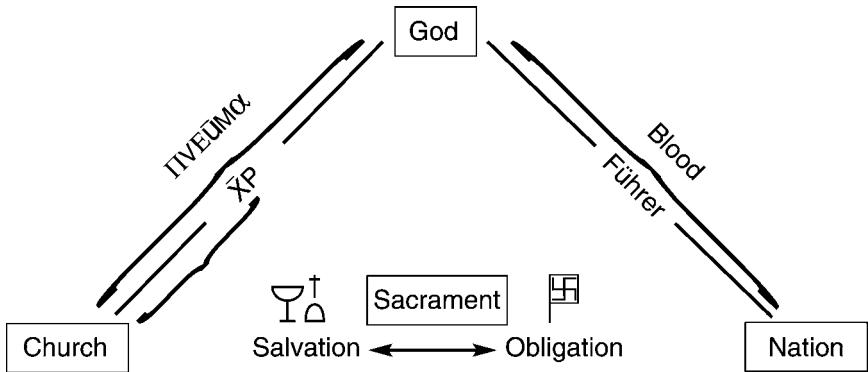


Figure 4.3 Symbol and sacrament. What the *pneuma* is for the Christian faith, the blood is for National Socialism. With the former, the *pneuma* is the principle of unity between God and Christ or between Christ and the church. With the latter, God, Führer are interchangeable and become exchangeable quantities in the blood.

The Eucharist as a re-presentation of the sacrifice on the cross is the sacrament representing the unity between Christ and the church in the *pneuma*. The flag with the swastika is the sacrament representing the unity between Führer and nation in the blood.

The Eucharist is the seal of salvation. The flag, by contrast, is the seal of duty: 'we do not want be saved, no, but bound in duty'.<sup>38</sup>

The Eucharist is a sacrament of peace; the flag is a 'sacrament of the struggle'.<sup>39</sup>

That heart upon heart broke for our flag –  
 When silently, we press hands to our belts,  
 Our dead are doubly awake in us.  
 It leads us on to shining goals,  
 It is a torch, it burns inextinguishable:  
 For flags whose first bearers fell  
 Are as noble and holy as a sacrament!<sup>51</sup>

The call (4) unites the elements of greeting, leading and consciousness and replaces the prayer that is lacking in the National Socialist cult. As a flag motto, it concludes the opening section and declares the theme of the festival.

5 Celebratory music

6 The Eternal Vigil

The Führer says:

Truly, the palls of these sixteen fallen have celebrated a resurrection that is unique in world-history. They have become banners of freedom for

|         | Nazi Cult: Feldherunhall |                                 | Church Concecration  |   |
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Past    | profane place            | historical sites: memory        | locus iste (Gen.28)  | earthly Jerusalem (Psalm 122)           |
| Present | holy place               | cultic site: re-presentation    | domus Dei (Gen.28)   | Church (Eph.2.19-22)                    |
| Future  | holy symbol              | eschatological image: reference | porta coeli (Gen.28) | heavenly Jerusalem (Revalations 21,1-5) |

Figure 4.4 Dedication. As an historical site, the Feldherrnhalle recalls the sacrifice of 1923. At the same time, it is a cultic place at which the sacrifice of the blood-witnesses is re-presented in the celebrations of the Third Reich. Finally, it is an eschatological image that points to the fruit of this sacrifice, the eternal Reich.

The profane place is a holy place. The holy place is a holy symbol.

The categories of the National Socialist cult arise from the liturgy of the consecration of a church. In the *introitus* from Genesis 28 (Jacob's dream at Bethel), the religious-historical triad appears: 'this place is God's house and the gate of heaven'. It returns in the remaining texts as a triad of salvation history: earthly Jerusalem, Church, heavenly Jerusalem.

their people. And a miraculous thing came of this sacrifice: this great unity arrived in Germany, this victory of a movement, of an idea, and the duty of the entire people to uphold it. And for all this we have these first victims to thank. For if I had found no one who would stand up for this Reich with his body and his life at that time, then it would also have been impossible later. All later blood-sacrifices were inspired by the sacrifice of these first men.

This is why we raise them from the darkness of oblivion and place them in the great attention of the German people forever. And for us, they are not dead. These temples are not crypts, but an eternal vigil. They stand here for Germany and hold watch for our people. They lay here as true witnesses of our movement. If we celebrate this day year after year – not always in the same form during the time of persecution; and if we are determined to honour it as a holiday for the German nation in all the future too, it does not occur merely because sixteen men died at that time.

Thousands die daily, and wars consume many more within hours. It occurs because these sixteen men suffered with truly faithful hearts, a death that helped to raise the German people up again.<sup>52</sup>

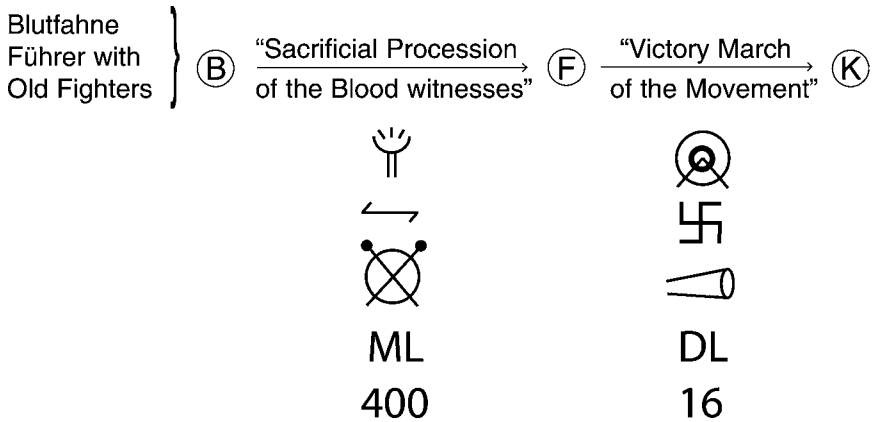


Figure 4.5 Paschal. (1) Bearers of the action: *Blutfahne* and Führer with bearers of the Blood Order; (2) Sacred places: Bürgerbrücker, Feldherrnhalle, Königplatz; (3) Processions: (a) sacrificial procession of the blood-witnesses, (b) victory march of the movement; (4) Symbolism: (a) ceremonial goblets {rarr} victory wreaths; (b) red sacrificial flags with sacrificial runes {rarr} swastika flag in Reich colours with sun-rune; (c) death drumming {rarr} victory fanfare; (d) martyr song {rarr} German anthem; (e) four hundred march {rarr} sixteen rise.

7 Chorus:

Many must fall and die in the night,  
 Before the banners wave great at the final goal.  
 Those who remain, they too bear the mark  
 Written on the forehead, the flaming torch of peril.  
 To you who follow us, we pound it in:  
 For that which leads to happiness, blood must be shed.<sup>53</sup>

8 Address

9 Honouring of the Dead

Reading, singing and praying are the main elements of the Christian service, which is centred upon the Word. The proclamation at the heart of the National Socialist festival also consists in one or more texts framed by songs, choruses or instrumental music (5). The words of the Führer, 'The Eternal Vigil' (6) represent the gospel. These are connected by a chorus (7) – singing in the style of a meditative interlude – to an address (8) that is comparable to our sermon. The Honouring of the Dead (9) follows.

10 Vow

We fight for the purity of the flag, of the blood, of the land.  
 We fight for the freedom of the people, of the Reich.  
 We believe in the mission of the Führer, the purity of the light,

the fertility of its blessing beam, the powerful sword of the eternal God.  
We believe in the power of our blood.  
We believe in the call of the people and of our dead  
as a living sacrifice to the undying greatness of our work,  
the German longing, the eternal Reich.  
We believe in our flag and in the Führer.<sup>54</sup>

11 Common Song

We all stand bound  
Under our flag's light.  
Because we have found ourselves as nation,  
No one goes alone any more.  
All of us stand, obliged  
To God, the Führer and the blood.  
Standing firmly erect in faith,  
Cheerful in the work that each does.  
All of us want this one thing:  
That you, Germany, shall stand shining.  
We want to see in your supreme light  
The honour of us all.<sup>55</sup>

12 Honouring of the Führer

Leader:

Führer,  
The mystery of your reign  
Is founded on our own deed.  
You are us  
And we are you.  
All the words that you find,  
Are taken from our mouth,  
For you say that  
which we believe.  
And it is you  
Who so obediently imprints  
Life with its form,  
Who, returning home in joyful certainty,  
Takes loving care of us,  
like God's broad mantle.<sup>56</sup>

Commando:

Flag block still:  
Flag high!

Leader:

Führer,  
 We lift ourselves up  
 to you, in this hour.  
 Führer,  
 We greet you:  
 Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!

13 The National Hymns

Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles ...  
 Flag high ...<sup>57</sup>

14 Flag March-out

Just as the service of a high Christian celebration concludes with credo, petitions, the Lord's Prayer complete with doxology and the *Te Deum*, so does the morning service achieve its purpose with the vow (10–11), the honouring of the Führer (12) and the national hymns (13). The celebrating community makes the confession read by an individual – with its 'fighting faith' (10) reminding of the baptismal liturgy – its own in a confessional hymn (11). In terms of both form and function, this song corresponds to the communal hymn of the Reformation. The thrice-repeated *Sieg Heil!* to the Führer (12) finds parallels in the liturgical acclamations of Christ and Lord<sup>58</sup> (*Kyrie eleison*). Further – like the national hymns (13) and the framing actions of the marches in and out with the flag (14) – it too originates from the fighting era of the movement.

In terms of both elements and structure, therefore, the three-part morning service – consisting in call, proclamation and vow – corresponds to the Christian divine service. Figure 4.6 illustrates this.

The honouring of the dead (9) was bracketed out at first. This has no correspondence in the Christian service of the Word. It is derived instead from the festival of the Eucharist itself: from the remembrance at the beginning (a). Music (drumming, melody of the song of the good comrade) and ritual (sinking and raising of the flag; standing up of the participants) is emphasised in the middle. At the end, we find the honouring of the dead (c) and the obligation (e); these are bridged by music (b/d).

What speaks for the quasi-sacramental interpretation of this honouring of the dead is that an insertion of this kind into the morning service can also be found in the celebrations of life – thus, in the National Socialist sacraments! Specifically, this occurs in the place where the dispensing of the sacrament takes place in the liturgy of Vatican II – between the address, namely, and the confession of faith.

**(9) Honouring the dead of 9 November 1923**

*(a) Remembrance of the Dead*

Drum-roll of the Hitler Youth. The assembled rise from their seats. The leader speaks:

We commemorate the first-blood witnesses of the Movement!

Commando:

Flagblock still: flags high! Lower the flags!

Leader:

On November 9, 1923, at 12.30 in the afternoon, in true faith in the resurrection of their nation, the following men fell before the Feldherrnhalle and in the courtyard of the former Ministry of War in Munich: Felix Alfarth . . .

As the names are being read, the drums roll quietly.

*(b) Celebratory music: 'I had a comrade . . . '60*

The assembled raise their hands for the German greeting. Commando:

Raise the flags! Lower the flags! At ease!

The assembled sit down.

*(c) Honouring of the dead*

He who faithfully followed the flag  
Unto death  
Still lives for us in farming,  
Lives in the bread.  
His power in the grain  
Is sacredly transformed.  
Germany, in his place,  
Works and acts for him.  
You who gave flesh and life,  
All you dead,  
Gained a new awakening,  
Missives of spring.  
No one could murder  
Your model and example

Graves have become  
 Cradles of a better future.  
 Resurrected you are, brothers,  
 Resurrected!  
 From the bonds of death  
 Of the bitter earth.<sup>61</sup>  
 Your hearts beat,  
 Glowing in us all.  
 No one has fallen in vain  
 For his nation.

Regarded in terms of its theme, the Honouring of the Dead is a secularised paschal. The central text (9c) demonstrates this. The final strophe is about honour and praise of the dead!

Celebrating, cheering, we greet you,  
 Hordes of heroes,  
 Who have been borne up  
 To the eternal, primordial state  
 We raise your flag  
 To the light, to the youth,  
 Above our head blaze  
 Tongues of rousing fire.<sup>62</sup>

The word 'rouse' recalls the exodus the Old Testament. Together with the New Testament images of primordial state, ascension and tongues of fire, the death of the heroes is proclaimed as a paschal. In a great sweep of motifs encompassing Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost, this poem connects the various aspects of the paschal mystery as it was celebrated up to the fourth century. (At this point, the Easter vigil was still celebrated as a whole; later, historicising intent broke the one festival of the crossing into multiple festivals.<sup>63</sup>)

(d) *Chorus*

Take heed, comrade! The drum calls,  
 And the flag waves there in the wind.  
 Take heed, comrade! The drum calls,  
 That each finds his place well.  
 And if I fall, comrade, then you stand for two  
 And will cover my body.  
 Then I want to sleep until Germany is free,  
 Then you should wake me again.<sup>64</sup>

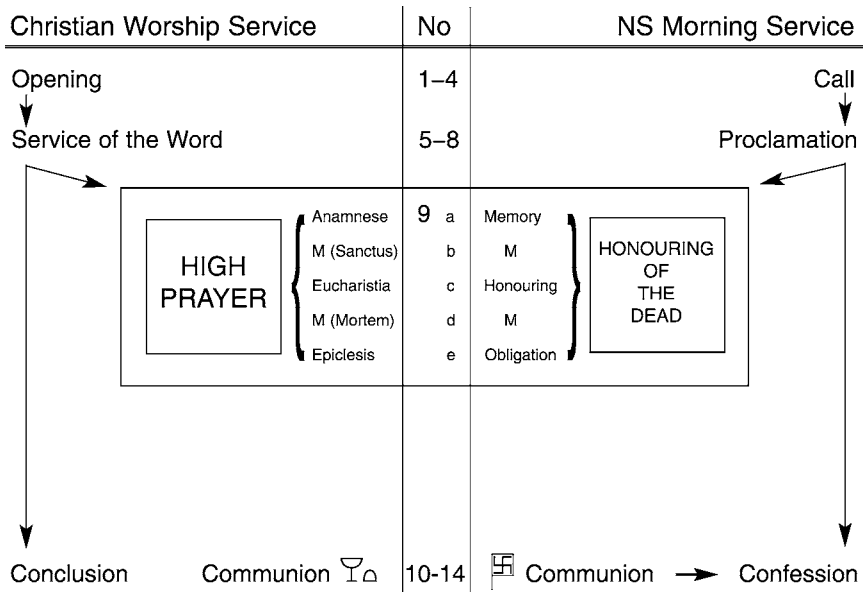


Figure 4.6 Christian service of worship – National Socialist morning service. The National Socialist morning service, with its three-part structure, corresponds precisely to the structure of the Christian service: in the former, the call (1–4), in the latter, the opening; in the former, proclamation (5–8), in the latter, the service of the Word; in the former, confession (10–14), in the latter, the confession-like and prayer-like conclusion.

The honouring of the dead (9) is an insertion into the morning service. Interspersed with music, it consists in remembrance (a), honouring (c) and obligation (e), which correspond to the anamnesis, Eucharist and epiclesis of the high prayer.

Like the canon, so does the honouring of the dead – as well as the 'high prayer of the brotherhood'<sup>59</sup> – refer to the communion. As a response to the obligation, the confession to the flag is *communio*. In National Socialism, community is collectively assumed responsibility; in the Christian belief, it is the salvation that is granted to all.

(e) *Obligation by the dead*

When one falls, when one dies –  
 The gap yawns, the gap recruits;  
 Neither rank nor distinction counts here –  
 There issues only a call, 'you are missing in the body!'  
 Hollow-eyed, the dead freedom-fighters  
 Regard you, man for man  
 What, you still go cheering in the light?  
 The drum drones: 'Do your duty!'  
 When one dies, when one falls  
 A shudder goes cold through the world;



An eternal heroic song sounds out:  
 'You too must go in rank and file!'<sup>65</sup>

Just as the death of the blood-witnesses is interpreted as a Pascha, so is the honouring of the dead celebrated as a Pascha festival. Regarded in structural terms, it can be understood as an ersatz for the Eucharist: the canonic anamnesis and Eucharist are paralleled by the remembrance and honouring of the fallen. Epiclesis, the summoning of the Holy Spirit, has become through the obligation an invocation of the dead. For 'the dead admonish to duty so long as a drop of blood, the vow to the blood-standard binds us'.<sup>66</sup> This 'vow of the sacred obligation . . . to live and die for the Reich'<sup>67</sup> is the 'high prayer of the brotherhood of the people'.<sup>68</sup> Here, reference to the liturgical connection between high prayer and communion is made.

Just as the high prayer is directed to the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist, so is the veneration of the dead directed at the performance of the sacrament of the flag – *sacramentum* means oath of allegiance! In both cases, communion seals initiation sacramentally. The *communio* involved with National Socialism is not only communion with the dead, but ultimately a community of the dead. Obligation, incorporation, uniformisation and death – this is the path to which the 'mute brothers compel': 'you too must go in rank and file'<sup>69</sup> (9e). As an initiation into the columns marching towards death, initiation into the 'sacrament of the struggle'<sup>70</sup> marks a cultic anticipation of the political eschaton of 1945:

I am no longer. I was.  
 I am a member of the holy horde  
 That sacrifices itself to you, Fatherland!<sup>71</sup>

Insignificant in itself, the individual becomes immortal only in the nation, the bearer of the eternal blood.

In the images of the Christian paschal and through the Eucharistic motifs of sacrifice, transformation and communion, the death of the blood-witnesses of National Socialism is celebrated by the cult as salvation.

The cult reinforces the manipulative power of this thematic complex via a series of manipulative instruments. Besides symbol and rite, music and language are of particular importance here.

Even the simple festival of 1943 evinces a wealth of forms of musical planning: the drums and fanfares symbolising death or victory, the quietly played melody of the song of the good comrades, the meditative choir singing, the hymn of the confession of faith sung by all in unison. These all indicate that the force and expressive power of music was known in the National Socialist cult; and this instrument was outstandingly mastered.<sup>72</sup>

The same holds in no little measure for language.<sup>73</sup> To what extent National Socialist language had ceased to contain reasonable statements is shown by the second strophe of the Flag Anthem (3):

And then an early red dawning,  
A wild fury of a rising,  
Which seeks, with spellbound pounding  
Power and soul – and Germany alone.<sup>74</sup>

An irrational image is nebulously brought into the picture. The expressive words have been detached from the entire sentence and, in isolation, have gained an evocative function.

On the other side stands the hymn (11), which captivates not the least through its mystical mode of speech:

We all stand bound  
Under our flag's light.  
Because we have found ourselves as nation,  
No one goes alone any longer.  
All of us stand obliged  
To God, the Führer and the blood.  
Standing firmly erect in faith,  
Cheerful in the work that each does.<sup>75</sup>

In terms of both form and meaning, this poetic piece breaks its bounds. It creates a solemn atmosphere, has an emotionalising influence and thereby becomes an effective instrument of manipulation. Brutality is consecrated because irrationality and sentimentality simulate sacrality. Cruelty is concealed in the cloak of the sacred: 'You too must go in rank and file.'<sup>76</sup> These are literally the last words of the Honouring of the Dead.

The chaotic language is a clue that a whole world has been turned upside down, and the mixture of empathy and cruelty illustrates the inner turmoil of the human beings who helped to form the National Socialist cult or identified with it.

This brings us to the question: why did the National Socialist regime consciously bring such a cult into being? In order to answer this question, the psychic situation of the cult's carriers must briefly be illuminated.<sup>77</sup>

On the one hand: Hitler. For him, the only cult was the celebration of his own person. Here, the socially dispossessed person could compensate for his personal problems.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand: the masses. The political and spiritual collapse after the First World War had produced in them a feeling of hopelessness. If Hitler sought power, then the people dreamt of salvation. The two sides met in the cult.

By being divinised through word and ritual, Hitler gave the celebrating individuals a feeling of being liberated through him to a new life. Such individuals knew

... that we need him  
Like bread and wine that forced us together.

He transformed us so much, that slim lads  
 And hard men mutely give their lives  
 As a service and a stony song.<sup>79</sup>

In consecrating its representative, the nation consecrated and divinised itself: 'my god is my nation'.<sup>80</sup> As a nameless choir of identical individuals, this 'new community'<sup>81</sup> sought to hear and answer the words of the Führer to whom they had confessed in the vow (10–11) and with whom they had united in mystical communion in the Honouring of the Führer (12):

You are we and we are you.  
 All the words you find  
 Have been taken from our mouth,  
 For you say that which we believe.<sup>82</sup>

In terms of the state of mind of its bearers, the National Socialist cult corresponded to the psychic needs of many members of the society. This is why it was useful to those who held power in attaining their political goals.

The National Socialist cult was a means to an end: it helped to propagandize the National Socialist ideology, to integrate the members of the society into the national community and finally, to sanction the political power of the Führer.

'Divine service is the school of the nation.'<sup>83</sup> This statement by Vitus Anton Winter, the reforming liturgist of the Enlightenment, became reality in the National Socialist cult.

The new human being that was formed here – playfully – was a reduced existence, a compliant follower of the National Socialist Führer and seducer. And the 'devout' words scarcely conceal what was actually involved: 'Blood you must be on the holy altar of the Fatherland . . . for Germany needs soldiers'.

I come to my conclusion. There is no question that the anthropological and theological structures that are important for understanding and planning the liturgy can also be recognised in the distorted mirror of the pseudo-cult. For reasons of time, this point cannot be demonstrated here in detail. I therefore restrict myself to presenting two theses that have been consciously formulated in a provocative way. I present them in the hope that they will kindle a discussion encompassing all the disciplines present.

- 1 Anthropologically: because it has a missionary aspect, liturgy has something to do with propaganda.
- 2 Theologically: because it is eschatological, liturgy has something to do with politics.

Moving to the first point: in his autobiographical records, Albert Speer reports on the strong impression that had been made upon Hitler by his meeting with the abbot of the cloister, Banz:

Do you believe that the Church could have maintained itself for two thousand years for no reason? We must learn from its methods, its inner freedom, its knowledge of human beings . . . . The dimensions of our great cultic structures in Berlin and Nuremberg will make the domes laughable. Let some small farmer step into our great domed hall in Berlin. Not only will his breath be taken away here; from this point on, this man will know where he belongs.<sup>84</sup>

Hitler and Goebbels were fascinated by the 'secret' and 'knowledge of human beings' of the Catholic Church. They were inspired by its unchanging, unifying, celebratory, yet ultimately mysterious liturgy in the planning of their own celebrations. All perversions aside, anthropological regularities were sensed here – regularities that hold for the Christian liturgy as well and were perhaps not always heeded in the liturgical reform (emphasis through veiling, intensification through repetition, etc.). If the Tridentine Good Friday liturgy is analysed against the comparative background of the National Socialist 'Easter celebration' of the ninth of November, some interesting discoveries will be made!

On the other hand, is the restraint regarding certain sensory signs and rites that can be observed in the renewed liturgy not an expression of the effort to plan the service of worship 'in the spirit and in the truth' (John 4: 23)?

In fact, the emotions are a dangerous means by which to manipulate the masses. Yet they are nonetheless necessary as a unified expression in the life of a community. In a phase of rationalistic shortening and verbal overloading, a liturgy that knows its character as proclamation – from 1 Corinthians: 14 – and understands itself, with Luther, as a 'public provocation to belief'<sup>85</sup> cannot dispense with this dimension.

On the second point: 'Filled with hope, millions look already to the swastika/the day of freedom and bread dawns'.<sup>86</sup> The origin of the Christian liturgy is the eschatological hope, and the National Socialist cult also has an eschatological direction. The eschatology propagated by its festivals is inner-worldly and political; the cult is enlisted into the service of the existing social order.

Within the Church, a loss of the eschatological dimension has contributed to the individualisation of the divine service. This dimension thereby becomes useful to political ideologies, for an eschatologised liturgy either becomes socially irrelevant or is transformed into a totalitarian cult. When the festival of salvation ends, either private devotion or the cult of duty begins: 'we do not want to be saved, only obligated'.<sup>87</sup> The future of liturgical renewal depends upon regaining the eschatological dimension.

What does this mean? Part of the nature of the Church and its divine service is continually and constructively to question the existing society in terms of the kingdom of God. The service should also make present the matter of God – which is at once the matter of men – in a public way. The liturgy exerts a political influence precisely by not letting itself be

politicised. It perceives its social-critical character by protesting, through its celebration of Christian worship, against the absolutisation of any earthly reality whatsoever; and it thereby holds the horizon open for the total, absolute reality of God, who alone ultimately frees the human being.

A liturgy that is eschatologically oriented in this sense is precisely the kind of liturgy that is required today. It is one in which the ‘for the sake of our salvation’, of the credo and ‘for the sake of your great majesty’ of the Gloria are ultimately based. For such a liturgy, the following observation obtains: ‘the most significant contribution to the society of the church is its life of worship’ (Wolfhart Pannenberg).

Like every National Socialist celebration, this lecture will also close with the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*. With a few minor variations, I would like to sing its text for you:

The butcher calls.  
 The eyes closed tight  
 The calf marches  
 With calm, sure step.  
 The calves whose blood  
 Has already flown in the slaughter-house –  
 They draw the spirit  
 Into their ranks.<sup>88</sup>  
 Under the motto:  
 Behind the drums  
 The calves trot.  
 They themselves provide  
 The skin of the drum.

Bertold Brecht parodied the song *Die Fahne hoch* in 1943, and he thereby desacralised National Socialism. Although the problem seems to have been swept from the table, the question of the survival of the democracy remains unsolved. Three things, in any case, are certain:

- 1 The inclination to manipulate on the part of the system and institutions is no different today than in the days of Hitler.
- 2 Despite – or perhaps due to – the increasingly perfected (pseudo) information web, the susceptibility to manipulation is in no way lesser than it was in the Third Reich.
- 3 Given the possible modern uses of military action, the possible consequences of manipulation have become gigantic compared to what happened in the Second World War.

The material that is held in archives and processed by researchers illustrates that the events of fifty years ago – events the younger generation finds

incredible – were not seen through at that time. What will the archives say about the backgrounds of our time?

### Notes

- 1 This text is a reworked version, with footnotes, of the publication: ‘“Liturgie” im Dienst der Macht. Nationalsozialistischer Totenkult als Säkularisierte Christliche Paschafeier (Mit Dokumentarfilm 1935)’, *Universität im Rathaus II, President of the Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz* (Mainz, 1983), 56–86.
- 2 Reinhold Schneider, ‘Der Antichrist. Nach Luca Signorelli’, *Sonette* (Leipzig, 1939).
- 3 Compare Michael Schmaus and Karl Forster (eds), *Der Kult und der heutigen Mensch* (Munich, 1961); Hermann Ullmann, *Der Weg des 19. Hunderts am Abgrund der Ersatzreligionen* (Munich, 1949); Kurt Eisner, *Feste der Festlosen* (Dresden, 1906); Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Vienna, 1938 – now also Munich, 1993).
- 4 Compare Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 1971); Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Der braune Kult. Das Dritte Reich und seine Ersatzreligion. Ein Beitrag zur politischen Bildung* (Hamburg, 1962); Karlheinz Schmeer, *Die Regie des Unöffentlichen Lebens im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1956); Werner Reichelt, *Das braune Evangelium. Hitler und die NS-Liturgie* (Wuppertal, 1990); Walter Künneht, *Der große Abfall. Eine geschichtstheologische Untersuchung der Begegnung zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Christentum* (Hamburg, 1947); Oskar Söhngen, *Säkularisierter Kultus. Eritis sicut deus* (Gütersloh, 1950); Rudolf Zinnhobler, ‘Nationalsozialismus als Religion’, *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 127 (1979), 139–49; Hans Müller, ‘Der pseudo-religiöse Charakter der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung’, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 12 (1961), 337–52; Werner Hamerski, ‘Gott und Vorsehung im Lied und Gedicht des Nationalsozialismus’, *Publizistik* 5 (1960), 280–300; Friedrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler. Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (Munich-Esslingen, 1968); Romano Guardini, *Der Heilbringer in Mythos, Offenbarung und Politik* (Stuttgart, 1946).
- 5 Romano Guardini, ‘Der Kultakt und die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der liturgischen Bildung’, letter of 1 April 1964 to Johannes Wagner, *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 4 (1964), 101–6.
- 6 Vondung, 140–44. See also: Victor Klemperer, *LTI (Lingua Tertii Imperii), Notizbuch eines Philologen* (Leipzig, 1996); Cornelia Berning, ‘Die Sprache des Nationalsozialismus’, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* vols 1–4, new series, 1960–63 *passim*; Siegfried Bork, *Mißbrauch der Sprache. Tendenzen nationalsozialistischer Sprachregelung* (Bern-Munich, 1970).
- 7 Compare Max Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945* (Wiesbaden, 1973). Cited singly: I, 326–30 (1933); I 457–59 (1934); I, 551–57 (1935); I, 653–55 (1936); I, 757–59 (1937); I, 966–72 (1938); II, 1404–17 (1939); II, 1601–8 (1940); II, 1771–81 (1941); II, 1932–44 (1942); II, 2049–59 (1943); II, 2160–67 (1944).
- 8 *Ibid.*, I, 458.
- 9 Leo Trepp, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst. Gestaltung und Entwicklung* (Stuttgart-Berlin-Cologne, 1992), 167.
- 10 Domarus I, 554.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Domarus I, 655.
- 13 *Qui pridie, quam pateretur* ... Thus begins, in the mass canon of the *Missale Romanum*, the report that makes the Last Supper present.
- 14 Both before and after the transformation, the same canon shows a list of saints (*Communicantes* ... *Inobis quoque peccatoribus* ...).

- 15 Narration of the story of the Exodus in the context of the Jewish Pascha meal. Compare Hans-Jörg auf der Maur, *Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit, I*. Volume 5 of Hans Bernhard Meyer, Hans-Jörg auf der Maur, Balthasar Fischer and Irmgard Pahl (eds), *Gottesdienst der Kirche. Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft* (Regensburg, 1983), 56–63.
- 16 *Vondung*, 70–112.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 33–69. The relevant materials on the planning of festivals can be found in *Vorschlägen der Reichspropagandaleitung zur nationalsozialistischen Feiergusaltung* (Munich, 1935–36) and the journal, *Die neue Gemeinschaft* (Munich, 1937–45). Of particular significance is also Hermann Roth, *Die Feier. Sinn und Gestaltung* (Leipzig, 1939); Hans-Werner von Meyen, ‘Die politische Feiern’, *Wille und Macht. Führungsorgan der nationalsozialistischen Jugend* 17 (1936), 1–15; *Fest- und Freizeitgestaltung im NSLB* (Munich, 1936).
- 18 *Vondung*, 150–58.
- 19 *Vorschläge der Reichspropagandaleitung* 1/23 (November 1935).
- 20 Schmeer, 101–5; *Vondung*, 83–85.
- 21 Compare Reichelt, 18.
- 22 Heinrich Anacker, *Die Fanfare. Gedichte der deutschen Erhebung* (Munich, 1934, 112–13).
- 23 Compare Kotze, 226; also Gamm, 141–42.
- 24 See Christoph Konrad, ‘Die Feiern zum 9. November im Spiegel der Berichterstattung des “Völkischen Beobachters”’. Ein Beitrag zur Verhältnisbestimmung von nationalsozialistischen Kult zu christlicher Liturgie’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Mainz, 1994); Schmeer, 101–5; *Vondung*, 83–85. A good summary in Hildegard von Kotze and Helmut Krausnick (eds), *Es spricht der Führer. Sieben exemplarische Hitler-Reden* (Gütersloh, 1966), 224–29.
- 25 *Völkischer Beobachter*, 10 November 1935.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 This ‘Here!’ probably ultimately goes back to the *adsum* of the Catholic consecration liturgy. Goebbels had ‘copied from the Fascists during his visit to Italy in early 1933 and “instituted for his own use”’ (compare Kotze, 229). Compare also Joseph Goebbels, *Der Faschismus und seine praktischen Ergebnisse* (Munich, 1934), 29.
- 28 Note the new calendar, analogous to the French Revolution. Compare Hans Maier, *Die christliche Zeitrechnung* (Freiburg, 1991), 45–46.
- 29 *Völkischer Beobachter*, 10 November 1935.
- 30 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich, 1930), 685.
- 31 On the thematic complex of the ‘flag’ see: Ernst Berthold, *Heiliges Brauchtum um die Fahne des Reiches* (Leipzig); ‘Die Flaggenhissung’, *Fest- und Freizeitgestaltung im NSLB*, 1/1937, book 2; Helmuth Fritsche, ‘Wir steh’n am Werk. Flaggenappelle und Feierstunden für Werkstatt und Berufsschule’, *Schaffende Jugend*, vol. 1 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1938); Gerhard Hellwig (ed.), *Fahnenhissung und Fahneneinholung. Zehn Feiern für die Schule im Dritten Reiche* (Berlin, 1935); Hanna Röbke (ed.), *Worte für die Fahne* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1935); ‘Stellt euch um die Standarte! Dichtungen für vaterländische Gedenktage und Feiern des deutschen Volkes und seiner Schule’, Werner Koch and Paul Skriewe (eds), *Deutschland muß leben* (Halle, 1935); *Fahnen-sprüche*, collected by the Office for the Instruction and Education of the Work of the Reich, for the Female Youth (Leipzig); Hermann Klauss, *Feierstunden der deutschen Schule* (Stuttgart, 1941); Karl Seibold, *Verpflichtung der Jugend und Schulabschied und ihre Vorbereitung in der Schule* (Munich, 1944); Herbert Böhme, *Bekenntnisse eines jungen Deutschen* (Munich, 1935), 5–12.

- 32 See article, 'Hakenkreuz', Arnold Rabbow, *DTV-Lexikon politischer Symbole* (Munich, 1970), 110–18.
- 33 Eberhard Wolfgang Möller, cited in Klaus Dörner (ed.), *Freude, Zucht, Glaube. Handbuch für die kulturelle Arbeit im Lager* (Potsdam, 1937), 65.
- 34 Heinrich Anacker, *Geweihte Fahnen. Wir wachsen in das Reich hinein* (Munich, 1938), 73.
- 35 Anacker, *Die Fanfare. Gedichte der deutschen Erhebung* (Munich, 1936), 88.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Hermann Böhme, 'Feierstunde zum 9. November', *Vorschläge der Reichspropagandaleitung zur nationalsozialistischen Feiargestaltung* (September 1935), 6/4}, nos. 1–6.
- 38 Böhme, *Feierstunde zum 9. November*, no. 3.
- 39 Ibid., no. 3a.
- 40 Ibid., compare Hebrews 9: 6–7; 11–12.
- 41 Hannelore Kunz-Otto (ed.), *150 Jahre Feldherrenhalle* (Munich, 1994), especially 67–74.
- 42 Böhme, *Feierstunde zum 9. November*, no. 3a.
- 43 Ibid., no. 3e.
- 44 Baldur von Schirach, *Die Fahne der Verfolgten* (Berlin, 1933), 32.
- 45 Gerhard Schumann, *Heldische Feier* (Munich, 1936).
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Domarus I, 555.
- 49 Vondung, 116–17. The festival analysed in the following corresponds structurally to the rules that are authoritative for the National Socialist festivals. In terms of content, it corresponds to the text suggestions that are included in the National Socialist publications.
- 50 *Songbook of the NSDAP* (Munich, 1938), 62.
- 51 Heinrich Anacker, *Wir wachsen in das Reich hinein* (Munich, 1938), 73.
- 52 Domarus I, 554–55.
- 53 Heinrich Anacker, *Die Trommel. S.A.-Gedichte* (Munich, 1936), 26.
- 54 Böhme, *Bekenntnisse*, 28.
- 55 Heribert Menzel, *Liederbuch der NSDAP*.
- 56 Friedrich Joachim Klähn, 'Führer', *Gedichte des Volkes*, 1st book.
- 57 Ibid., nos. 6 and 7.
- 58 Compare Bernhard Opfermann, *Die liturgischen Herrscherakklamationen im Sacrum Imperium des Mittelalters* (Weimar, 1953).
- 59 Böhme, *Feierstunde zum 9. November*, 3a.
- 60 *Songbook of the NSDAP*, 17–18.
- 61 Compare the Easter Song of Martin Luther, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, Markus Jenny (ed.), *Luthers geistliche Lieder und Kirchengesänge. Vollständige Neuedition in Ergänzung zu Band 35 der Weimarer Ausgabe* (Vienna, 1985), 194–97.
- 62 Ernst Leibl, in Reichsorganisationsleiter des Hauptschulungsamtes der NSDAP, *Material zur Gestaltung von Mittwinterfeiern im kleinen Kreis der Ortsgruppen*.
- 63 Auf der Maur, 70–83.
- 64 Hans Baumann, *Horch auf Kamerad* (Potsdam, 1936), 70.
- 65 Heinrich Anacker, *Die Trommel*, 24.
- 66 Böhme, *Feierstunde*, 2.
- 67 Böhme, *Bekenntnisse*, 13–19.
- 68 Böhme, *Feierstunde*, 3a.
- 69 Anacker, *Die Trommel*, 24.
- 70 Böhme, *Feierstunde*, 3a.
- 71 Walter Flex in Erich Kulke (ed.), *Hin zu dem Tag der deutschen Freiheit! Sinnsprüche der Hitlerjugend* (Berlin, 1935), 37.



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- 72 Vondung, 144–50.  
73 Ibid., 132–39.  
74 Schumann, 'Fahnenlied', *Wir dürfen dienen. Gedichte* (Munich, 1937), 73.  
75 Herbert Menzel, *Liederbuch der NSDAP*.  
76 Anacker, *Die Trommel*, 24.  
77 Vondung, 159–209, especially 199ff.  
78 Compare Erik H. Erikson, *Kindheit und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1954), 320–52 (chapter, 'Die Legende von Hitlers Kindheit').  
79 Schumann, *Gedichte und Kantaten*, 17.  
80 *Das schwarze Korps* of 21 August 1935, cited according to Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, *Die Bekenntnisse und grundlegenden Äußerungen zur Kirchenfrage des Jahres 1933* (Göttingen, 1936) 338.  
81 The journal of the Nationalsozialistische Feier- und Freizeitgestaltung bore this name.  
82 Compare note 56.  
83 Vitus Anton Winter, *Versuche zur Verbesserung der katholischen Liturgie. Erster Versuch. Prüfung des Werthes und Unwerthes unserer liturgischen Bücher* (Munich, 1804), Introduction, para. 1.  
84 Albert Speer, *Spandauer Tagebücher* (Frankfurt a. M., 1976).  
85 Martin Luther, 'Deutsche Messe vund ordnung Gottisdiensts, Wittemberg, 1526', in Wolfgang Herbst, *Evangelischer Gottesdienst. Quellen zu seiner Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1992), 71.  
86 Horst Wessel, *Die Fahne hoch, Liederbuch der NSDAP*, 7.  
87 Compare note 38.  
88 Bertold Brecht, *Gedichte VI* (Frankfurt a. M., 1964) 10.

## 5 Discussion of Chapter 4

### Dietmar Klenke, Münster

Right at the end, Mr Becker, you made an interesting observation. Specifically: you said that those of us who were born later find it inconceivable that what happened during the Third Reich was not seen through. I have the impression that, to this day, we historians – and this also holds for the neighbouring disciplines – have not developed a satisfying explanatory model, a theory that would suffice to make that which happened between 1933 and 1945 conceivable. And here, I would like to follow up on your observation that the celebration of the ninth of November – the memorial holiday for the heroes of the NSDAP – was musically framed in 1943 by the *Lied vom guten Kameraden*. Now, very few might know that almost no other Fatherland song possessed such a long and deeply rooted tradition as this hymn of comradeship on the front. The bases of this song are a poem by Ludwig Uhland and a composition for a men's choir by Friedrich Silcher from the 1830s. In the Weimar era, it became – and this can be said without exaggeration – the secret national hymn of the German nation. It had to be present in almost all memorial celebrations for the fallen soldiers; and it was precisely these celebrations in which the majority of Germans realised their national identity in the shadow of the defeat in the World War. And this majority assumed, self-righteously, that the Germans had conducted a defensive war against a world of malevolent enemies. In this thoroughly beloved song, the front soldier who has succumbed to death in battle gave his comrade the legacy of the further struggle on the way. Years before the meteoric rise of the National Socialists, this song not only lent highly effective expression to the revenge idea of anti-Versailles revisionism; on top of that, it elevated the German warrior to the sphere of divinity. It is striking in my opinion that this hymn should have formed the heart of the Fatherland ritual. The hymn demonstrates it splendidly: in the planning of their celebrations and festivals, the National Socialists preferred to fall back on the established symbols of the Fatherland tradition. Apparently, a much broader national consensus could be established around it than around such specifically National Socialist thought as the race theory, for example.

But now I come to what really interests me: the historical placement of all these rituals of the National Socialist era that seem so strange today. And this could hardly be done without taking a look at origins and precursors. If we take a look at the leading images and symbols of German National Socialism, we discover that a wide arc of tradition was involved, an arc that extends from the polished rites of the festivals and celebrations of the German national movement up to the Third Reich. It begins with the idea that there was a national resurrection, willed by God, in 1813. The Easter celebration symbolism that we encounter in the festivities on the first anniversary, on 18 October 1814, of the battle of Leipzig, expressed the same thing. Here we already have, throughout Germany, a religious rite of national resurrection. The entire Fatherland cult of the martyrs and heroes of the early twentieth century – the ideas that God has allied himself with German nationality; that the German nation is the chosen people of God; that the national community is a salvation community and should be understood in religious-historical terms; and finally, that the German man can find supreme moral fulfilment in self-sacrifice for the Fatherland in war – all this was already completely developed in the German national movement, in the so-called ‘organised nationalism’ of the early nineteenth century. These ideas about the Fatherland had already been radicalised before the wars of unification; they were borne by the German bourgeoisie, which was ambitious for advancement. This obtains for the period from 1815 until the revolution in March 1848, but even more for the phase from 1859 to 1863. It obtains, therefore, for the era before Bismarck and Prussia entered the scene as executors of the divine plan of German national salvation. Without effort, all the Fatherland rituals that elevated the nation to the highest earthly value of existence can be discovered at the gymnastic festivals, the shooting festivals, and the singing festivals of the liberal bourgeoisie. Without any initiation from above – by that, I mean from the traditional ruling elites – the idea of the Fatherland had already been disseminated before the wars of unification. If one considers this fact, which extends far back into the history of the nineteenth century, then one perhaps understands the matter better. Following the severe crises of the early twentieth century – above all, the World War catastrophe of 1918 and the economic breakdown of the post-war years – hardly anything else *could have* occurred other than a further radicalisation of this deeply rooted nationalism. Based on the mistaken belief in German innocence, this nationalism made Germany’s external and internal enemies responsible for all post-war evils.

I have the impression that National Socialism – regardless of all its genuine peculiarities – was based upon a core of traditional, national-religious ideologemes. The first was the model of the German man who appeals to God. The second was a national, militant community ideal for which any fight among factions whatsoever – any fight that would undermine national unity – is repugnant. And the third ideologeme is the idea that, after God,

this community ideal is the highest earthly point of reference to which everything else – even the churches, if necessary – must be subordinated. This cannot be emphasised often enough: we have here a very close mixture of God's will and the nation as a salvation community. And with these we further find a competition with classical ecclesiastical structures. It is here that I find the roots of all the errors that then led to the political religion of National Socialism at a time when German society was undergoing its worst national catastrophe since Napoleon. Even before the 1848 revolution, one can see beautifully how the men's choir movement of the Fatherland became a rival of the church choirs, how they detached the church hymn and spiritual choral hymn from the ecclesiastical sphere and transposed them into the salvation community of the national club movement. In doing so, they politicised the religious sphere considerably. In my opinion, precursors of the political religions of the twentieth century already reveal themselves here. If this entire context is kept in view, then we are more likely to be able to develop a plausible theory of the German *Sonderweg* in the future as well. I am so immodest as to attempt this myself at the moment. Next year, my book will be published by the Wissenschaftlichen Buchgesellschaft. It will be entitled *Der 'deutsche Mann' und seine Nation. Männerbünde, Vereinsnationalismus und deutscher Sonderweg* – this already as a pre-advertisement.

### **Peter Ehlen**

Mr Becker, a remark at the beginning of your lecture brings me to raise a question. After the foundation of the Spartacus League, we repeatedly find in the vocabulary of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg an emphasis upon the role of the proletariat as saviour, of the Communist movement. In 1919, shortly before his death, Liebknecht likened the deaths of those who were shot in the street fights to that of Jesus, the victim of Golgotha. With Rosa Luxemburg, we find such statements as, 'I was, I am, I will be' – statements that expressly refer to a religious context. My question is now the following: are there demonstrable influences upon that which you have presented here? Something like the antagonistic relationship of the Spartacists to the alliance of front-line soldiers – thus to national and nationalist currents? Following up on this: did the cultic festivals in Moscow surrounding the developing veneration of Lenin in the 1920s – a development that peaked on the ten-year anniversary of the October Revolution in 1927 – have an influence upon the cultic events in Munich or elsewhere in Germany?

### **Hansjakob Becker**

These are two very interesting questions to which I must answer in both cases very simply that I cannot answer them. I do not know.

**Leonid Luks, Eichstätt**

Mr Becker, your closing remark about the National Socialist liturgy made a certain connection to the missionary aspect of the Catholic liturgy. But I believe that we would still have to emphasise the fundamental difference here. The Catholic Church is universalistic in its missionary zeal, similar to Communism. Communism also directs its missionary zeal at all humanity. Who does National Socialism address when it does missionary work? Solely the community of the German people, perhaps also the Nordic race: all others are to be enslaved or annihilated. This is a particularistic missionary zeal; this is why this fundamental difference should be emphasised here in our investigation of political religions. The universalistic aspect of Communism differs fundamentally from the particularistic quality of National Socialism.

**Hans Leiner, Augsburg**

As a Lutheran theologian, I would like to approach the topic from the side of religion. This is why Mr Becker's lecture was particularly valuable to me, and also because I myself experienced a National Socialist morning service as a fourteen year old in Freudenstadt. Even if I could not understand the context at that time, nor the interesting parallels with the Protestant or Catholic service, it nonetheless made a deep impression on me. I must admit that I was deeply impressed by it; its atmosphere of solemnity, of divine worship, captivated me to the extent that I counted myself among the faithful and the seduced.

I am attempting to approach the topic of political religion from the side of religion. As a Lutheran theologian, this poses no problem or contradiction for me, as long as we add that it is pseudo-religion that is involved here – you alluded to it once at the end, Mr Becker. In our discussion of it within the church, we also like to speak of ersatz religion or religious ersatz or sacralised politics. As an aid to understanding it, please let me introduce and develop a thought of Martin Luther here. Interpreting the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, he formulated it thus: to have a god means to have something upon which to hang one's heart. 'The thing upon which you hang your heart, that is actually your God.' That is precisely what today's lecture by Klaus Vondung describes as religious faith. That is, the human being – and I assume, as Berdyaev says, that he is incorrigibly religious – always needs a god. This is why he always hangs his heart upon something or other that extends beyond himself. If it is not a god in the sense of religion, then it is some other earthly or worldly thing – something that would be described in religious terms as an idol. Yet the attitude of religious faith is always the same religious attitude. And to this extent, the idea that a new 'religionisation' of politics (to coin a term) occurred with National Socialism and Communism alike has something very convincing

about it in my view. And finally, permit me to introduce yet another citation – one that was not presented this morning. It is very short and to my knowledge, it arises from Baldur von Schirach. It is called *Bekennnis zum Führer* and will serve to reinforce this line:

We often heard the sound of your voice  
And listened mutely and folded our hands,  
For each word pressed into our souls.  
We all know that the end will come sometime,  
And will liberate us from need and force.  
This is the year of the turning point.  
What is here is a law that seeks them.  
The pure belief that you give us,  
Pulses through our young life, defines it.  
My Führer, you alone are path and goal.

The allusion to John 14, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ is for me completely obvious here.

### **Klaus Vondung**

I wanted once again to consider the question of what the religious element in National Socialism actually is, if one regards it as political religion. This consideration also follows up on what Mr Leiner just said in terms of comparing the National Socialist cult to the Christian one.

One can – and this you have done in a truly convincing way, Mr Becker – place the National Socialist cult and its liturgy alongside the Christian cult. I too have done this in my book on the National Socialist cult – this works very well, down to the smallest detail. You have gone a step further than I have in a few cases. Yet this is accompanied by a certain danger: then, the accent is placed too strongly on the ersatz function of the National Socialist cult. We juxtapose them so nicely – the celebratory order of a National Socialist morning service and the celebratory order of a Christian service of worship – and we can see the correspondence on every point. But then the former appears – and these were indeed precisely the words used – to be an ersatz cult, a pseudo-cult. I do not want to say that this is not the case, but I do not believe that this is the entire story and it would truncate the matter if we were to regard it solely from this perspective. The parallels extending to the smallest details might tempt us to assume that the National Socialist propagandists would have sat down, taken out the order of celebration of the Christian service and said: ‘so, how do we make ours?’ In this case, they would simply have translated it. But this was not so – or, at least, there is no kind of proof of it. Disregarding the certainty that there were conscious assumptions in individual cases, I believe that the situation fundamentally looks somewhat different.

One must recall that all these propagandists had been socialised as Christians. Even if they were no longer Christians in a substantive sense during the Third Reich, they all had received a Christian socialisation. Indeed, some of them had received a downright intensive one: Hans Johst, whom I cited, originally wanted to be a missionary and Gerhard Schumann had studied at a Lutheran theological seminary in Urach in preparation for theological study in Tübingen. They knew both their Bible and their orders of service; to a certain extent, the entire symbolism had sunk into their bones. They did not have to imitate something consciously; instead, it flowed into their finger as they wrote a text or drafted an order. Why is it so important for me to emphasise this? Because, I think that a genuine religious need was still present: one that had to create a space for itself, which sought to take shape, which wished to gain linguistic expression. And what was there in words, shapes and forms was what these people knew from their Christian upbringing. It was these that they fell back upon. This situation differs from a conscious imitation for propagandistic purposes and the creation of an ersatz function, an ersatz form. Rather, it involves the symbolic clothing of a genuine religious need using the materials at hand. And I think that it is important to emphasise this point.

### **Hansjakob Becker**

I would agree entirely with that.

### **Gerd Koenen, Frankfurt**

In my book, *Die großen Gesänge*, I treated the Communist cult of the leader. At the moment, I am working on the topic of the German-Russian projections of each other – primarily in the period before and after the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

The first thing that I would like to point out is that National Socialism and Bolshevism or Marxism-Leninism must also always be analysed within their respective national contexts. In that which Mr Becker portrayed, the very surrogate-like, forced aspect of this staging was what struck me first. I think that this is one major difference between the two systems. Leonid Luks has pointed out the difference between the universalism and particularism of the respective ideologies, but I think that different national traditions are also involved. The Bolshevistic martyrology was, it seems to me, somewhat more authentic because it corresponded to a genuine history of suppression. Certainly, this history was painted in an exaggerated way, but it evinced with its opposition to the tsarist despotism a greater authenticity compared to the martyrology of National Socialism. The latter, after all, had existed legally during its ‘period of struggle’ in the Weimar Republic. This, then, was the first forced and over-drawn element.

The second concerns the parallels to the Christian liturgy and Christian eschatological representations. To be sure, it is very tempting to make these parallels. In the main, however, that which we have seen still seemed to me to be a chaotic mix of the most diverse elements. And many of them – perhaps most – were entirely un-Christian. Certainly, the solemn marching has something of a procession about it. Yet it is not the Word that is in the centre here: instead, everything springs from the music and images. And if I let their charms work upon me, then I find characteristics of the nineteenth-century national mythologies to be much more strongly developed – the emphatic classicism or pseudo-Hellenism, therefore, or the Old German mischief of the popular movement. And there are many elements of the Youth Movement as well . . .

### **Hans Maier**

Richard Wagner . . .

### **Gerd Koenen**

. . . correct, the Richard Wagner cult. Expressionism has also already been named. What I see is a syncretism of characteristics and styles that were cobbled together in an outrageously artificial way. In terms of poetic quality, what emerges at the end are the swollen lyrics of a senior high-school teacher. In the poems you have presented us, I again hear this forced, artificial aspect.

This leads to the next, perhaps the most substantial, difference: the time horizons are completely different. National Socialism lasted a mere 12 years and this is another reason why all its productions and linguistic forms seem artificial. Part of a ritual or liturgy is the practice, the continual repetition of it so that it sinks into one's bones. Further, National Socialism – so it seems to me – incorporated only a very small generational spectrum. Russian Marxism-Leninism, by contrast, shaped a number of generations.

### **Juan Linz, New Haven**

My starting point is Spanish society, in which empathy with the entire complex of topics about which we have spoken today is very difficult to find. This brings me to my problem: why was it so successful in Germany? There were of course imitations in other contexts and I have not yet heard any mention of the Italian elements, which preceded National Socialism in a temporal sense – I am thinking here of D'Annunzio. The 'Here!' of the Hitler Youth was of course the 'Presente!' of the Italians. And the movement's concern with martyrs is also very Italian.

A further point: the state coaches at the celebration of the dead, these were state coaches for military funerals. The entire thing was in part very



eclectic. On the other hand, however, the religious language is omnipresent. And this occurred with people who were not faithful and did not want to connect it with religion; we are not speaking here of the faith movement of the German Christians but of genuine Nazis. A difference from the Communist political religions comes to light here: the Marxist-Leninist Communist variant assumed that religion must first be eradicated as a condition of constructing the new human being. National Socialism sought first to construct the National Socialist community that would destroy the Church later; the first step was not to destroy the Church, because the Church was much too strong in Germany. The Catholic Church – this holds in part for the Protestant one too – was not as vulnerable to attack by a popular movement as was the Russian Orthodox Church. For this reason, assimilation of the ecclesiastical language was possible and useful. As has been emphasised, however, this was not a conscious process.

What is specifically German, perhaps, is the phenomenon of a secularised culture and society being erected upon an enormous religious basis. Religion and the entire phraseology, the entire language of religion, had already been transmitted in school – to non-believers as well. The religious high culture and religious celebrations – I am thinking here of Bach, choral music and the entire musical sphere – were also a part of the bourgeois culture. Then, I would investigate to what extent the German culture – one in which religion and culture were closely connected – and secularisation were not anti-religious, but an ersatz religion. To what extent was this special kind of German Protestant secularisation the foundation of the political religion? This was a total contrast to the secularisation that occurred in other countries; elsewhere, it was pushed through with radically anti-clerical elements and an anti-Church atmosphere that extended down to the peasant population. I believe that this topic should be discussed.

## 6 Marxism-Leninism as political religion

*Klaus-Georg Riegel*

### **Political religion: religion or ersatz religion?**

The public interest<sup>1</sup> in a narrower definition of the concept and nature of political religions is definitely due to the totalitarian movements that have so emphatically marked the face of the twentieth century. The political religions of pre-modern societies, by contrast, seem to have been securely archived in the respective specialist disciplines. Under these circumstances, the question as to the totalitarian implications of the sun-cult of Akhenaton or the Geneva theocracy of Calvin might scarcely mobilise the combat battalions of political correctness; they are more likely to be treated controversially in the responsible specialist organs. That these pre-modern societies formed theocracies that – *en miniature* – underwent every variation of wars of faith conceivable might belong among the pieces of knowledge that arouse no further notice. Scientific concern with the political religions of totalitarian movements of the modern era, by contrast, cannot work undisturbed in an encapsulated space of the archives of specialist disciplines; instead, it must always expect a public that reacts to scientific problems and results with praise or censure, critique or agreement, outrage or judgement. The explosiveness of the scientific study of the modern totalitarian movements and their political religions rests not so much with the data submitted and their incorporation into comprehensive theories; it is based, rather, upon a matter that is seldom openly confessed and extends far beyond the limits of the cultural sciences. What is involved is the problem of the religious justification and motivation of the monstrous crimes that these totalitarian movements practised with the help of institutions and technologies of the utmost modernity. Moral judgements, allocations of guilt and exonerations for those who commit religiously motivated and legitimated crimes are indivisibly tied to the researching of problems in this area. In this context, both condemnations and exonerations are bound up with one's position;<sup>2</sup> they are, therefore, dependent upon value judgements and the foundations of faith that underpin them. Representatives of a universalism of human rights also judge in terms of their own position: in terms, namely, of their faith-conviction that there are transculturally valid

standards of value that must obtain universally. It is necessary, therefore, to answer the question as to whether the monstrous crimes that were planned and executed by these totalitarian movements under explicit invocation of their ideological postulate of destruction were in fact brought about and driven on by religious basic motives. Or was it only perversions of religious faith that were involved? If this were the case, then such perversions would have to be regarded as illusory legitimations and be eliminated from religious legitimation in the more narrow sense. Are the roots of the barbarian inhumanity of modern totalitarian movements in fact religious, then? Did the movements legitimate this inhumanity as a necessary deed in terms of salvation history? Is there a religion of inhumanity, under the conditions of modernity, which provides the technical means and prerequisites by which to let the crimes of the totalitarian movements penetrate into areas that were hitherto inconceivable in the history of inhumanity? Stated differently: would the crimes of the totalitarian movements also have been carried out if those movements had not had at their disposal inner-worldly doctrines of salvation that conveyed their adherents the certainty of belief that their crimes were necessary and legitimate?

The totalitarian movements of Fascism, National Socialism and Marxism-Leninism did not describe themselves as political religions. Rather, they regarded the traditional Christian religions as dangerous competitors for power in the field of the 'official interpretation of the world'. For this reason, these religions were to be combated.<sup>3</sup> The concept of political religions is a foreign description selected from the vantage point of the scientific observer, the political opponent or the renegade for the sake of describing the paradoxical phenomenon and explaining why these secular mass movements of modernity – which struggled against the Christian religions – themselves emerged as religious movements. The movements formed analogous structural forms, presented their theories of history and ideological axioms as doctrines of inner-worldly salvation, treated their members as believers and venerated their leaders as prophets, saviours and founders of faith. The entire arsenal of the concepts of the sociology of religion was enlisted in order to understand this religious character of totalitarian movements. W. Gurian spoke of totalitarian or secular religions,<sup>4</sup> R. Aron conceived of them variously as caricatures of soteriological religion,<sup>5</sup> as secular religions,<sup>6</sup> as ersatz religions,<sup>7</sup> or – with respect to communism – as a 'religion of intellectuals that was successful'.<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt even categorically refused to describe Bolshevism as a religion, because 'both its doctrinal framework and its deeds have caused a genuine abyss to arise between the free world and the totalitarian parts of the globe'.<sup>9</sup> She even speaks in this context of a 'danger of blasphemy that is always innate to the concept of "secular religion"'.<sup>10</sup>

The embarrassment that speaks from these changing and contradictory conceptual definitions is obvious. As these citations – which could be further multiplied at will – demonstrate, no specific conceptual schema that fits the

basic religious structure of totalitarian movements exists. These movements are classified as unsuccessful imitations of the Christian religions, as their illegitimate inheritors, as poor religious substitutes or as essentially different ideologies. There is one further possibility: that of understanding political religions as *faits sociaux* in the sense of Durkheim.<sup>11</sup> In this case, they would be religions *sui generis*; like all forms of religious belief and experience, they would satisfy certain basic functions of social integration.<sup>12</sup> There is an obvious recourse here to the conceptual matrix according to which the traditional Christian religions describe themselves or are understood by the research in the sociology of religion. In this process of analogising, it is left to the reflective judgement of the scientific observer to decide whether political religions created by totalitarian movements should be regarded solely as ersatz religions of short duration or as an opiate created by revolutionary intellectuals; such religions would then again disappear with the failure of totalitarian regimes. Or should these political religions be regarded instead as social facts, as religions *sui generis*? In this case, they would not be understood conceptually and evaluated in processes of analogy or subsumption to other, true and morally better religions. What is involved here, therefore, are value-judgements that have been made previously and are linked to a scientific definition of the concept and fact of political religions.

With his 1938 essay, *Die politischen Religionen*, Eric Voegelin provided a systematic definition of the concept that sought to combine value-judgement with scientific analysis.<sup>13</sup> His value-judgement is clear: the political religions had developed a destructive dynamic that not only shook the foundations of a civilised order but threatened them at their base. Political religions had almost destroyed the experiences of transcendence of religious faith and hope and had divinised the earthly political community in their place. This was a fateful step in the demonism of inner-worldly theocracies, which declared their inhuman doctrines of annihilation to be revelations in salvation history that promoted the collective happiness. According to Voegelin, the destruction of sacral transcendence and sacralisation of political communities occurred during a period that long preceded the totalitarian experiences of the twentieth century: during the heresy of antique Gnosis, which had already attempted the self-divinisation of human beings and their societies in the early stages of Christianity. The destructive influence of the Gnostic revolution,<sup>14</sup> the first traces of which Voegelin already believes to discern with the sun-cult of Akhenaton, extends through the heretical sects of the twelfth and thirteenth century. Gaining new expression in the doctrine of the Thousand Year Reich of Joachim of Fiore, the Gnostic revolution experienced a powerful radicalisation with the movement of the Puritan saints in the seventeenth century. The saints sought to establish a kingdom of God upon earth and felt no pangs of conscience when they demanded that the representatives of the old church be liquidated. The Gnostic revolution had a particular symbolic structure: the Third Reich, theories of historical stages, the leader and superman, the prophet

and Gnostic intellectual, and finally, the ‘brotherhood of autonomous people’<sup>15</sup> comprise the instrumentarium of concepts in the sociology of religion that Voegelin uses. Voegelin also uses this instrumentarium to characterise the modern Russian chiliastic societies, fighting orders and communities of revolutionary faith. These, according to him, begin with the Decembrist Rebellion of 1825 and end with Lenin’s Gnostic sect. Despite the pejorative valuation that Voegelin attributes to the Gnostic heresies and their representatives, he nonetheless succeeds in formulating a scientific position that does not regard the political religions merely as analogies, imitations and ersatz solutions of the – morally superior and therefore worthy of affirmation – Christian religions.

Voegelin chooses as his starting point a paradox that the Christian self-description has formulated as a contradictory faith experience. The believers’ pneumatic experience allowed them to come into contact with the sacral transcendence of God, to open their souls,<sup>16</sup> to have a new, tremendously moving experience. The return of God, His *paraousia*, seemed imminent and the uncertainty of fulfilment of the salvation abolished.<sup>17</sup> Yet the *paraousia* did not occur. The failure of God to materialise on earth required a postponement of the *paraousia* to a later, eschatological point in time. Consequently, the postponed *paraousia* unintentionally legitimated the church as an external, rule-bound institution – as the earthly representative of transcendence. The pneumatically conveyed transcendence (the ‘weak bond of faith’<sup>18</sup> to the ‘world-transcendent God’<sup>19</sup>) and the earthly institutionalisation of it parted ways; each then developed its own logic, one that produced a different, opposing form and experience of faith. The Gnostic revolution destroyed this tension-laden dualism of transcendence and immanence; it mutilated the experience of transcendence of the faithful by attributing to earthly communities and human beings divine attributes that they – as finite, mortal beings – do not possess. Previously, the experience of transcendence had formed an entire religious world of experience of the faithful, one that had been psychologically and culturally enriched in many different ways by the opening of the soul. This experience was then lost to the political community; having lost itself in the immanence of mere interests and wishes, it even endowed these with a sacral significance. A consequence of this loss of transcendence was the abolition of inner controls. In the course of realising inner-worldly hopes of salvation and strivings for self-divinisation, however, it is just such controls that might serve to hinder the community from killing human beings who oppose such sacral self-legitimation. The sacral, self-divinised community commits crimes without being able to conceive of them as such. It believes that its doctrines of liquidation are justified by its own, socially rooted economy of salvation.

Despite his value judgements and his open distaste for modern political religions, then, Voegelin can formulate a scientific position that draws upon the experiences of transcendence of Christian believers. This position indicates the unintended consequences of blocking such experiences for the

temporal world. Further, it traces the chequered history of Gnostic abortive developments up to the modern totalitarian movements. Voegelin thereby successfully develops a research perspective that does not have to dispense with value judgements. As the most important points of his research perspective, the following should be named:

- 1 The symbolic world of the political religions was formed in an epoch that included the ancient high cultures and extended over a millennium. The political religions of the totalitarian movements of modernity mark the endpoint of this Gnostic revolution. In order to advance in modernity to its final radicality and intensity, Gnostic revolution needed a thrust of developments and ideas that had endured for centuries. Temporally, therefore, political religions and the religious legitimation of totalitarian movements do not coincide. The modern totalitarian movements drew upon the repertoire of antique, medieval and early modern Christian symbolic worlds.
- 2 As the starting point of investigating political religions in terms of the sociology of religion, a paradox that had already been formulated in the self-description of Christianity was selected. The conceptual net of the analysis originates from the transcendent and immanent experiential worlds of Christianity itself. The analysis of political religions, therefore, does not rely upon a heteronymous categorisation of the Christian belief and its goals.
- 3 The modern derivatives of the ancient Gnostic heresy – the political religions of Fascism, National Socialism and Communism – are indeed phenomena that mark the decay of the true, transcendent Christian religion and, as such, should be rejected in terms of value. Nonetheless, the basic religious motifs and faith impulses are considered to have arisen from a genuinely religious experience of the Christian world of faith. The symbolic world of the modern political religions remains a Christian symbolic world even if assumes a form that betrays and denies transcendence.
- 4 It is for this reason that the immanent symbolic world of the modern political religions – the core of which is divinisation of the political movement – has enjoyed such tremendous success. Indeed, at certain points in the historical development of modernity (collapse of traditional powers of order: army, state, administration, political class), its success has been overwhelming. The immanent symbolic world has enjoyed popularity with masses of people living in a secularised world and in supposed remoteness from God. The success has been due to the political religions having unleashed, mobilised and captured in organisational terms basic emotions, practices and faith that are genuinely Christian. Accordingly, the political religions have not merely advanced into the free spaces that were created by secularisation; they have not simply appeared in a secularised no man's land as disguised religions<sup>20</sup> or

successors of the original Christian religions. As forces of faith *sui generis*, they are no mere ersatz religions.

- 5 The political religions aim to conquer central apparatus of rule. With their help, they seek to bring about a revolutionary upheaval of the entire social structure. Thus does the political sphere become the stage of modernity's striving for inner-worldly salvation. In pre-modern societies, the high religions were ordered towards the beyond. Granting significance to the political sphere only in the context of their ideas of transcendence, they attributed the supreme significance to religion as a system by which to rule and interpret the world. The modern political religions, by contrast, focus upon control of the political system as the decisive prerequisite of attaining inner-worldly salvation. The political system<sup>21</sup> becomes the central vehicle of the political religions.
- 6 It is impossible to analyse the modern totalitarian political religions without using the Christian symbolic world – in terms of both self-experience and scientific understanding – as one's own frame of reference. To seek to dispense with Christianity would be to miss the object. A mere critique of ideologies that seeks to expose the modern political religions' world of new Christian symbolism as a farce, caricature, substitute, surrogate or poor concealment of unrestrained drives for power will serve only to confirm its own initial assumptions. In the process, however, it will fail to recognise the force of faith of the political religions.

### **The national tradition of Leninism: the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia**

The self-divinisation of historical actors that Voegelin addresses applies to a special extent to the Russian intelligentsia. With its glowing consciousness of destiny, this group had sought to liberate Russia from the autocratic yoke and save the people since the Decembrist rebellion of 1825. As with all such self-divinised actors, the Russian intelligentsia believed to have decoded the meaning of history with its secularised doctrines of salvation; and it also imagined itself to be the master of history. Yet Russia and its intelligentsia did not emerge as a nation and national intelligentsia in the traditional, Western sense, but always understood itself as an imperial representative of the Christian truth of a Third Rome.<sup>22</sup> With the emergence of a revolutionary intelligentsia, this self-understanding was transformed into a secular message of salvation. And after Russia's October Revolution of 1917, this message was then spread throughout the world. As is well known, the Russian intelligentsia created its own forms of social organisation. The various conspiratorial brotherhoods, religious orders, revival movements, terrorist fighting associations, secret societies, literary circles and friendship alliances granted members a space with which to identify themselves; they guarded the messianic knowledge and made possible its distribution via newspapers, books and declarations.<sup>23</sup> The intelligentsia's sense of messianic mission was

strengthened and fortified by the establishment of this peculiar type of social knowledge. In the long run, however, its consolidation led to a separation – one the intelligentsia at once welcomed and lamented – both from the rest of the society and from the tsarist ruling apparatus.<sup>24</sup> The figure of the repentant aristocrat who is ashamed of his privilege, who confesses his sins to the pure, undefiled people even as he holds firm to his sense of a messianic mission and praises self-sacrifice as a penance for the servitude of his people: this is a well known phenomenon of this intelligentsia and one that cannot be described according to criteria of social class.

The historically unique form and shape of the Russian intelligentsia – the mission of which was later taken up by the revolutionary intelligentsia as well – arose from the social and cultural distance that had been reinforced by the self-organisation into secret societies. Here too emerged the combination of ethical rigorism and revolutionary praxis that was to shape future developments – a combination that had been foreseen in literary terms by Dostoevsky in the figure of Stavrogin in *The Devils*.<sup>25</sup> The best known examples are certainly Pestel's Decembrist 'welfare alliance',<sup>26</sup> the revolutionary catechism of Necaev,<sup>27</sup> Tkacev's 'Program for Revolutionary Actions'<sup>28</sup> and Isutin's guidelines for his 'Organisation'.<sup>29</sup> These were all attempts to capture and discipline the revolutionary intelligentsia's ethical rigorism and sense of mission in organisational terms; they were also attempts to translate this rigorism into practice in concentrated political strikes against the autocracy and thereby to realise the plan of salvation. The individual career revolutionaries selected the internal disciplining strategies to which the members of their secret societies were supposed to be subjected; and they grew into models of order of a total character. Although he himself had cooperated in formulating it, Bakunin described Necaev's revolutionary catechism as a 'Jesuit control system'. He denounced its 'deceitful methods as well as the offensive mistrust, the mutual surveillance, the spying and the mutual denunciations'.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, he recommended introducing a 'fraternal and common control of each individual by all'<sup>31</sup> in their place. At base, then, this signified merely the exchange of a literal for a strict semantic.

This is the historical and cultural background against which the first attempts at interpretation – attempts based on the sociology of religion – must be regarded. These attempts were made by the Russian intelligentsia itself, for the sake of ascertaining both the historical continuities and the breaches of tradition in the claim to leadership that had been raised by the Marxist intelligentsia. In the failed revolution of 1905, the role played by this group had not exactly been triumphal. The *Vechi*, a collection of essays of Russian intellectuals appearing in 1909, was supposed both to account for the true grounds of the failure of the Marxist intelligentsia in the revolution of 1905 and to set 'path-markers' for spiritual and moral renewal. The *Vechi* can be understood not only as a 'study in the early history of the Communist intelligentsia',<sup>32</sup> but also as a 'collective confession'.<sup>33</sup> As a



continuation of the history of the Russian intelligentsia, it too is rife with confessions. Thus did almost all the authors – among which were to be found not a few former Marxists – passionately criticise the monopoly upon interpretation that was held by the revolutionary intelligentsia. This criticism was likewise returned. In this context, Lenin spoke contemptuously of an ‘ideology of counter-revolutionary liberalism’.<sup>34</sup> Semen Frank’s religious-sociological analysis of the ‘religion of the absolute attainment of the people’s happiness’ stands out as being particularly impressive for having anticipating many points of later developments.<sup>35</sup> With gaze trained upon the Bolshevik ‘underground sect’,<sup>36</sup> Frank described the Leninist career revolutionary as a ‘revolutionary monk’<sup>37</sup> whose religious zeal seeks

not the execution of objectively useful and profane reforms of some kind, but destruction of the enemy of the faith and a violent conversion of the world to his belief. ... The entire enthusiasm of this army of monks is directed at attaining earthly, material interests and needs, at establishing a paradise in which milk and honey flow. ... The entire asceticism, the entire religious zeal, the drive to self-sacrifice and determination to sacrifice others – all these serve the realisation of those subjective, relative and changing interests that nihilism and materialistic unbelief regard as being the sole important ones. The most prosaic matters and needs become the object of religious veneration for them; and they are fulfilled according to a universal plan that has been prescribed by metaphysical dogmas and unshakable cloister rules. A handful of monks that are both alienated from the world and feel contempt for it declares war upon the world in order to make it happy through violence and to satisfy its earthly and material needs.<sup>38</sup>

Bulgakov also sees ‘features of a religiosity ... that at times even approaches the Christian one’ in the Russian intelligentsia.<sup>39</sup> Despite its break with the church and its confession of atheism, this intelligentsia is characterised by a ‘certain world-remoteness’,<sup>40</sup> by an ‘eschatological dream of the city of God and the coming kingdom of justice (under various socialist pseudonyms) and the striving to save humanity – if not from sin, then from suffering’.<sup>41</sup> Atheism, the ‘religion of divine humanity, the core of which [is] self-divinisation’<sup>42</sup> has a ‘main dogma’:<sup>43</sup> namely,

belief in the natural perfection of the human being, in an infinite progress accomplished by human means. This progress is also understood mechanistically. Because everything evil can be explained in terms of the external defects of human social existence, and because, therefore, neither personal guilt nor personal responsibility exist, the entire task of social planning consists in overcoming these external defects – through external reforms, of course.<sup>44</sup>

The 'heroism of self-divinisation'<sup>45</sup> ends in 'maximalism'.<sup>46</sup> This is

the very soul of heroism, for the hero by no means contents himself with little. Even if he sees no possibility to realise the maximum at this time or later, he is entirely obsessed with it in his thoughts. He makes an historical spring in his fantasy and fixates, without taking much interest in the path that has been leapt over, completely on the shining point at the most extreme horizon of history. A maximalism of this type displays all the symptoms signs of monomania and self-hypnosis; it fetters thought and yields a fanaticism that is deaf to the voice of life. It also helps us to answer the historically important question as to why, in the revolution, the most extreme movements enjoyed triumphs and the immediate tasks of the day were always formulated in a maximalist way.<sup>47</sup>

Such maximalistic fanaticism, thus Bulgakov, is essentially different from the inner self-control that the Puritans – the Christian counterparts to the Russian god-men – practised as 'true Christian fighters'.<sup>48</sup> There is a nice expression of the monastic life for this religio-practical idea: to serve in obedience. This expression describes every task that is given to the monk: whether it involves scholarly work or the heaviest physical labour, it is carried out in the name of religious duty. This concept can also be used beyond the limits of the cloister to describe all other kinds of work as well: the doctor and engineer, the professor and politician, the factory owner and workers. These too can let themselves be guided by the fulfilment of their duties, not by their personal interests – whether these be ideal or material – but by their consciences, by the commands of duty'.<sup>49</sup> Between the Russian maximalist hero and the Puritans – with their 'discipline of obedient service'<sup>50</sup> – that were so important for Western Europe, 'no essential relation' exists.<sup>51</sup> This, at least, is the analysis of Bulgakov, who was schooled on Max Weber's thesis of Protestantism. 'The task of heroism is the external salvation of humanity . . . through one's own power, according to one's own plan, 'in one's own name'. The hero is he who most consistently translates his ideas into deeds, even if life smashes upon it. He is the god-man. The task of Christian heroism consists in living one's life in apparent self-denial: to serve, to do one's work with all one's energy, self-discipline and self-mastery, but to see in it and oneself merely an instrument of providence. A Christian saint is one who has transformed his entire personal will and his entire empirical existence in such a way that he is as permeated as possible by the will of God. The highest image of this is the man-god who has come, 'not to do his will, but the will of the One Who has sent him and "who comes in the name of the Lord"'.<sup>52</sup> Bulgakov's intentions aside, the parallels to the Leninist strategies of discipline are remarkable – as remains to be shown. Bulgakov makes a plea for an intellectual who is bound by internal self-discipline, who transforms his former 'heroic ecstasy with clearly hysterical

undertones<sup>53</sup> into a 'discipline of obedient service'<sup>54</sup> (party discipline). This results in the end in the elimination of the orientation towards transcendence, in a discipline machine that replaces the puritanical 'earning machine'.<sup>55</sup>

Kistiakowsky<sup>56</sup> confirms that the intelligentsia possessed only a truncated<sup>57</sup> consciousness of right in that it disregarded the rights and liberties of the individual. Kistiakowsky heatedly criticises the maxim that was stated by Plechanov at the Second Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Russia in 1903, *salus populi suprema lex*. Translated into the language of the revolutionary, this means that the success of the revolution is the highest law. And if it were to enhance the success of the revolution to suspend some democratic principle or other for a time, then it would be a crime to shrink back from such restriction'.<sup>58</sup> He also offers a perceptive commentary on Lenin's approval of the state of siege that had been imposed upon the Party at the same party convention: 'Yet if a party composed of educated republicans cannot get by without a state of siege and emergency decrees, then we can understand why Russia is still governed with the help of the secret police and martial law today'.<sup>59</sup>

Berdyayev calls upon the revolutionary intelligentsia to practise 'self-critique, repentance and disclosure of infirmity'.<sup>60</sup> He criticises it for its politicisation of philosophy.

The intelligentsia did not have a selfless relationship to philosophy because it conducted itself in a selfish way with regard to the truth, demanding that it be an instrument of the social coup, an instrument of the welfare of the people and of human happiness. It succumbed to the seduction of the Grand Inquisitor, who demanded renunciation of the truth in the name of human happiness. The moral premises of the intelligentsia can be captured in the following formula: by all means, let the truth go under, if only the people become happy and life becomes better. Down with the truth, if it stands in the way of the sacred call, 'down with self-mastery'.<sup>61</sup>

This scathing critique also applied to the Marxist intelligentsia, which had succumbed to the 'mystique of the proletarian class'.<sup>62</sup>

From this perspective, the conscious interest has been directed toward the objective conditions of Russia's development; rather, it was necessarily enlisted to the assertion of an abstract maximal goal for the proletariat – the maximal goal of the intelligentsia sect, that is, which wished to know nothing of objective truths.<sup>63</sup>

Berdyayev continued this critique in exile, in a religious-sociological analysis; and he presented more extensive concepts of the sociology of religion in his 1934 book, *Wahrheit und Lüge des Kommunismus*. Here, Berdyayev characterises

Communism as the 'religion of ultimate this-worldliness'.<sup>64</sup> It was organised like a theocratic church.<sup>65</sup> This Communist theocracy has assumed Marxist messianism as its sacral inheritance. As a 'messianic class that is called to liberate humanity',<sup>66</sup> the proletariat is brought together by proletarian communism in order to attain social justice and thereby the power and rule of socially organised humanity. The victory of the proletariat means at once the triumph of social rationalisation and the ultimate overcoming of the irrational energies of the world. Anarchy, in the form of capitalist society, is abolished. The proletariat is to implement a definitive regulation of existence and to liberate the life of the perfected society from all irrational, dark and secretive elements and powers.<sup>67</sup> According to Berdyaev, the Marxian messianic of the proletariat has allied itself with the Russian messianic of the religious vocation in the theory of Moscow as the Third Rome.<sup>68</sup> 'But in the place of the Third Rome, the Russian people has realised the Third International. In this Third International was accomplished the fateful marriage of the Russian national messianistic idea with international proletarian messianism'.<sup>69</sup>

The Messianic feeling, the Messianic consciousness, unleashes violent energies; it fills one with enthusiasm, with preparedness to sacrifice . . . The Communists live and create in the belief that the historical hour, heavy with destiny, is at hand; the world catastrophe is in progress and a new era of world history awaits. This belief grants them superhuman energy and impels them to enormous activity'.<sup>70</sup>

The nihilistic revolutionary intelligentsia was excellently suited to serve as a carrier of both the international proletarian messianism and Russian national messianism. Because 'the meaning of suffering and of its overcoming remains unknown' to this pre-revolutionary nihilism, 'it therefore loses itself in utilitarian dead-ends and betrays the human personality to the abstract idea of the general welfare'.<sup>71</sup> 'Russian atheism is a rebellion against God in the name of the salvation of the human being – but not of the salvation from sin, but from suffering. So is it above all a failure to recognise Christ, the god who suffers and gives life'.<sup>72</sup> The 'atheistic idolatry'<sup>73</sup> understood and organised as a state, according to Berdyaev, presents all characteristics of an intolerant state church. In the 'religious psychic constitution of the Russian people and its religious uniqueness',<sup>74</sup> such a state finds a 'favourable cultural medium'.<sup>75</sup>

Communism holds itself to be the only true religion and tolerates no other within its territory. It demands a religious worship of the proletariat as the chosen people of God; it defies the social collectivity, which is called upon to replace god and the human being. Indeed, the social collective becomes the only subject of moral valuations and acts, the bearer and representative of truth itself. Communism preaches a

new morality, one that is not Christian, but not humanitarian either. It has worked out an orthodox theology and a cult – the Lenin cult, for example – of its own, as well as its own symbolism; it has even introduced its own holidays, the red baptism and red burial. Communism possesses a generally binding dogmatism and a catechism; it exposes the heresies and damns the heretics.<sup>76</sup>

Like Berdyaev, Fedor Stepun also attempts to account for the underlying causes of the success of Bolshevism in exile. Whereas Berdyaev regards at least the Bolshevik demands for social justice and for comprehensive planning of the economic anarchy of the capitalistic market as justified and the ‘marriage’ of proletarian and national messianism as given, Stepun draws a decisive dividing line between the revolutionary intelligentsia and Bolshevism. Stepun even goes so far as to blame Bolshevism for the destruction of the sacrifice-ready intelligentsia, which had taken personal responsibility and guilt upon itself.<sup>77</sup> He also held it responsible for the destruction of the terroristic *Narodnaya Volya*.<sup>78</sup>

An intelligentsia in the old Russian sense does not exist today as a visible quantity in Soviet Russia. That which is described as a new Soviet intelligentsia abroad is the opposite of that which the knights of the intelligentsia orders were. The old members of the intelligentsia were career ideologues and professional confessors, but at the same time usually bloody dilettantes in practical life. The representatives of the new Soviet intelligentsia are usually specialist achievers with great ability and strong wills, but lacking in new and creative ideas in their heads and hearts.<sup>79</sup>

Stepun convincingly shows that there were no social classes in the Marxist sense in the agrarian Russia mired in the beginnings of industrialisation: classes that would have come into question as subjects of a revolution that would kindle a socialistic revolution. Neither the proletariat nor a class-conscious bourgeoisie came into question as leading revolutionary actors, not even in the revolution of 1905. Much more – thus Stepun – was the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia itself the ‘actual subject of the revolution’<sup>80</sup> that was ‘born of the spirit of the Petrinistic reforms’.<sup>81</sup> It distinguishes itself by the aims of its conviction;<sup>82</sup> in addition, it has the ‘character of a power that is inimical to government’.<sup>83</sup> And finally, it can be described as ‘a fighting order’.<sup>84</sup> This revolutionary intelligentsia, especially ‘the so-called confessing noble’,<sup>85</sup> was the ‘yeast of the revolution’.<sup>86</sup> Filled with admiration, Stepun describes the moral motives of the revival movement of the *Narodniki*, which sought, in the spring of 1874, ‘truth’ with the farmers and took upon themselves, as ‘saints of the revolution’,<sup>87</sup> the ‘heavy cross of total renunciation and even of death’.<sup>88</sup> Stepun also honours the terrorist arm of the *Narodniki*: the terror of the *Narodnaya Volya* was related to

persons; it considered the guilt of the victim and placed the consciousness of guilt of the terrorist, who took upon himself the 'sacrificial death',<sup>89</sup> in a context of moral justification. The terror of the Bolsheviks, by contrast, was directed against 'entire classes'.<sup>90</sup>

So did it come to both the theory and the practice of exterminating the bourgeoisie and the kulaks as a class. The representatives of *Narodniki* socialism executed the ministers in the conviction that they were guilty for the unhappiness of the people. By contrast to these philosophical idealists, the materialistically oriented Marxists did not even acknowledge the concept of guilt, insofar as it is based upon the untenable assumption of the human being's freedom of choice. . . . Regarded precisely, communist terror involves not punishment of the guilty, but liquidation of a foreign social material with which the new world cannot be constructed. The cynical idea of the punishment of other members of a group for the crimes of one member can also be explained by this theory.<sup>91</sup>

The victory of Bolshevism ultimately produced a new church, one that transformed the Christian truth of the real church into an inner-worldly truth of salvation. The loss of Christian truth led to the Communist church. The Western-oriented intelligentsia had stirred up the Russian people against the monarchy and the orthodoxy, the Caesaropapist tradition; in doing so, it had lost Christian truth and acquired merely a formal freedom for which

deeper religious prerequisites were lacking. This led to a one-sided politicisation: one took upon oneself the freedom to take the life of the political enemies, but did not give them the right to remain freely loyal to their own convictions. Thus, ultimately, did two churches oppose one another: the true church of Christ, which – imprisoned in the Caesaropapist tradition – let itself be tempted to find its role in the affirmation of the reactionary monarchy, and the oppositional front of the radical parties. The latter perceived their socialistic convictions as absolutely valid saving truths and regarded themselves as a kind of catacomb church of prophets and martyrs. Considered from this perspective, Bolshevism represents an amalgamation of both churches: no other party has understood its situation in such unconditionally absolute terms as communism and no other has so consciously imitated the church – not only its hierarchical structure, but also its rites and customs – as the Bolshevik Party.<sup>92</sup>

Members of the Russian intelligentsia wrote the religious-sociological analyses that have just been presented with an intent that was both critical and self-critical. These analyses sketch the picture of a pneumatically motivated

intelligentsia that had fallen victim to the charisma of the hopes of final salvation. Due to their social distance from the society and rule of the tsarist autocracy, as well as of the cultural missionary tradition of the Third Rome, this intelligentsia emerged (1) as a pneumatically motivated belief-community, which (2) understood its mission as a doctrine of inner-worldly salvation. As championed by the various groups of the intelligentsia, this doctrine of inner-worldly salvation owes (3) its most important ideas to the selective assumption of Western philosophies of history, especially of the Marxian doctrine of salvation. The representatives of the revolutionary intelligentsia legitimate (4) their mission and soteriologies in public confessions and self-declarations and attempt (5) to gain political influence and attain positions of power by organising their own followers. The various forms of self-organisation of the revolutionary intelligentsia alternate between (6) the extremes of pneumatic movement, chiliastic rapture, messianic sense of mission and conspiratorial fighting alliances, disciplined action and blind faith in scientifically proven laws of social development. To the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia's revolution of conviction, Lenin opposes a model of discipline that indicates both continuities with and sharp breaks from the traditional forms of self-organisation that had been developed previously.

### **Leninism as a disciplined machine**

Lenin's conception of a party of conspiratorially acting career revolutionaries had been developed in Western European exile. Lenin's faith-world had been formed by his prior experiences in the Petersburg 'fighting alliance', by the conspiratorial tradition of Russian revolutionaries (Bakunin, Necaev, Tkacev, *Narodnaya Volya*), by the factional fights within the *Iskra* editorial staff and, last but not least, by the schism of 1903, which divided Russian social democracy into the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks.<sup>93</sup> Lenin had always understood the directional struggles that existed within Russian social democracy and the struggles of belief with the Western European parties – in particular within German social democracy – as a permanent 'purging'. This purging process would distinguish the true revolutionaries from the bourgeois representatives of a social democracy that was willing to adapt and that merely represented the interests of unions. Lenin emerged as a virtuoso of the correct interpretation of Marxian sacral scripture. All his ideological utterances provide the reader with a compilation of blocks of citations that were selectively taken from the sacral canon. The compilation and manipulation of sacral texts, the presentation of one's own convictions as the sole and correct explication and interpretation of these texts, combined with the deployment of a semantic of destruction against critics within the Party, comprised a scholastic of self-definition and self-delimitation that was typical for the Leninist type of faith. Lenin presented himself, therefore, as a defender, not a founder of the faith; he raised the objection

of betrayal of the most holy principles even against Kautsky. And this he did even though German social democracy, with its organisational power and ideological schooling, still counted among the models Lenin admired.

Despite this strategy of legitimation, opponents and critics alike immediately recognised the radicality of the Leninist faith in 1902, when *What Is To Be Done?* – its dogmatic foundation – was published. With its dogmas of party unity and the preparedness for a discipline that was typical of a ‘military organisation of agents’,<sup>94</sup> this work presented the first systematically developed theory of the career revolutionary. Lenin did not let himself be swayed in the certainty of his faith – neither by the vehement criticism nor by his isolation and stigmatisation by companions in the faith and the attendant loss of adherents. In his view, his interpretation of the Marxian theory of revolution was the only correct one; it was the only one suited to the special developmental conditions of Russia; it offered the only correct strategy and tactic by which to revolutionise Russia and help communism achieve victory. Lenin’s trust in his conspiratorial model was shaken in no way by the critique – already published by Axelrod in *Iskra* in December 1903 and January 1904 – of this ‘system of bureaucratic socialism’.<sup>95</sup> Nor was it shaken by Trotsky’s prognosis, in 1904, of a rule of Jacobin terror.<sup>96</sup>

The sole organisational principle for the functionaries of our movement must be the following: strictest conspiracy, strictest selection, training of career revolutionaries. If these qualities are present, then something even greater than ‘democratism’ is ensured: namely, a full trust among the revolutionaries as the comrades of one another.<sup>97</sup>

This was his message in face of his critics who demanded democracy within the Party.<sup>98</sup>

This catechism for career revolutionaries was shot through with a deep mistrust of pneumatically moved virtuosos of conviction, of the spontaneity of their discussions in literary circles, their eruptions of messianic minimalism and heroism, their enthusiastic desire for salvation. Lenin chose the model of a military barracks in order to transform revolutionary enthusiasm into a ‘rationally calculated optimum of physical and psychical striking power [of] uniformly trained’<sup>99</sup> virtuosos. The army served for Lenin as a model for this crossing of revolutionary conviction with unconditional discipline. In terms of its structure, the model relied upon analogous communities of total discipline<sup>100</sup> – on orders, cloisters and prisons using the strategy of the Benthamite panopticon.<sup>101</sup> According to Lenin, only a military conditioning is capable of forming

troops of specially schooled revolutionaries from the working class that have undergone a long training period . . . . No political police in the world will be able to stop these troops; for these troops of the revolution



are infinitely more devoted people and will also enjoy the unlimited trust of the masses of the workers.<sup>102</sup>

What is involved, therefore, is:

precise execution – schooled according to a plan – of the received command, unconditional suppression of all internal critique, and an unremitting inner directedness exclusively to this purpose. ... The rational uniformisation of the obedience of multiple human beings is decisive.<sup>103</sup>

The faith<sup>104</sup> of the tried revolutionary forms the scheme of a convictional ethics that motivates this conspiratorially functioning and centrally steered apparatus of disciplined virtuosos. According to this, what would be characteristic for the disciplining of virtuosos motivated by an ethics of conviction are the following:

- 1 An orientation of all acts of will and conviction upon the faith-goal of the community. Various kinds of disciplinary strategies are supposed to uniformise these acts of will and conviction. Imperative, therefore, is
- 2 the negation of individual autonomy, which might express itself as a critical authority upon action. Such a possible critical authority upon action is
- 3 replaced by unconditional obedience, which is supposed to guarantee the steered and planned functional context of the discipline machine. This functional context, in turn, runs without friction only if
- 4 the virtuosos' 'mechanised capacities' are linked to their habitualised and standardised schemata of conviction. These schemata direct the 'inner orientation' towards the faith-goal in the long term.

It is of central significance that no breach of discipline should be allowed to handicap the functioning of this army, its striking power, its insularity and continuity. The general staff must have a free hand in choosing the means, goals and persons. The doctrine of 'democratic centralism' legitimates this freedom of action. Disciplining of the virtuosos should occur through a hierarchically layered mutual control. One might say that the puritan saints<sup>105</sup> of the New Model Army enter the battlefield, not the vagabond guerrilla bands of faith-fighters of the heroic type. The great strategic plan, the drilling in rank and file, the clockwork of a conspiratorially functioning, disciplined machine, set the Party soldiers' order of battle.

Lenin opts for 'organised mistrust'<sup>106</sup> within the ranks of the virtuosos. This is a standard rule of all virtuoso communities, used in order to track and remedy defects in the disciplined machine. The Leninist powers of censorship are 'comradely trust' and the 'public opinion'<sup>107</sup> of the faith community. The 'comradely trust', the opening of one's inner self towards

the other – in whom one must trust – leads to the control via mutual trust of the conspiratorially functioning comrades. Under the conditions of conspiracy, this of course always also entails the mistrust of one's fellow comrade. Such comradely trust does not signify an initial surplus of trust, therefore. On the contrary, it calls one to be vigilant, to 'liberate oneself from an unsuitable member',<sup>108</sup> to unmask Party enemies, to smash the formation of fractions and to expose agents provocateurs. The centrally steered and organised 'public opinion' emerges as a censoring power when struggles of ideological direction threaten the purity of the binding doctrine. The officially conducted debate in which prosecutor and accused exchange words becomes a show-stage upon which to sanction the truth of the central disciplinary power – a truth that supports the 'insularity', 'organisation', and 'constant unity'<sup>109</sup> of the Party and ensures its superiority over rivals of the faith. In Lenin's times, 'public opinion' was still institutionalised – with his cooperation – as revolutionary justice<sup>110</sup> against rivals of the faith (social revolutionaries). It was also instituted internally, complete with purgation specialists, as a commission of control against Party sinners.<sup>111</sup> This latter was a tradition Stalin could follow with his public and informal show-trials. 'Comradely trust', and 'public opinion' constitute those informal imperatives of conduct that were to discipline the believing virtuosos. Self-critique, critique by other comrades and planned and steered purges were further institutionalised exercises in obedience that were supposed to guarantee the following of Party rules. In addition, they were supposed to compel the exposition of private spheres of knowledge and to promote the formation of mechanical solidarity within the faith community.<sup>112</sup> As a perceptive critic of Lenin – Axelrod, who would later become Menshevik – aptly commented, this was a mechanistic solidarity: one that makes 'all members of the Party wheels of an apparatus that an all-Russian centre has at its disposal according to its own best judgement'.<sup>113</sup>

### **Leninism as a religion of virtuosos**

The Leninist model of a conspiratorially working and centrally steered apparatus of disciplined virtuosos can be described as a revolutionary faith community that appeals only to particularly qualified virtuosos,<sup>114</sup> actors who are willing and able to place their lifestyle under the dictates of the truths of their faith uncompromisingly and with total submission. The closed horizon of meaning of these faith communities is characterised by an exclusive code of conduct for the revolutionary virtuosos, a total identification with the truths of the faith and a submission to the comprehensive control of belief and conduct by the internal disciplinary powers. Such communities claim already to have actualised an exclusive faith order – one that stands in radical contrast to the commonplace lived morality of the society, which remains to undergo the revolution.

It is primarily intellectuals who cultivate soteriologies in the virtuoso communities.

Always, the salvation that the intellectual seeks is a salvation from 'inner need', and thus of a character that is, on the one hand, more remote from life; on the other hand, such salvation is more principled and understood more systematically than the salvation from external need that corresponds to the non-privileged estates. The intellectual searches on paths whose casuistry is infinite in order to endow the conduct of his life with a continuous 'meaning' – in other words, with 'unity' with himself, with the human being, with the cosmos. It is he who conceives of the 'world' as a problem of 'meaning'. The more that intellectualism forces back the belief in magic – and thus are the processes of the world 'disenchanted', thus do they lose their magic meaning, thus they only still 'are' and 'happen' – the more urgent becomes the demand of the world and 'the conduct of life' as such that they be significantly and 'meaningfully' ordered.<sup>115</sup>

The meaning of the revolutionary cosmos – for the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, in any case, which had subscribed to Western European Marxism – was by no means given, but had become questionable in a dramatic way through the problem of the postponement of the *paraousia*.

The economic, cultural and political backwardness of Russia had placed grave decisions of faith before the Marxist intelligentsia. The Marxist doctrine of revolution had been tailored to the industrialised West; it was there that the revolution and the realisation of the saved Communist state were supposed to occur. Only in the West could the proletariat and bourgeoisie battle out the all-decisive class struggles under the conditions of a final antagonism of unleashed productive powers and relations of production that had become unbearable. Societies like Russia, which were only in the first stages of industrialisation, had to wait for a far-distant stage of development in order to attain the conditions that had been prophesied by Marx for the transition into the Communist paradise. Only in the distant future could salvation from the oppressive social conditions of the humans' alienation in all respects under capitalistic relations of production occur. The problem of the postponement of salvation becomes virulent when the revolutionary intelligentsia, conscious of its mission, is unwilling to accept the time limits that have been announced in the sacral doctrine. A messianic sense of mission, which urges for foreseeable and redeemable fulfilment in the immediate future, must discover certain ways and means to prevent the hope for salvation from atrophying into the despair of an endless waiting for an end-time that is no longer experienceable. The question posed by Vera Zasulic to Marx in 1881 – whether 'all countries of the world must pass through all the phases of capitalistic production'<sup>116</sup> – was in fact 'a question of life and death'.<sup>117</sup> Plechanov, Axelrod and Zasulic had come

together as the 'Liberation of Labour' in Geneva between 1880 and 1883. These did not accept the solution by which to alleviate this salvation problem that Marx had provided after several drafts of his letter. In his answer of 1881, Marx conceded that the Russian Marxists could take their raw communism – the farmer communities of the *obscina* – to the starting-point of their revolutionary efforts only 'if the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a workers' revolution in the West, so that both supplement each other; only then might the contemporary Russian community property serve as the starting-point of a communist development'.<sup>118</sup> This Marxist solution of the problem of the *paraousia* was 'completely forgotten' by the founders of the 'Liberation of Labour'.<sup>119</sup> The deeper ground for the forgetting to which the creators of the first orthodox Marxist party in Russia had succumbed seems to be obvious: Plechanov and Zasulich<sup>120</sup> especially had broken with their former faith community, the *Narodniki*,<sup>121</sup> shortly beforehand and, with the well known zeal of the renegade, had stigmatised it as a heretical deviation. Following this faith-decision, they were no longer willing to abandon the path of the right belief and praxis of Marxism after they had set out upon it, not even if Marx himself had allowed them to relapse into the sin of the *narodnicestvo*. Faith-decisions of this kind make one blind to alternatives.

Lenin's judgement of the *narodnicestvo* (1894), his 'scientific' analysis that conceded the backwards Russia capitalistic preconditions (1899) and his catechism, *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), were typical of his reaction to the problem of the postponement of salvation. Without explicitly calling the Marxist orthodoxy into question, he theorised an independent faith-doctrine. Unwilling to content himself with the prognosis of a capitalistic penetration that would include Russia as well, he was also unwilling to be satisfied with Menshevik social democracy, which prescribed as its binding faith-doctrine the evolutionary path of an open mass party. Lenin's option for a conspiratorial, centralised and disciplined cadre party in fact signified not only an innovative creation of faith clothed in the garb of orthodoxy, but also an active promotion of a revolutionary messianism that demanded immediate fulfilment of its desire for revolutionary salvation. Lenin's utopian essay, *State and Revolution*, was published in August 1917; Fritz Gerlich was correct to interpret it in 1920 already as a theory of the thousand-year kingdom.<sup>122</sup> The carrier of the salvation work is not the proletariat<sup>123</sup> but its avant-garde, the intelligentsia motivated by its ethic of conviction. As disciplined virtuosos, this intelligentsia had activistically transcribed the Marxist economy of salvation to fit the special conditions of Russia.

The party of disciplined virtuosos becomes the bearer of the doctrine of salvation. The smoothly functioning apparatus of 'military agents' – which works like clockwork and destroys enemies of the faith as a disciplined machine – is supposed to establish the new society. This apparatus is thereby accorded a charismatic transfiguration to become the Saviour, the Redeemer; now, it is the Messiah that knows how victoriously to master

the situation of need, the revolutionary seizure of power and the civil war alike. This charismatic transfiguration of the party apparatus<sup>124</sup> and revolutionary order is in turn based upon a divinisation of the mechanistic principle. Now, existence is collectively organised and rationalised by the divinised demiurge: by the human being, as Fülöp-Miller impressively described him in 1926.

Only in Russia has the final secret of the only possible salvation been known: it is not the development of the soul, for example, that can lead humanity to a true rebirth. Much more is salvation to be gained solely from the mechanical and external connection of all individuals through organisation. It is only such external functions as those that millions perform in common, such simultaneous movements of the same kind, which can form the multitude into a higher unity. Marching, simultaneous emergence, unified cries of hurrah, songs of joy in chorus, unified strikes against the opponent: these are the life-expressions from which the new, superior type of human being is to issue. But everything that separates the masses from one another, that simulates an individual significance for the human being – above all, therefore, the ‘soul’ – stands in the way of this higher evolution and must therefore be abolished. Henceforth, the ‘magnificent external’ human being created by organisation is to replace the inner human being – thus, the soul. Only that which is mechanically organised has reality, force and endurance; only the mechanism is reliable; only the ‘collective human being’ that has been liberated from the evil of the soul and bound mechanically to the rest by external interests is strong. To him alone belongs the kingdom of the future; he alone will be able to rule it for ‘a thousand years’.<sup>125</sup>

‘The entire society will become an office and factory having identical work and an identical income’.<sup>126</sup> And – thus Lenin – the ‘factory-discipline’ that will ‘extend to the entire society’ is ‘only a *stage* that is necessary for the radical purification of the society from the vileness and nastiness of capitalistic exploitation, a stage *in order* to be able to stride *further forward*’.<sup>127</sup>

Leninistic messianism displays four characteristics:

- 1 The party of career revolutionaries performs the work of salvation. The charismatic transfiguration of the Party, the revolutionary order, is nourished by the belief in the omnipotence of organisation. It is this that the ‘magnificent external human being’ has at his disposal; through it, he would like to call the new society into existence.
- 2 The Marxist developmental doctrine can be revised in favour of those societies that possess the advantage of backwardness.<sup>128</sup> These peripheral societies are no longer forced passively to wait out the postponement of the *paraousia*, as the Marxian prophecy had expected them to. As the

example of Russia shows, peripheral societies can dare to make a developmental leap; a messianic developmental revolution has the prospect of success if it has at its disposal an apparatus of disciplined virtuosos.

- 3 Following the Congress of Baku (1920) at the latest, the perspective of Leninist messianism – which had been centred upon Western Europe – opened up to the colonial periphery.<sup>129</sup> In Lenin's theory of imperialism, this periphery counted as the weakest link in the imperialistic chain. Revolutionisation of the colonial periphery was now regarded as the strategic lever that might force the revolution in the industrialised West that Marx had predicted, but which had not yet occurred. From this perspective, Leninist messianism appears as a rescuer and executive organ of the Marxian messianism that had already been appropriated by a revolutionary Russian intelligentsia in its sense of mission.
- 4 The salvation of the world, therefore, was to occur through a Leninist world revolution.

'The Third Rome' of the cloister brother, Philotheos, is replaced by Lenin's Third International. Further, this International – cloaked in Marxist clothing and Marxist symbolism – usurps the religious calling of the Russian people. The international elements mingle with Russian national ones here to the extent they can no longer be distinguished. Internationalism proves itself to be a Russian national calling and takes on the hue of the Russian idea.<sup>130</sup>

In sum, the Leninist religion of virtuosos can be described as the classical example of a political religion. The Leninist faith-world knows (1) no division between politics and religion. The cadre party is conceived as a charismatically transfigured bearer and executive organ of Leninist messianism through which has occurred the developmental leap from the backwardness of Russia into the avant-garde position of the world revolution. The revolutionary order of disciplined virtuosos also advances to become the most important agent both of the internal societal mobilisation and of the economic, cultural and political reconstruction of the shattered Russia. The traditional structures of the power and authority of tsarist Russia are smashed within the horizon of a messianism that would attain Communist paradise via the intermediate step of an omnipotence of planning and organisation possessing the efficiency of a large capitalist enterprise. Alongside the Party as an efficient discipline machine *and* as the bearer of the messianic hope of salvation, organisations and bureaucracies move into the foreground. As quickly as possible, these are to manage the organisation and industrialisation of Russia so that the utopia of one factory and one office – a utopia that Lenin still took care to describe as an intermediate step on the path to the Communist paradise – might be realised. Implemented in 1920, the 'State Commission for the Electrification of Russia' perfectly embodies the messianism of the Great Plan<sup>131</sup> that had been

announced by the victorious Leninist virtuoso religion to its believers. (2) Leninism, the inner-worldly doctrine of salvation of the Leninist virtuoso religion, understands itself as a creative innovation and adaptation of the Marxian sacral tradition, which knew to combine scientific rationality, messianic sense of mission and revolutionary enthusiasm. Thus can the Leninist virtuoso religion selectively assume from the Marxist reservoir of faith-convictions, cultic symbols and ritual practices those symbols, doctrines and practices that seem to fit their own special conditions the best. (3) Thus, the Leninist virtuoso religion invents a sacral tradition<sup>132</sup> in which the revolutionary order of disciplined virtuosos plays the main role. In many aspects, this revolutionary order shares the structural forms of such total institutions as cloisters, armies, factories and prisons. (4) Leninism expresses itself in a stock of unquestionable dogmas<sup>133</sup> that is primarily intended to secure the internal insularity, discipline and strength of faith of its own faith army of 'monk revolutionaries' (S. Frank). (5) Programmes of internal and external discipline are supposed to demonstrate the absolute bindingness of the stock of dogmas and transform them into a lived faith-world. (6) In general, a 'sacrally closed community' is involved here.<sup>134</sup> 'It is no longer sacral, suffused by the supreme source, but has itself become original sacral substance'.<sup>135</sup> (7) In the cultic celebrations of the October Revolution of 1917, there arose an extensive and differentiated cultic symbolism of revolution myths.<sup>136</sup> Celebrations, artistic movements and rulership rituals staged the cult of revolution in mass parades, military parades, church processions and proletarian demonstrations. In 1918, Lenin planned to stage a 'speaking city' on the model of Campanella's sun-city for the Petrograd first of May ceremonies. This plan marked the transition to a revolutionary pedagogy of the people that was – through statues, monuments and murals – to show the illiterate masses the path to the new Bolshevik state.<sup>137</sup> Agitators served as a mouthpiece of this revolutionary world of monuments. Through instruction, enlightenment and indoctrination, these were supposed to communicate the symbolic world of the revolution to the masses rushing past. The artistic movements of suprematism, constructivism and productionism arose among the Russian avant-garde, which developed after 1917. For all the variations of their styles, these movements nonetheless shared the view that art was to play the roles of both the all-powerful creator bound by no human laws and the planning engineer. Shattered after 1917 by the civil war, the society was regarded as a collective work of art to be moulded and modelled according to principles that were known only to artists and political engineers. The artistic elite saw its own commission to rule in the victory of Bolshevism; and it was not the least for this reason that it succumbed to this new idea of salvation.

We should not reflect, present or interpret reality, but translate and express the goals drafted by the new, active working class, the proletariat,

in practice. . . . Like the initiators of mass actions, the masters of colour and of light should become constructivists in the collective tasks of organising and steering the masses, which number many millions.<sup>138</sup>

The ‘inner-worldly communal religion’<sup>139</sup> is symbolically empowered and its ‘self-understanding as a unity balanced upon itself’<sup>140</sup> is strengthened in this cult of revolution. In the cultic festivals, the god of inner-worldly salvation is identified with the community of believers. The Leninist virtuoso might well agree with Emile Durkheim’s religious-sociological assessment, albeit with the restrictive condition that the society is replaced by an ‘order of monks’ (S. Frank) to which he feels himself to belong in a special way. ‘We can state in fact that the believer subjects himself to no illusions when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he is dependent and to which he refers the best part of himself: this power exists, it is the society.’<sup>141</sup>

### **The Stalinist institutional church**

Lenin had already tackled the building of the Party cadre into a hierarchically and centralistically structured ruling apparatus. Stalin took the construction systematically further. The bureaucratisation of the Party cadre apparatus revealed itself in the further construction of instances of control, hierarchies of command and apparati of function that recruited their members according to expertise. Held in March 1921, the 10th Party Congress was faced with the immediate challenges of the Kronstadt mutiny and the internal opposition of the workers. At Lenin’s prodding, it forbade any kind of formation of fractions or articulation of ideological platforms. The Central Committee was declared the supreme instance of judgement on questions of faith and power. The organisational necessities of war-Communism and later waves of industrialisation and collectivisation forced a comprehensive transformation of the Leninist virtuoso religion into a bureaucratised and hierarchically ordered ecclesiastical institutional organisation. The specially trained and well disciplined cadre apparatus of functionaries that worked for the administrative and governing bureaucracies detached the pneumatically inspired virtuosos from the chiliastic revolutionary movement. This apparatus also evinced an altered biographical identity. In the case of the Stalinist cadre functionary, the non-intellectual origin, the village milieu and the modest educational preconditions made for a Party face that was tailor-made for amorphous biographical stereotypes;<sup>142</sup> these virtuosos of inconspicuously developed cadre biographies that fulfilled the demands of foreign directed discipline machines. The virtuoso ethic of the religiously qualified was transformed into an ‘institutional obedience’<sup>143</sup> combined with a ‘formal humility of obedience’.<sup>144</sup> These required no deep-going ethicisation of one’s entire internal conduct of



life ('ethical virtuoso quality'). Thus does 'institutional grace' replace the 'charismatic dispensation of grace'<sup>145</sup> of the virtuosos in need of salvation.<sup>146</sup> The 'institutional grace'<sup>147</sup> is (1) bestowed according to the principle, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.<sup>148</sup> Membership to the saving institution is made possible through regulated processes of acceptance into the Party. The standard equipment of a Party cadre consists in the following: formulas proving a minimum of faith taken from the catechisms, an unquestionable class background, acquisition of Party membership as well as demonstration of obedience, discipline and a will to order. (2) The saving institution is structured into a hierarchy of sacral instances that distributes premiums of salvation according to office.<sup>149</sup> To be mentioned here are primarily the upper sacral ranks with their sacral functionaries. Their offices are charged with the following tasks: supervising the correct interpretation of the dogmas, regulating the teaching authority in the areas of instruction and mission and deciphering the sacral texts such that they are also accessible to the religiosity of the people. Thus, an intelligentsia of functionaries that is educated in native university-type training academies for cadres works in the bureaucracies of propaganda, agitation and state security as a specialist in sacral matters. The importance and effectiveness of the dispensed sacrament can be measured according to the position in the hierarchy of grace of the dispenser that is qualified by the charisma of his office.<sup>150</sup> Only the sacral office at the pinnacle can bestow an order of Lenin, whereas the secretary of the respective areas can also grant an award of distinction for model use of the harvest. (3) Accessibility to the saving institution and to institutional grace is, in principle, granted to all who seek salvation. 'Salvation, therefore, is universal and not accessible solely to the religious virtuosos. ... Thus, the level of ethical achievement that is demanded of oneself can be set only at the average qualification – and this means somewhat low.'<sup>151</sup> Complaints of the respective Party control commissions about the qualification of Party functionaries cease accordingly. Getty<sup>152</sup> reports on the catastrophic state of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the 1930s: corruption, nepotism, lack of political schooling, lack of conviction, bureaucratic ossification, illegal machinations were said to have determined the codes of conduct of local and regional Party apparati. The regularly occurring *proverka*, the scrutinising of Party documents and their possessors, was thus an indispensable purging measure. The purging campaigns that were directed against such defects represented more controls of conformity than tests of conviction.

Of course, the structural transition from the Leninist virtuoso religion to the Stalinist institutional church also drew in its wake a comprehensive reformulation of the Leninist stock of dogmas. Stalin attempted to have this reformulation of the Leninist sacral stock stated in such a way that no manifest breaches of continuity would arise. The sacral specialists of the Stalinist orthodoxy worked out a programme of legitimation that was to shape Leninism and Stalinism into the new sacral tradition of Marxism-Leninism. Thus is (1)

Stalin legitimated as a new teaching authority in questions of faith,<sup>153</sup> through his being held to be a loyal pupil of Lenin. This is why he becomes his historical successor, whereas his faith-rivals – who likewise declare themselves to be loyal pupils of Lenin – are stigmatised as traitors and are also liquidated after the show-trials. (2) The construction of the Lenin cult, which Stalin proclaimed as the state religion in his contest with other pupils of Lenin.<sup>154</sup> Boris Souvarine provides a vivid description of this Lenin cult.

It does not suffice that Lenin was a hero, a super-man, a genius; the triumvirate of the *Troika* make a kind of god out of him, one whose prophets they attempt to become. By deifying him, they prepare their own beatification. If one were to believe them, Lenin knew everything, saw everything, foresaw everything, said everything and predicted everything. In a contest of rivalling orthodoxies, his portrait replaces the icons: in full form or as a bust, from the front and in profile, modelled as a statue, pressed into medals, painted on national emblems, embroidered on handkerchiefs, pressed, engraved, crocheted, reproduced in millions of exemplars. The same image appears as a constant irritation on walls, on train stations, in the shop-windows of traders of colonial wares and is to be found even more and more frequently on cutlery, ashtrays, cigarette packages and the most trivial objects of use. An unaesthetic collection of pious images illustrates in black and white and colour a high-flown and indigestible literature brimming with verse and prose. *Izvestiya* publishes a requiem between two ecstatic articles about the sign of bad taste. Some photograph the armchair of Lenin, others collect relics of him. Everywhere, cities, streets, institutions, enterprises, clubs, stadiums and countless places and things are named after him. Petrograd becomes Leningrad, and soon there is also a Lenino, Leninsk, Leninskaya, Leninakan, Leninsk-Kuznetsky, Uljanovsk and Uljanova. Feverish zeal inspires the most tasteless memorial projects. Under the thin layer of varnish that the imported Marxist theories have smeared upon it, the familiar face of the old, barbaric Russia again appears.<sup>155</sup>

With the staging of the celebration for the deceased Lenin, the Lenin cult reaches its sacral climax.

Under the pretext of a memorial honouring the deceased, the apparatus has fallen back upon the most blatant tricks of fetishist religion – tricks that have been modernised by processes of the most trivial promotion. ... Like an embalmed pharaoh, the corpse of the great materialist revolutionary serves endless spectacular ceremonies; for eternity, it is exposed to public curiosity, which is awakened, stirred and nourished using all means. To this end, the crowd is collected and herded past the mortal remains in an almost eternal stream. Before the Kremlin wall, a Holy of Holies consecrates the unconscious scorn of

the Leninists in remembrance of Lenin. The curious are drawn here; the workers commanded to service are led here; and the children will be dragged here to await the endless procession of superstitious farmers mingling among the unbelieving tourists.<sup>156</sup>

The encounter between the religious founder and his successor – who has not yet become such, but has every chance of becoming such – takes place in Stalin's speech in honour of the dead. This speech combines an oath and vow of loyalty with Stalin's own claim to power. With religious-sociological acumen, Souvarine takes notes on the Stalinist memorial liturgy:

Between the paragraphs – which are composed of elementary consents, hackneyed banalities and untiring repetitions and expressed with an absolute certainty that betrays the uncertainty – litanies with a church-like harmony are interspersed. In these litanies, the former pupil of the Tiflis seminar stands on familiar terms with the deified Lenin and he clearly expresses his clerical mentality. After that, he assembles piece by piece his fervent invocation to prayer and – torn out of context – makes of it a kind of credo for the use of the catechumen and the Leninist religion. The result deserves to be reproduced in its entirety:

When Comrade Lenin departed from us, he left us behind the bequest to hold high and preserve in purity the honourable name of a member of the Party. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will fulfil this, your command, in your honour!

When Comrade Lenin departed from us, he left us behind the bequest to preserve the unity of our party as our most treasured possession. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will also fulfil this, your command, in your honour!

When Comrade Lenin departed from us, he left us behind the bequest to protect and consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will also fulfil this, your command, in your honour!

When Comrade Lenin departed from us, he left us behind the bequest to consolidate, with all our power, the alliance of the workers and farmers. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will also fulfil this, your command, in your honour!

When Comrade Lenin departed from us, he left us behind the bequest to consolidate and broaden the union of the republics. We swear to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will also fulfil this, your command, in your honour!

When Comrade Lenin left us, he left us behind the bequest to preserve our loyalty to the basic principles of the Communist International. We swear to you,

Comrade Lenin, that we will not spare our lives in consolidating and expanding the alliance of the workers of the entire earth, the Communist International!<sup>157</sup>

The Enlightenment-inspired critique of religion of the former revolutionary virtuoso, Souvarine, misses its mark. The cult of the dead that was staged on the occasion of the burial of Lenin fulfilled important functions for the Stalinist institutional church, which was attempting to gain legitimacy. The cultic bond between the dead but untouchable and unattainable religious founder – by virtue of his universal authority – and his loyal pupil was to be tied so narrowly that rivals within the faith would no longer be capable of tearing it. Thus, there exists (a) between the embalmed Pharaoh and Stalin, who is the foremost holder of the death vigil – thus the burial iconography – a silent agreement about role model and loyal successor. The successor formulates the oath of loyalty as an authentic testament and holy commandments of the founder of the faith for the pious Party cadre. Stalin would like to usurp the charisma of office of the only and legitimate successor, ‘the “apostolic successor” by means of manipulation of the ordination of the bishop’.<sup>158</sup> In doing so, he would obliterate the testament that had in fact been written by Lenin and that would prescribe the removal of Stalin from office.<sup>159</sup> (b) Through the burial ceremonies, a heightened sacral tension is attained – one that forms the mourning community into the cultic community. Souvarine speaks of a ‘collective delirium’,<sup>160</sup> Durkheim of ‘effervescence’,<sup>161</sup> Max Weber of ‘ecstasy’,<sup>162</sup> Voegelin of ‘political-religious arousal’.<sup>163</sup> The cultic site becomes the sacral centre of a faith community; and this, despite inner divisions and tensions, possesses a point of connection that extends beyond the routine of daily business and struggles of interests and power. The intended establishment and spread of devotional objects creates (c) a cult of devotional objects that meets the magic daily needs of the population (‘the barbaric Russia’). On the whole, the entire liturgy for the dead that is developed for the deceased Lenin marks (d) the difference between the profane and the sacral spheres of a faith community. This difference is indispensable to the construction of a differentiated cosmology.

(3) Alongside the construction of a Lenin cult, the sacral-specialists of the Stalinist orthodoxy compile their own sacral tradition invented for goals of government.<sup>164</sup> It consists in a state philosophy (Diamat), a Party history manipulated for its own legitimising goals<sup>165</sup> and a collection assembled from lectures and speeches of authentic utterances by the new successor of the office, the General Secretary. The *Questions of Leninism*, issuing in 1924 from lectures at the Sverdlov University,<sup>166</sup> form the core of the sacral tradition of the new monocratic pinnacle of the institutional church; this

church then regards the compilation as a catechism and has its leadership cadre trained in it.<sup>167</sup> At any given time, the Party cadre could read the latest state of development of the general line in this collection of the Stalinist dogma inventory; it could read which editions of this catechism had been changed, expanded or shortened – a redactive work that was not un-dangerous for the sacral specialist. Some of them met the often-fatal reproach of having represented, with their superseded standard version, false views that had brought ‘objective’ use to the class enemy.

The publication of catchy transfigurations of founders and saints in legend is also important in order to popularise and legitimate the successor and new leader; it is intended to evoke pious devotion within the agrarian population for the person of the General Secretary. In these new legends of the leader,<sup>168</sup> his simple, straightforward manner and Spartan life-style are praised in order to facilitate identification with him and his person. With social realism, the artistic avant-garde is also called upon to immortalise Stalin as a work of art.<sup>169</sup> Of course, the new formation – often described as Stalinisation – of the artistic avant-garde and the Party cadre apparatus also applies to the spheres of the world mission in which a firmly led Comintern apparatus must manage the deliberate and organised distribution of Stalinism. On the whole, the amalgamation of Leninism and Stalinism is conducted as Marxism-Leninism: a sacral tradition that shows to the experienced sacral specialist that Stalin is and remains both its inventor and its sole interpretive power.

### **Inquisition tribunals**

The institutional church makes use of the inquisition tribunal in order to secure the charisma of its office. An absolutely essential part of this is the legitimation of its universal authority in questions of faith. The Stalinist institutional church also claims a ‘monopoly of legitimate hierocratic coercion’<sup>170</sup> when it is deemed necessary to destroy heresies through bestowal or refusal of salvation (hierocratic coercion) and to stage, for one’s own ecclesiastical community, a moral didactic play in which the orthodox theory and practice of the institutional church are strengthened and reinforced. The Moscow show-trials (1936–39) are the moral didactic plays; carefully prepared by the sacral specialists and purification functionaries from the bureaucracies of propaganda and state security, they were portrayed and re-enacted as model productions – also behind closed doors – in the most diverse Party sectors as informal show-trials.<sup>171</sup>

By contrast to the classical inquisition of the official Roman Church, the Stalinist inquisition practice concealed its methods of extorting confessions.<sup>172</sup> It concentrates upon staging a trial that is publicly to reconstruct that which had already been arranged between the accused and the accuser in the secret procedure. All traces that could point to psychic torture and bodily tortures are washed away with embarrassing precision in this arranged

didactic play. The public bodily punishment at the end of the confession ritual is also avoided. The exhibition of the penal ritual that was customary for the inquisition process – which chose the body of the condemned as the most important point of reference – is hidden in the Stalinist trial behind a curtain of silence. In the legal consciousness at that time, the inquisition of the official Roman Church functioned as a legitimate institution.<sup>173</sup> The Stalinist inquisition, by contrast, presented itself as a judicial process that seemed to work according to the customary legal procedures of democratic constitutional states; yet it fact represented a judicial drama that had been arranged by the purging specialists. Through roles that had been previously distributed and rehearsed, this drama had to demonstrate guilt and atonement, law and betrayal, belief and heresy according to the rules of the Stalinist ‘liturgy of execution’.<sup>174</sup>

The Stalinist inquisition practice operates in the twilight of fictive and real confessions. The former pupils and closest companions in the struggle of the religious founder, Lenin, are to perform – as virtuosos of performance – genuine confessions that provide information about their fictive crimes and heresies. The faith of the Stalinist practice of inquisition in the performing arts of the accused heretics cannot – as in the case of the classical inquisition – be supported by the mechanics of brilliantly rehearsed and legitimated apparati of sanction. Whereas these once produced evidence of guilt using the iron logic of the interrogation, torture and public destruction of the deviant heretics, the Stalinist method of purging must rely upon the will of the accused pupil of Lenin and companion in the struggle to perform fictional confessions as a genuine self-accusation. So it is that only actors who are prepared to confess are accepted. The silent heretic who is unwilling to do penance, who dumbly presents his fate, would rob from the play its intended effect.

The public confession of one’s own crimes and heresies in the show-trial also breaks with the Christian confession,<sup>175</sup> which had institutionalised secrecy with the private auricular confession. A construction of an individual biography of guilt that refers to the person of the sinner who is willing to confess does not occur in the public confession ritual. Much more does the public un-masking, humiliation and moral stigmatisation of the accused serve the desired pedagogy, which is comprised of equal parts fear and instruction. With the confession of his sinful transgressions, the confessing individual makes a contribution to the idealisation and legitimisation of the Stalinist sanctioning power.

The confession of the accused attains such a central significance because it is indispensable for the staging of a moral didactic play. It is credible because the accused himself vouches for the correctness of the accusation. Although circumstantial evidence can strengthen the suspicion of guilt, it cannot do so with ultimate security. Authentic confessions made through a free decision appear to bring ultimate security. The burden that the confession-willing accused takes upon himself attests to the authenticity of the confession.

The show-trial is supposed to demonstrate to the Party cadre that he too should voluntarily announce his own transgressions to the responsible penal authorities and should thereby make, by committing acts of penance, his contribution to the construction of socialism. This is why the catalogue of crimes presented in the confession does not merely include incriminatory membership in heretical splinter groups (in Trotskyism, for example); it also names the sabotage of industrial facilities, poisoning of food products, causing of accidents in mines and railways, etc.<sup>176</sup> Through these means, responsibility for catastrophes that have in fact occurred in the context of the over-hasty and mistaken politics of industrialisation is shifted onto to the accused and the Stalinist leadership is relieved of responsibility. The construction of fictive agents in order to explain mysterious, inexplicable catastrophes is presented to the faith community as a proximate possibility of a plausible explanation. The reduction of complex courses of action to simple patterns of explanation (conspiracy, bewitchment and destructive magic)<sup>177</sup> serves not only to exonerate ascribable responsibility for concrete guilt, however; it should also be understood as a permanent warning to the cadre apparatus and technical intelligence to fulfil their functions in a way that ‘the work of Trotskyite pests’ might not gain influence in their area of work. The epidemics of denunciation that are triggered by the staging of the great Moscow show-trials and the waves of purging that followed them also have the latent function of encouraging the achievement of work through the threatened unmasking of hidden acts of diversion and heretical involvements. The formalised and regulated institutional control of the Stalinist institutional church is to be buried in the internal disciplinary rooms of the individual Party activists; these are thus urged to internal self-control and to improvement of their provisions of service and construction. Seen from this standpoint, the great Moscow show-trials represent only the small stage upon which the prominent criminals of the Party permit a glimpse into the criminal abyss; they are pictures from which the virtuous Party cadre should turn away in indignation. He should – thus states the moral maxim of the didactic play – enthusiastically continue the heroic work of the socialistic construction. And in doing so, he only follows the example of his brilliant leader, who has exposed the enemy of the faith and rewarded the virtuous cadre with the saving goods of his institution.

### **Marxism-Leninism as world religion and world mission: Maoism**

With the October Revolution of 1917, Leninist Bolshevism became a world religion<sup>178</sup> devoted to missionary work in societies that had not yet been delivered from the capitalistic yoke. The founding congress of the Communist International, which assembled in the Kremlin on 2 March 1919, was supposed to provide the world mission of Leninist Bolshevism with the necessary organisational form and spiritual content. These were then expressed in the twenty-one clauses that were resolved at the Second Congress

of the Communist International in July and August of 1920. The conditions had to be fulfilled by the communist parties that sought entry – if they were to be accepted as members of the victorious world church. Lenin's handwriting can be recognised in the organisational statute and ideological declarations of intent of this Communist International. His conspiratorial, disciplined and centralised cadre party is conceived as the organisational and ideological centre of the new universal church, as the model to which all other parties must conform. As a condition of entering the new universal church and exerting influence as a member, these parties must also subject themselves to cleansing that is both personal and ideological, one 'that removes reformers and centrists and replace them with proven Communists'.<sup>179</sup> In addition, the parties were required to break with social-democratic renegades and 'notorious opportunists'.<sup>180</sup> The universal church claims a monopoly of infallibility in the interpretation of salvation and requires that its national parties submit to this claim. The missionary cadres of the universal church attempt to ensure acceptance, influence and dissemination of the universal salvation theory in the societies from which they originate. These missionary cadres then face a task that can hardly be solved: that of finding a balance between the universal theory of salvation and the particularistic bonds of the recipient population.<sup>181</sup> Conflicts of faith between a universal orthodoxy and a national heterodoxy necessarily result from this constellation.<sup>182</sup>

Indispensable to a worldwide mission are missionary institutions and missionaries. The Comintern schools<sup>183</sup> were instituted: schools in which novices were taken from the filial missions and formed into tried and true cadres of the new universal church. In addition to these, there was a broad network of Comintern emissaries who worked, either openly or hidden, in the respective brother parties according to the directives of Comintern Central. These are the institutional prerequisites both for the distribution of the trans-national salvation doctrine throughout the world and for adherence to the directives of the new orthodoxy. The responsibility 'to create in all places a parallel illegal organisational apparatus that, at the decisive moment, will help the party fulfil its duty to the revolution'<sup>184</sup> meant the construction of security apparati<sup>185</sup> whose functionaries were to execute the liquidation directives of the Comintern Central within the respective brother parties. Through these illegal security apparati also runs the transport of weapons, money and propaganda material; such transport is usually overseen by the personnel educated in the respective areas.<sup>186</sup> The intention is to create certain institutional preconditions for the general staff of the world revolution, the trans-national world-church – preconditions that are to enlist the various national Communist parties to act as an extended arm of Comintern Central. The permanent conflict between national identity and transnational following of the Communist parties is thereby implanted in both the Leninist universal church and its Stalinist successor. It was inevitable that this necessity to combine a universalistic world mission and a national



identity not only with one another, but with the Marxist-Leninist salvation doctrine as well, yielded a variety of manifestations of the stock of sacral dogmas. This variation very clearly demonstrated the capacities of survival of particularistic ties and national conditions of reception.<sup>187</sup> In the context of this universalistic world mission aiming at the inner-worldly salvation of suppressed human beings, the history of the Maoist current of faith clearly supports this.

After the revolutionary upheavals that had broken out in Western Europe in the spring of 1919 did not lead to the desired world revolution, the Leninist world mission turned to the non-European, colonial periphery. Through the revolutionisation of this periphery, it sought to make the modern, capitalistic societies of Europe accessible to true Communism as well.<sup>188</sup> Thus does Moscow call upon the ‘peoples of the Orient’ – the new centre of the work of universal mission and salvation – to fight ‘the first genuine holy war under the red banner of the Communist International’.<sup>189</sup>

[L]ong, all too long, the peoples of the Orient have remained in the dark, under the despotic pressure of their tyrannical rulers, under the yoke of the foreign conqueror and capitalists. The roaring of the world massacre, the thunder of the Russian workers’ revolution that liberated the Eastern Russian people from the centuries-old chains of capitalist slavery, has now awoken the peoples of the Orient as well. Roused from a centuries-old sleep, they now rise up themselves.<sup>190</sup>

The Chinese Marxism-Leninism that ultimately developed into Maoism also owed its origin to the missionary work of the Moscow Comintern Central.<sup>191</sup> In 1921, the University for the Workers of China<sup>192</sup> was founded in Moscow, followed by the Sun Yat-Sen University in 1925.<sup>193</sup> These were the most important missionary institutions in which the new generation for the higher cadre ranks of the Communist Party of China was educated. Issuing from Moscow, a transnational diffusion of sacral writings was translated into Chinese. Further, models of conduct for the training of cadres<sup>194</sup> were adapted to the specific national and cultural conditions of China. The Comintern emissaries Borodin<sup>195</sup> and Maring<sup>196</sup> played an important role in the translation of Comintern directives for the policy by which the Communist Party of China was allied to the Guomindang. From this multilayered process of diffusion, reception and transformation that had been set in motion by the Moscow universal church, there developed a Maoist current of faith which absolutely cannot be regarded as a mere copy of the orthodox Marxist-Leninist one.

As Maoism<sup>197</sup> could be described that faith-current within the Marxist-Leninist world-church that (1) founded an independent stock of sacred dogmas arising from the selective interpretation of the Marxist-Leninist faith repertoire. The Maoist dogma attributed a strategic role to the peasantry, one that it was to play in an alliance with the Leninist avant-garde

party. The Chinese career revolutionaries were intellectual virtuosos of both Confucianism and Leninism. They therefore substituted the proletariat – which was present in only in a few coastal cities in China – with the illiterate farming masses of the strategic hinterland. These masses were to assume the messianic function of the proletariat. ‘In its might, this type [of farmer] resembles a hurricane that lets the yielding exist and throws down the unruly. The centuries-old privilege of the feudal landlords is smashed to pieces as a result.’<sup>198</sup> (2) The Sinoisation of the transnational salvation doctrine of Marxism-Leninism occurred through the charisma of the national saviour and leader of the revolution, Mao Zedong. He was said to have liberated China from both the shame of the Japanese occupation and the exploitation by the Guomindang. During the Yan’an period, Mao Zedong used the myth of the charismatic war-hero as an opportunity to construct his own personality cult of the leader. By 1945 at the latest, this cult was accepted as Maoist orthodoxy. Liu Shaoquis’ ‘Report on the Revision of the Party Statute’ (1945) marked the beginning of this personality cult.<sup>199</sup> A final result of this cult of personality surrounding the leader was the construction of an internal palace system that was hermetically closed to the outside. Within this palace system<sup>200</sup> of the Forbidden City, diverse cliques within the inner circle competed for the favour of the charismatic leader. The leader’s demonstrations of favour, which changed from situation to situation, supported the clique that was dominant precisely at that time, bestowing upon it advantage and opportunities to gain power. The so-called ‘Gang of Four’ issued from this internal dynamic of the charismatic ruling structure.

(3) The creation of legitimacy by the Maoist orthodoxy proceeded analogously to that of the Stalinist model. Without directly challenging the Stalinist universal church and openly presenting itself as a centre of heretical heterodoxy, (a) Mao manipulated the Party history in favour of his own correct general line and stigmatised rivals in faith and power as heretics. The ‘Resolution on some Questions of the History of Our Party’,<sup>201</sup> written in 1945 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, expressly reinforced the Maoist path of salvation and maintained a silence about the earlier heretical deviations of the new sacral instance.<sup>202</sup> Affirmed by his correct interpretation of the sacral tradition and his successful conduct of the war, the ‘brilliant leader’ compiled his insights and strategic world-views into (b) a core of dogmatic guidelines and articles of faith. The publication of collected works, propagandistic brochures, catechisms<sup>203</sup> and legends of the leader documented official approval by the head Party committee. Through its publication of the extensive sacral literature, a department of (c) ideological sacral specialists assured the Party leader of his monopoly on authentic interpretive power. By his own admission, Mao had first seriously studied the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of dialectical materialism in 1937. For this reason, he had also to rely upon the support of such well versed, Soviet-educated ideological virtuosos as Chen Boda. Mao’s rivals in

power and faith,<sup>204</sup> by contrast, had enjoyed an ideological schooling and education in the Moscow missionary institutions and thus had at their disposal a repertoire of scriptural interpretations that had been legitimated by the Stalinist orthodoxy. Mao's self-legitimation was accomplished in a covert way. It ended only when Mao's own claim to power had been stabilised and presented (d) as a national heterodoxy having a universal appeal. The universal aspect ensured that it might begin its own world mission, as a new universal church according to its own model.<sup>205</sup> Lin Biao's *Victory Lives in the People's War*<sup>206</sup> illustrates this claim to universal leadership. Indeed, with its 'three world theory', this claim merely continued the classical Sino-centric orientation<sup>207</sup> of the Confucian empire.

### **The Maoist 'Thought Reform' (*sixiang gaizao*)**

The Maoist 'Thought Reform' might be regarded as the most important innovation of the Maoist inner-worldly salvation doctrine seeking the utopia of the new human being. The Cultural Revolution that had been undertaken within the narrow framework of Yan'an functioned in the Maoist salvation doctrine as historical point of entry for the later eschatologies of the 'Great Leap Forward' (1957) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–69). Encompassing the entire society, these were eschatologies to which millions of people fell victim.<sup>208</sup> The 'Thought Reform' marked perhaps the most far-reaching attempt by the leadership of the system to enact a total transformation of the identity of those who were subjected to this totalitarian experiment in steering human beings. Because the 'Thought Reform' seeks to destroy the person's innermost self, his value and integrity, it might well mark the final step on modernity's path of the moral manipulation of human masses. Neither the present theories of totalitarianism nor the theories of modernisation that have replaced them have sufficiently recognised its totalitarian implications.<sup>209</sup> The Soviet archipelago has overshadowed the Chinese Gulag in which this 'Thought Reform' was practised with extreme intensity.<sup>210</sup>

The Maoist 'Thought Reform' arose in the context of the *zhengfeng* movement, which was practised from 1942 to 1944 in Yan'an. The goal of this cultural revolutionary movement in which all leading Party cadres in Yan'an participated was to correct (*zhengfeng*) the style and spirit of the Party-work (*zuofeng*).<sup>211</sup> Following the Long March, the Communist Party of China had been substantially weakened and had fled into the remote northwestern province of Yan'an. The resulting problems of action and communications within it were to be remedied by the formation of unified models of conduct for the Party cadre. 'If one wants to lead a great revolution, one must have a great party, one must possess innumerable first-rate cadres'.<sup>212</sup> Taken from Stalin, this maxim also holds for the formation of the Party cadres that Mao strove for. Now, however, it is expanded to encompass a goal reaching even further: formation of the new human being.

The Party cadres are the moral avant-garde; as such, they not only represent China's socialist future, but are supposed to anticipate that future in the present as well. Their moral virtues are to tip the outcome of the class struggle in favour of the new social order. The armed confrontation with the class enemy is staged as a moral drama<sup>213</sup> in which a small number of virtuous and select cadres are to defeat the class enemy with their model conduct. Technological inferiority to the enemy in terms of numbers and arms compels an extraordinary intensification of the Party cadres' moral virtue; such intensification is supposed to end in a moral superiority over the enemy. If the Party cadres are not capable of such moral perfection, then – as Mao Zedong will concede in the course of the Cultural Revolution – the idea of regarding the Communist Party as the embodiment of this moral rigorism must be given up as well. A morally degenerate party can and must be destroyed. Mao desacralises the charisma<sup>214</sup> of the Party during this late phase of the Cultural Revolution. The concept of the new person is not indivisibly tied to the Party; it can also be used to crush a morally corrupt party. Insofar as every member of the society can be subjected to the 'Thought Reform' and become a bearer of moral perfection, this interpretation is revolutionary within the history of the Marxist-Leninist faith.

The 'Thought Reform' is understood as a protracted process of reformation and purification. During this process, the former, old identity is destroyed and detached from the superior moral integrity of the new human being. With the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong detaches this form of conversion to the new state of salvation – which is practised in all virtuoso religions – from the context of the schooling of the Party cadres; the 'Thought Reform' now extends to the entire society. Such an expansion of the virtuoso morality has devastating consequences. The epidemics of denunciation that appear in virtuoso communities in the competition for moral perfection expanded during the Cultural Revolution to include the entire society. As a result, almost every person was the target of suspicions, insinuations and accusations of representing a conviction that was morally imperfect.<sup>215</sup> Transposed to the entire society, this 'Thought Reform' places on the agenda a critical and permanent testing of the political correctness of everyone by everyone – a phenomenon that is not unknown in Western intellectual circles.

Mao Zedong considered the 'Thought Reform' to be a 'torturous process of re-education'<sup>216</sup> that was to establish an 'inner uprightness'.<sup>217</sup>

The goal is to save human beings, not to cure them to death. If someone has an intestinal disturbance, the doctor undertakes an operation and saves the patient. If a person commits an error – no matter how large – the disease is not thereby permitted to slip into an incurable condition by being concealed or by the patient remaining in his error. And if the patient in fact wants to be healed and wants to correct his errors with honest intentions, he will welcome us so that his illness can be healed and he can become a good comrade.<sup>218</sup>

Mao recommends a shock therapy requiring that the patient feel sick and let himself be treated: 'but one must begin with a shock therapy, in that one yells at the patient: "you are sick!" This is done so that he gets a shock and breaks out in a cold sweat. Then, one should amicably persuade him to let himself be treated'.<sup>219</sup> This shock therapy shows its first success when the patient agrees to commence with a circulation of critique and self-critique. His self-critique is first received by the other patients of the political study group and then submitted to critical scrutiny and returned to the group-members who are prepared to reform for further correction. In this stage of a crisis of identity and steered eruption of emotion that is consciously brought about by the specialists of purgation, the participants willing to reform are isolated, exposed to public shaming and humiliation and persistently excluded from the group. The torture of permanent collective pressure gathers information about the inner self of the participant; it observes, interrogates and wears him down until the resistance ceases. One's private life is surrendered to the clutches of the collective censoring force of the study group. Fear, wrath, hate and despair reign among the participants of this 'Thought Reform'. The feeling of guilt one has for not yet being prepared to submit a confession is relieved only through the confession.<sup>220</sup> Those participants who are unwilling to reform are met with a series of formal and informal, administrative and Party sanctions, which are graduated corresponding to the gravity of the crime. The most effective sanction might be a temporary or lasting social isolation. This means a command of social avoidance by friends, comrades and relatives and a withdrawal of trust by the study group.<sup>221</sup> In a society in which group norms rather than individual interests dominate, such social isolation is both particularly painful and effective. The social isolation can be intensified even further through the declaration that one is a state enemy; as was exemplarily demonstrated in various 'corrective movements'<sup>222</sup> against landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries and 'corrupt elements', a 'mark of disgrace' (*dai maozi*) is set upon him. During a 'fight sitting', the accusers turn up and denounce the accused. With bowed head (*ditou*), he must present his confession to the assembly. The liquidation machinery of the Party, its security organs, its staged 'meetings of struggle and critique' and its 'reform work camps' (*laogai*) decide the future negative career of one stigmatised as a 'counter-revolutionary element'. For Mao, counter-revolutionaries are 'bacteria and microbes' – if they are not exterminated, one generates another, two generate three and three generate millions. Internally, they wreak secret havoc; to extinguish them also means to educate the broad masses.<sup>223</sup>

Critique and self-critique, public self-accusation and the exposure of embarrassing offences and private spheres of knowledge aim at the loss of moral integrity, at the snuffing out of the prior identity (*fanshen*) and its corrupting influences. In the traditional Confucian context, the loss of *lian*<sup>224</sup> signified a withdrawal of trust by the relevant social reference group. To live without a face signified social death. The participants of the

*zhengfeng* movement can compensate for this social death only through the assumption of a new *lian*, of the new collective trust that is offered by the political study groups in which the ‘thought reforms’ occur. At the end of this curative process, the newly acquired face of the cured human being merges with the collective model biographies that are the faceless, yet socially acceptably norm.

Mao understood the ‘Thought Reform’ as a permanent learning process that should also be continued once the communist paradise had been attained in order to solve the non-antagonistic contradictions within the people.<sup>225</sup> The permanent Cultural Revolution – with its goal to form the new human being – failed through resistance from the Party, which considered the interests of its estate. Each political, social, economic and cultural catastrophe that was caused by Mao’s utopian vision allowed the Party bureaucracy to present itself as guarantor of an ordered development that ran according to plan.<sup>226</sup> Planned progress and revolutionary chaos comprised the two sides of the single totalitarian coin of modern China.

### **Concluding observations**

As has become evident from the discussion to this point, the political religions that have been investigated here involve virtuoso religions that were developed by intellectuals as comprehensive systems by which both to explain the world and to change it through revolution. In all these virtuoso religions, the intellectuals represent a messianic mission. The revolutionary virtuosos emerge as representatives of human masses that are not yet mentally independent; and they promise to save these masses from their suffering. Both the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia of tsarist Russia and its Marxist successor had performed this messianic mission with enough decisiveness to attain in the world, through particular forms of social organisation, that which they understood as the saving truths. We are not dealing, therefore, with virtuosos fleeing from the world and cultivating their sociologies in monastic communities that are secluded from the world.

The virtuoso religions of both the tsarist and the Marxist intelligentsia pressed for a revolutionary transformation of the world. Certainly, they differ in terms of content and of the organisational forms of their world-toppling ideas of salvation. In his conscious confrontation with the pneumatically inspired communities of conviction of the *narodnicestvo*, with the revolutionary secret alliances and with the open social democracy of Menshevism, Lenin developed a model of discipline and military-like training of revolutionary virtuosos that was to transform revolutionary enthusiasm into an effectively functioning disciplined machine. (To be sure, the reality was a far cry from the functional efficiency that had been envisaged.) This course that Lenin took with his model of the disciplined cadre party also paved the way for Stalin’s institutional course – which was to develop further in the direction of a bureaucratised and hierarchised soteriological

institution. With Maoism, a new current of faith had been articulated, one that definitely represented the most historically significant result of the world mission that had been set into motion by the Moscow universal church. This current did not develop as a faithful copy of the Stalinist institutional church, however. Much more did Mao Zedong try to realise a utopia of the new human being in several attempts to bring about a cultural revolution. These attempts not only took into account the special Chinese conditions and context in which it took up Communism, but even led to a desacralisation of the Party – one that was consciously accepted as necessary. During the Cultural Revolution, the Maoist ‘Thought Reform’ seized hold of the entire society and destroyed its moral foundations through its chaos of both subtle and violent tests of conviction and its epidemics of denunciation. The thought of Mao Zedong is treated today as a relic of a gerontocracy that may have been aware that its rule had come to an end. The efforts of the Party bureaucracy to bring the interests of its estate into harmony with the required processes of modernisation might well betray its pronounced will to survive, but not the heroic readiness for sacrifice of the New Human Being that Mao had envisaged.

In all the virtuoso religions within the sphere of Marxism-Leninism that have been described, a selective enlistment of Christian symbols and faith-practices can clearly be recognised. The chiliastic hopes for salvation of the ‘Order of the Revolutionary Intelligentsia’ (F. Stepun), its public confessions and preparedness for heroic self-sacrifice as atonement for unearned privileges, its forms of self-organisation as pneumatically inspired conviction communities: these all draw upon the monastic communities that had formed either in reliance upon or in decisive rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church. Even the Leninist discipline machine recalls the type of the ‘revolutionary monk’ (S. Frank). The rites of purgation and purification, the catechisms and holy dogmas, the strict orders of command and exercises of ritual obedience that were practised within its ranks, occurred according to the model of ‘cloister rules’ (S. Frank). The Lenin cult that was then staged by Stalin and his rivals in the faith created a sacral faith tradition, complete with a canon of sacral scriptures, that could be selectively used to support one’s own claim to rule. The Stalinist cult of personality was also oriented towards an institutional church that knew how to assert the hierocratic power of its office by means of inquisition tribunals. The Maoist vision of salvation intentionally unleashed the cultural revolutionary turbulence of the organised class struggle in order to shatter the stability of the Confucian state philosophy, to detach the people from the ordered authority of family, clan and religion and to form them, via the torturous purification process of the ‘Reform of Ideas’, into the New Human Beings.

The Marxist-Leninist currents of faith represented religions of inner-worldly salvation. They took from the sacral Marxist stock the certainty that their revolutionary efforts were in harmony with the scientific regularities that Marx had supposedly discovered. The scientific certainty that the laws

of historical development were being actively promoted connected up with the salvation doctrine that was also present in Marx's work: the doctrine of liberating a humanity that suffers under capitalistic alienation and of leading it into a communistic paradise on earth through revolutionary deeds. Scientific certainty and mandate for salvation were executed by the successful organisation of a 'monks' army' (S. Frank) of career revolutionaries. The amalgamation of scientific certainty, mandate for salvation and revolutionary virtuosity produced an inner-worldly political religion.

The different variants of this political religion of Marxism-Leninism fought, with all the instruments of revolutionary terror that stood at their disposal, all alternative *Weltanschauungen* or Christian religious communities that dared to formulate their experiences of transcendence in either open or secret resistance to the promise of inner-worldly happiness. The Marxist-Leninist religions entail closed faith-communities that fought inner dissension, the free exchange of opinion and scientific critique as heretical challenges. With Stalinism, the permanent suppression of internal processes of differentiation produced the chaos of the Great Purges; whereas the population attempted to escape the terror of the faith through various survival strategies, large numbers of convinced Communists fell victim here to the Stalinist compulsion for obedience. The hoped-for community of heroic faith that was prepared to sacrifice its life for the construction of socialism in its country did not issue from the Great Purges. The attempt to transform the Leninist virtuoso religion into an institutional church that would have been capable of translating the revolutionary putsch of October 1917 into a secure legitimacy failed. At base, neither Leninism nor Stalinism was able to free itself from the permanent state of siege in which they had placed themselves and their faith empires. The self-dissolution of the former Soviet Union occurred with both speed and ease. And behind the imperial facades, only spiritual emptiness, rather than belief in the Marxist-Leninist mission, remained. These phenomena indicate that virtuoso religions fail when they seek to change the world in a revolutionary way rather than restricting themselves to self-divinisation within their own ranks.

## Notes

- 1 Besides the literature which appeared in connection with the so-called 'historian fight', see above all Hans Maier, *Politische Religionen. Die totalitären Regime und das Christentum* (Freiburg, 1995); also Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen. Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs* (Paderborn, 1996).
- 2 In the sense of Karl Mannheim, 'Das Problem einer Soziologie des Wissens (1925)', Kurt H. Wolff (ed.), *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk* (Berlin, 1964), 308–87, especially 324–32.
- 3 Compare Karl Mannheim, 'Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiete des Geistigen' (1929), *Wissenssoziologie*, op. cit., 566–613, especially 575–75.
- 4 Waldemar Gurian, 'Totalitarian Religions', *The Review of Politics* 14, 1, 3–14. Gurian assesses in a markedly more differentiated way in his early work, *Der Bolschewismus. Einführung in Geschichte und Lehre* (Freiburg, 1932), 180–202.



- 5 Raymond Aron, 'L'ère des tyrannies (1939)', *Raymond Aron 1905–1983. Textes, études et témoignages, Commentaire nr. 28–29* (1985), 327–40, cited from 339. The term, 'religions politiques' on page 340 is applied here more in passing.
- 6 Raymond Aron, 'L'avenir des religions séculières (1944)', *ibid.*, 369–83.
- 7 Raymond Aron, *Opium für Intellektuelle* (Cologne, 1957), 334.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 334.
- 9 Hannah Arendt in Ursula Ludz (ed.), *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Übungen im politischen Denken I* (Munich, 1994), 308.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 11 Compare Emile Durkheim, *Die Regeln der soziologischen Methode* (Neuwied, 1961), 105–15.
- 12 So is Jules Monnerot, *Soziologie des Kommunismus* (Cologne, 1952) treated, according to the strongly worded critique of Hannah Arendt. Compare Hannah Arendt, *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft*, *op. cit.*, 324–36.
- 13 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Munich, 1993).
- 14 In a later study ('Religionsersatz. Die gnostischen Massenbewegungen unserer Zeit', *Wort und Wahrheit* 15 (1960), 5–18), Eric Voegelin described the political religions as a mere religious ersatz and emphasised their 'derivative character'. 'The Gnostic mass movements of our time betray through their symbolism the derivative character of their connection with Christianity and its experience of faith' (18).
- 15 Voegelin has provided an analysis explaining the hermetic text of the *Politischen Religionen* of 1938. See Eric Voegelin, *Die Neue Wissenschaft der Politik. Eine Einführung* (Freiburg, 1991), especially chapter IV, 'Der Gnostizismus – Das Wesen der Modernität', 158–91. The citation can be found on page 165.
- 16 Voegelin, *Die Neue Wissenschaft der Politik*, *op. cit.*, 179.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 178. This bond is so 'weak' because it is based only upon faith. Social support of this faith – its institutionalization in a church – leads, by contrast, to the loss of this faith.

The more human beings that are drawn into the sphere of influence of Christianity, the greater will be the number of those who do not possess the strength for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity; and the probability of a fall from faith will increase if the cultural progress in the raising, education and intellectual discussion makes a growing circle of individuals familiar with the seriousness of Christianity. But the two processes characterise the high Middle Ages. . . . it will suffice to remind summarily of the growing urban communities, with their intensive spiritual culture, as the centres from which the danger radiated into the entire western society.

(*Ibid.*, 179)

- 19 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 20 Thus Carl Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen* (Gotha/Stuttgart, 1924). He describes all of modernity's backgrounds of meaning – thus, all the modern non-Christian cultural phenomena – as disguised religions. The step to the invisible religions of modernity in the sense of Luckmann necessarily results from this perspective. Compare Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion* (Frankfurt, 1991).
- 21 Gustave le Bon, *Psychologie der Massen* (Leipzig, 1919), 48. For this reason, Le Bon already astutely speaks of the 'political faith' of the masses of modernity.
- 22 Voegelin, *Die neue Wissenschaft der Politik*, *op. cit.*, 170.

- 23 Details of this rich intelligentsia tradition can be found in the portrayals of Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1966); the articles of association of the welfare alliance in Gerhard Dudeck (ed.), *Die Dekabristen. Dichtungen und Dokumente* (Leipzig, 1975), 163–210; on the intellectual circles, Martin Malia is still valuable, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (New York, 1965), especially 65ff.; Michael Confino (ed.), *Daughter of a Revolutionary: Natalie Herzen and the Bakunin-Nechaev Circle* (London, 1974). On the ideal of self-sacrifice, compare Philip Pomper, *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia* (Arlington IL, 1970), especially chapter 5; James N. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford, 1958), especially chapter 6; Philip Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement* (Chicago, 1972), especially chapter 4; on Chernyshevsky, compare Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York 1966), especially chapter 5.
- 24 Messianism and alienation from the society is very clearly addressed in Nikolai Berdyaev, *Wahrheit und Lüge de Kommunismus* (Lucerne, 1934), 39ff. In the same sense, see also Fedor Stepun, *Der Bolschewismus und die christliche Existenz* (Munich, 1962), 181ff.
- 25 Compare Isaiah Berlin, *Russische Denker* (Frankfurt, 1981), 46.
- 26 Interesting information about goals, atmospheres, self-incriminations, confessions before the investigating judge, trial course and penal conditions of the Decembrists can be found in G. R. V. Barratt (ed.), *Voices in Exile: The Decembrist Movement* (Montreal, 1974).
- 27 Compare Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev* (New Brunswick NJ, 1979) and Franco Venturi, op. cit., 336ff.; the letter of Bakunin to Nechaev and Nechaev's catechism are printed in Michael Bakunin, 'Gewalt für den Körper, Verrat für die Seele?' *Ein Brief von Michael Bakunin an Sergej Nechaev. Mit einer Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Arthur Lehning* (Berlin, 1980).
- 28 Deborah Hardy, *Petr Tkachev, the Critic as Jacobin* (Seattle, 1977), especially 64ff. and chapter 10.
- 29 Compare Pomper, Sergei Nechaev, op. cit., especially 54ff. and Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, op. cit., 336ff.
- 30 Bakunin, Brief an Sergej Nechaev (1870), op. cit., 80. Compare here also Astrid von Borcke, *Die Ursprünge des Boschewismus. Die jakobinische Tradition in Rußland und die Theorie der revolutionären Diktatur* (Munich, 1977), 284.
- 31 Ibid., 80.
- 32 Thus Karl Schlögel, 'Russische Wegzeichen', Karl Schlögel (ed.), *Wegzeichen. Zur Krise der russischen Intelligenz* (Frankfurt, 1990), 5–44, cited from 39. It remains surprising that a first German translation of the Vechi appears uncommentated on 341 in the literature index. Compare Elias Hurwicz (ed.), *Rußlands politische Seele. Russische Bekenntnisse* (Berlin, 1918). Only the essay by Gersenzon was not taken up in this translation.
- 33 Fedor Stepun, *Der Bolschewismus und die christliche Existenz* (Munich, 1962), 314. As famous examples of public confessions should be mentioned those of Bakunin and Tolstoy. Compare Leo N. Tolstoy, *Meine Beichte* (1882) (Munich, 1990); *Michael Bakunins Beichte (1851)*, Kurt Kersten (ed.) (Berlin, 1926).
- 34 Compare Gisela Oberländer, 'Die Vechi-Diskussion (1909–1912)', doctoral dissertation (Cologne, 1965), especially 176ff.
- 35 Semen Frank, 'Die Ethik des Nihilismus (1909)', Karl Schlögel (ed.), *Wegzeichen. Zur Krise der russischen Intelligenz* (Frankfurt, 1990), 275–320, cited from 294.
- 36 Ibid., 314.
- 37 Ibid., 312.
- 38 Ibid., 312–13.

- 39 Sergei Bulgakov, 'Heroentum und geistiger Kampf. Überlegungen zur religiösen Natur der russischen Intelligencija', Schlögel (ed.), *Wegzeichen*, op. cit., 80–139, 86.
- 40 Ibid., 87.
- 41 Ibid., 87.
- 42 Ibid., 97.
- 43 Ibid., 96.
- 44 Ibid., 96.
- 45 Ibid., 98.
- 46 Ibid., 100.
- 47 Ibid., 100–1.
- 48 Ibid., 120.
- 49 Ibid., 120.
- 50 Ibid., 120.
- 51 Ibid., 121.
- 52 Ibid., 122.
- 53 Ibid., 98.
- 54 Ibid., 120.
- 55 Max Weber, 'Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus', Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. 1 (Tübingen, 1972), 189.
- 56 Bogdan Kistiakowsky, 'Zur Verteidigung des Rechts', Schlögel (ed.), *Wegzeichen*, op. cit., 212–50.
- 57 Ibid., 218.
- 58 Ibid., 230.
- 59 Ibid., 239.
- 60 Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Die Wahrheit der Philosophie und die Wahrheit der Intelligencija', Schlögel (ed.), *Wegzeichen*, op. cit., 51–79, 60.
- 61 Ibid., 60.
- 62 Ibid., 67.
- 63 Ibid., 67.
- 64 Nikolai Berdyaev, *Wahrheit und Lüge des Kommunismus* (Lucerne, 1934), 30.
- 65 Ibid., 30.
- 66 Ibid., 18.
- 67 Ibid., 19.
- 68 Ibid., 21.
- 69 Ibid., 22.
- 70 Ibid., 20.
- 71 Ibid., 47.
- 72 Ibid., 50.
- 73 Ibid., 56.
- 74 Ibid., 57.
- 75 Ibid., 57.
- 76 Ibid., 57.
- 77 Fedor Stepun, 'Der proletarische Revolution und der revolutionäre Orden der russischen Intelligenz', *Der Bolschewismus und die christliche Existenz* (Munich, 1962), 181–222.

First with the ideas of Tkatshev, Netschajev and Bakunin begins, in the order of the intelligentsia, the development that leads ever further away from Europe and its freedom. This development reaches its climax in Lenin's conception of the Bolshevist Party. Lenin's seizure of power brings means the death of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia. Those of its best representatives who withstood the days of the struggle and the months that

followed, went into emigration. Those who remained in Soviet Russia were exiled or executed. The rest established themselves in the New World – only a few out of conviction, most out of severe need.

(Ibid., 215)

78 Ibid., 200. Further:

by contrast to the Marxists, the *Narodniki* believed in the significance of the personality in history. Thus, they had theoretical grounds for liberating an entire people from an unbearable burden of shame and need through the execution of a sin-laden officer. They were also confident that a criminal act might be used only as a last resort, only where other means promise no kind of success.

(Ibid., 201)

79 Ibid., 220–21.

80 Ibid., 196.

81 Ibid., 194.

82 Ibid., 196.

83 Ibid., 197.

84 Ibid., 198.

85 Ibid., 198.

86 Ibid., 198.

87 Ibid., 199.

88 Ibid., 199. The *Narodniki* movement had

sought nothing for itself, it was always prepared to give. It wanted unconditionally to defend the good and the just, also among its victims. Yes, it unconditionally represented a human cloth of a type that was – in its purity – no longer to be found in Europe. If it had been entrusted with more concrete work, this work process and the satisfaction of its visible results would perhaps have cured it of the utopian character of its spiritual type. Yet history had denied this curative path to the Russian intelligentsia.

(Ibid., 206)

89 Ibid., 202.

90 Ibid., 204.

91 Ibid., 204. Stepun also emphasizes that the *Narodniki* fought

as powerless against an overpowerful government and in doing so usually also lost their lives. But the latter (Bolshevists), in the feeling of their unrestricted power, murdered, without risk for themselves, powerless people in the hundreds of thousands. Bolshevik terror has nothing to do with blind, misguided heroism.

(Ibid., 204)

92 Ibid., 208–9.

93 On this schism between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks and the prior faith-career of Lenin, see the classic studies by Abraham Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism* (Cambridge MA, 1972); Dietrich Geyer, *Lenin in der russischen Sozialdemokratie. Die Arbeiterbewegung im Zarenreich als Organisationsproblem der revolutionären Intelligenz 1890–1903* (Cologne, 1962); J. L. H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (London, 1966); Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge, 1967);

- Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Boston MA, 1966).
- 94 V. I. Lenin, *Was tun? Brennende Fragen unserer Bewegung*, in Lenin, *Werke*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1971), 355–551, 536fn.
- 95 Paul Axelrod, ‘Die Einigung der russischen Sozialdemokratie und ihre Aufgaben’, *Die russische Revolution und die sozialistische Internationale. Aus dem literarischen Nachlaß von Paul Axelrod* (Jena, 1932), 32–56, 47.
- 96 Leo Trotsky, ‘Unsere politischen Aufgaben’, Hartmut Mehringer (trans.), *Schriften zur revolutionären Organisation* (1904) (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1970), 117. Compare here Klaus-Georg Riegel, ‘Sendungsprophetie und Charisma. Am Beispiel Leo Trotzki’s’, Wolfgang Lipp (ed.), *Kulturtypen, Kulturcharaktere* (Berlin, 1987), 221–40.
- 97 Lenin, *Was tun?*, op. cit., 498.
- 98 An informative – often overlooked – critical portrayal of the Leninist conception can be found in *Die Lage der Sozialdemokratie in Rußland*, edited by ‘ambassadors’ of the Organisational Committee of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Russia (Berlin, 1912), 6–15.
- 99 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, study edition edited by J. Winckelmann (Cologne/Berlin, 1964), 391.
- 100 Commonly defined as total institutions in the sense of Goffman. Compare Erving Goffman, ‘Über die Merkmale totaler Institutionen’, *Asyle. Über die soziale Situation psychiatrischer Patienten und anderer Insassen* (Frankfurt, 1973), 13–124.
- 101 Michel Foucault, *Überwachung und Strafen. Die Geburt des Gefängnisses* (Frankfurt, 1979), 251–92.
- 102 Lenin, *Was tun?*, op. cit., 490.
- 103 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, op. cit., vol. 2, 867.
- 104 Lenin, *Was tun?*, op. cit., 486.

But in order, on the other hand, that all these small splinters be fit together into a whole, in order that the movement itself does not shatter with the functions of the movement and that the one charged with small functions be given the faith in the necessity and significance of his work (without which he will never work at all) – for all this, a solid organization of tried and tested revolutionaries is required.

- 105 Valeriu Marcu, *Lenin. 30 Jahre Russland* (Leipzig, 1927), 97. In an insightful aside, Marcu draws our attention to the connection between Leninistic discipline and the inner-worldly asceticism of Puritanism. ‘The obedient one should become the field of privation, of spiritual asceticism, a Puritanism of subjugation.’ This connection is systematically developed in Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York, 1976), chapter 8.
- 106 Thus the critique of Lieber, who follows up on a remark by Trotsky. Compare Brian Pearce (ed.), *1903: Second Ordinary Congress of the RSDLP: Complete Text of the Minutes* (London, 1978), 202.
- 107 Lenin, *Was tun?*, op. cit., 498.
- 108 Ibid., 498.
- 109 Lenin, foreword to the collection, *Zwölf Jahre* (1907), V. I. Lenin, *Gegen den Revisionismus. Eine Sammlung ausgewählter Aufsätze und Reden*, edited by the Institute for Marxism-Leninism at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Berlin, 1959), 90–106, 96.
- 110 Compare Marc Jansen, *A Show-Trial under Lenin: The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow 1922* (The Hague, 1982).

- 111 Compare the purgation catechism of Jemeljan Jaroslavski, *Für eine bolschewistische Prüfung und Reinigung der Parteireihen* (Moscow, 1933).
- 112 In the sense of Emile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris, 1960), 46.
- 113 Paul Axelrod, *Die Einigung der russischen Sozialdemokratie und ihre Aufgaben*, op. cit., 45.
- 114 The concept of the revolutionary faith community is developed here analogously to Max Weber's theory of the community of virtuosos for religiously qualified actors. Weber means that the religiously qualified virtuosos, in the context of the problem of the theodicy, systematically, permanently and exclusively subordinate their willing and acting 'to a methodical regulation of all thinking and action ... of a systematic regimentation of life in subordination to the religious purpose'. See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1., study edition edited by J. Winckelmann (Tübingen, 1964), 420–21. Sinoviev speaks clearly of the adherents of Lenin as 'a group of career revolutionaries ... who devoted themselves only to the revolution and knew only the interests of the revolution' (Grigorij Sinoviev, *Vom Werdegang unserer Partei* (Hamburg, 1920), 17–18). With pathos, Bucharin describes the 'revolutionary Order' in 1922:

all the Party workers had submitted themselves to the Party up to the last: the 'Party patriotism', the exclusive submission to the execution of Party instructions, the bitter struggles with inimical groups – which were conducted everywhere, in the factories and businesses, in open assemblies and in the clubs and even in prison – made a unique revolutionary order out of our party.

(Nikolai Bucharin, 'Die eiserne Kohorte der Revolution (1922)', *Marxismus und Politik* 1 (1971), 319–23, 320)

- 115 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, op. cit., 396.
- 116 Vera Zasulic, Vera Zasulic to Marx, 16 February 1881, D. Rjazanov (ed.), *Marx-Engels-Archiv. Zeitschrift des Marx-Engels-Instituts in Moskau*, vol. 1, reprint (Frankfurt, 1969), 317.
- 117 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 118 Karl Marx, 'Vorrede zur zweiten russischen Ausgabe des *Kommunistischen Manifestes* (1882)', Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die russische Kommune. Kritik eines Mythos*, Maximilian Rubel (ed.) (Munich, 1972), 69–71, 71.
- 119 Thus Rjazanov, cited by Rubel, op. cit., 55.
- 120 Compare to Zasulic, Wolfgang Geierhos, *Vera Zasulic und die russische revolutionäre Bewegung* (Vienna, 1977), 129–272.
- 121 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 122 Fritz Gelich, *Der Kommunismus als Lehre vom Tausendjährigen Reich* (Munich, 1920), especially 17–52.
- 123 Gerlich, op. cit., 30–31. Gerlich already sees that, with Lenin, the role of the proletariat – the 'saviour class' (*ibid.*, 31) – is occupied by the intellectuals, who demonstrate the correct 'communist conviction' (*ibid.*, 31).
- 124 Kenneth Jowitt, 'Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime', *Soviet Studies* 35 (1983), 275–97, especially 277. Jowitt refers absolutely correctly to the fact that it is not Lenin who comes into question as the charismatic leader of Russia's October Revolution, but his party of career revolutionaries. Uniting individual heroism and organisational discipline, the Party is celebrated as the bearer of revolutionary charisma. Compare on this also Günther Roth, 'Politische Herrschaft und persönliche Freiheit', *Heidelberger Max Weber Vorlesungen 1983* (Frankfurt, 1987), 78; also Stefan

- Breuer, *Bürokratie und Charisma. Zur politischen Soziologie Max Webers* (Darmstadt, 1994), especially 84–109.
- 125 Rene Fülöp-Miller, *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschewismus. Darstellung und Kritik des kulturellen Lebens in Sowjet-Russland* (Vienna, 1926), 2.
- 126 V. I. Lenin, *Staat und Revolution* (1917) (Berlin, 1977), 107.
- 127 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 128 Compare on this Manfred Hildermeier, 'Das Privileg der Rückständigkeit. Anmerkungen zum Wandel einer Interpretationsfigur der neueren russischen Geschichte', *Historische Zeitschrift* 244 (1987), 557–603.
- 129 Compare the collection of documents of Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North (eds), *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920–1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford CA, 1964); Brian Pearce (ed.), *Congress of the Peoples of the East: Baku, September 1920*, stenographic report (London, 1977); Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schramm (eds), *Marxism and Asia: An Introduction with Readings* (London, 1969).
- 130 Nikolai Berdyaev, *Wahrheit und Lüge des Kommunismus*, op. cit., 58. The best portrayal of 'Russian chiasm as the atmosphere at the outset of Bolshevism' can be found in Emanuel Sarkisyanz, *Russland und der Messianismus des Ostens. Sendungsbewußtsein und politischer Chiasmus des Ostens* (Tübingen, 1955), 95–134.
- 131 Compare Karl Schlögel, *Jenseits des Großen Oktober. Das Laboratorium der Moderne, Petersburg 1909–1921* (Berlin, 1988).
- 132 It is an 'invented tradition', a creation of continuity and legitimacy in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1994), 1–14.
- 133 The corresponding chatechisma were written by Bucharin, among others; compare Nikolai Bucharin, *Das Programm der Kommunisten (Bolschewiki)* (Vienna, 1918); also Nikolai Bucharin and Eugen A. Preobraschensky, *Das ABC des Kommunismus. Populäre Erläuterung des Programms der Kommunistischen Partei Rußlands (Bolschewiki)* (Hamburg, 1921).
- 134 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen*, op. cit., 49.
- 135 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 136 To this also belongs the revolutionary lyric, the effusions of which can also be found in the German sphere. See, for example, the collection by Ludwig Rubiner (ed.), *Kameraden der Menschheit. Dichtung zur Weltrevolution* (Potsdam, 1919).
- 137 Compare Richard Stites, *The Origins of Soviet Ritual Style: Symbol and Festival in the Russian Revolution*, Claes Arvidsson, Lars Erik Bomqvist (eds), *Symbols of Power: The Aesthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Stockholm, 1982), 23–42, especially 34–36; compare also Nils Ake Nilsson (eds), *Art, Society, Revolution. Russia 1917–1921* (Stockholm, 1979).
- 138 Thus A. Gan, the theoretician of constructivism. Cited according to Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1988), 30. Groys shows convincingly that the Russian avant-garde agreed with Stalinist realism in this goal.
- 139 Eric Voegelin, *Politische Religionen*, op. cit., 44.
- 140 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 141 Emile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens (1912)* (Frankfurt, 1984), 309.
- 142 Robert H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (New York, 1988).
- 143 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Study Edition, vol. 1, edited by J. Winckelmann (Cologne, 1964), 437.
- 144 *Ibid.*, 437.

- 145 Ibid., 435.
- 146 Ibid., 435.
- 147 Ibid., 435.
- 148 Ibid., 435.
- 149 'The office, endowed in accordance with orders, and not the personal charismatic qualification of the priest, decides as to the effectiveness of the dispensation of grace' (ibid., 435).
- 150 Ibid., 435.
- 151 Ibid., 136. Weber adds: 'through it, the virtuoso can accomplish, in addition to his own salvation, works for the thesaurus of the institution' (ibid., 435).
- 152 J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (Cambridge, 1985), 58–91.
- 153 On Stalin's attempts to gain official authority even in the area of philosophy, compare Robert C. Tucker, 'The Rise of Stalin's Personality Cult', *American Historical Review* 2 (1979), 347–66. See also Reinhard Löhmann, *Der Stalinmythos. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte des Personenkultes in der Sowjetunion (1929–1935)* (Münster, 1990).
- 154 Boris Souvarine, *Stalin. Amerkungen zur Geschichte des Bolschewismus* (1935) (Munich, 1980), 303.
- 155 Ibid., 328.
- 156 Ibid., 327.
- 157 Ibid., 328–29.
- 158 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, op. cit., 857.
- 159 Details in Souvarine, op. cit., 288ff.; Dimitri Volkogonov, *Stalin. Triumph und Tragödie. Ein politisches Portrait* (Düsseldorf, 1989), 134ff.; Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin. Koloss der Macht* (Esslingen am Neckar, 1977), 210ff.; Robert Conquest, *Stalin. Der totale Wille zur Macht* (Munich, 1991), especially 140ff.
- 160 Souvarine, *Stalin*, op. cit., 328.
- 161 Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1979), 547. Durkheim also speaks of delirium, but he attributes this ecstasy function to every religious ceremony:
- elle a pour effet de rapprocher les individus, de mettre en mouvement les masses et de susciter ainsi un état d'effervescence, parfois même de délire, qui n'est pas sans parenté avec l'état religieux. L'homme est transporté hors de lui, distrait des ses occupations et de ses préoccupations ordinaires. Aussi observe-t'on de part et d'autre les mêmes manifestations: cris, chants, musique, mouvements violents, danses, recherché d'excitants qui remontent le niveau vital, etc.
- 162 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, Study Edition, op. cit., 318. Weber sees ecstasy as a gateway of 'extraordinary powers ... for which we ... wish to use the name, "charisma"'.  
 163 Eric Voegelin, *Politische Religionen*, op. cit., 58.
- 164 Compare Hobsbawn, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', op. cit.
- 165 *Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion (Bolschewiki). Kurzer Lehrgang*. Edited by a commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B). Approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B) 1938 (Berlin: Verlag der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland, 1946).
- 166 J. Stalin, *Fragen des Leninismus* (Moscow: Verlag für Fremdsprachige Literatur, 1947).
- 167 Compare Dimitri Volkogonov, *Stalin Triumph und Tragödie. Ein politisches Portrait* (Düsseldorf, 1989), 324ff.



- 168 To the cult of personality also belongs the fact that Stalin distances himself from it, thereby demonstrating his 'modesty'. Compare Roy A. Medvedev, *Die Wahrheit ist unsere Stärke. Geschichte und Folgen des Stalinismus* (Frankfurt, 1973), 170–71.
- 169 Thus the title of Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gesplittene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1988).
- 170 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, op. cit., 39:

A hierocratic association shall be called a ruling association if and to the extent that psychic coercion through dispensation or denial of beneficial goods (hierocratic pressure) is applied to guarantee its orders. A church shall be called a hierocratic institutional church if and to the extent that its administrative staff claims the monopoly of legitimate hierocratical pressure.

And further (879–80):

the hierocracy develops into the church if 1. a particular stock of career priests has arisen that is regulated according to salary, advancement, career duties, specific (extra-career) life-changes and are selected out of the 'world', 2. the hierocracy raises 'universalistic' ruling claims ... 3. if dogma and cult are rationalized, set down in holy writings, commentated and systematically – not only according to a kind of technical skill – are objects of instruction – 4. if this all occurs in an institutional kind of community. For the point that decides everything ... is the detachment of charisma from the person and its connection with the institution and especially with the office. For the 'church' differs from the 'sect' in the sociological sense through the fact that it regards itself as an administrator of a kind of faith commission to eternal beneficial goods; these are offered to each in which one ... does not enter voluntarily, as in a club, but into which one is born, to whose cultivation the religiously un-qualified, the un-godly is also subject. In a word: it is not as a 'sect', as a community of purely personally charismatically qualified persons, but as a bearer and administrator of a charisma of office.

- 171 Compare here Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Kaderbiographien in marxistisch-leninistischen Virtuosityengemeinschaften', *Leviathan* I (1994), 17–46. Here too can be found further literature on these show-trials.
- 172 Compare here Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Inquisitionssysteme of Glaubensgemeinschaften. Die Rolle von Schuldgeständnissen in der spanischen und der stalinistischen Inquisitionspraxis', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 3 (1987), 175–89.
- 173 Compare John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Regime* (Chicago, 1976).
- 174 Michel Foucault, *Überwachen und Strafen: Die Geburt des Gefängnisses* (Frankfurt, 1979), 66.
- 175 Compare Klaus-Georg Riegel, *Konfessionsrituale im Marxismus-Leninismus* (Graz, 1985).
- 176 In the earlier trials, the Schachty trial (1928), the Ramsin trial (1930), the Metro-Vikers trial (1933) and the Novosibirsk trial (1937), it was predominantly economic offences that were objects of the accusation. Here, A. Vyschinski was involved predominantly as screenplay author since the Schachty trial. Compare Roy A. Medvedev, *Die Wahrheit ist unsere Stärke. Geschichte und Folgen des Stalinismus* (Frankfurt, 1973), especially 129ff. Arkadi Waksberg, *Gnadenlos. Andrei Vyschinski – Mörder im Dienste Stalins* (Bergisch Gladbach, 1991); Robert Conquest, *Der Große Terror. Sowjetunion 1934–1938*

(Munich, 1992), especially 402ff. Since 1920, Dzierzynski had described the main task of the Tscheka as the 'struggle against the economic decay, speculation and official crimes', 'in order to steer the economic life back on track and to set aside all obstacles arising through sabotage, lack of discipline or malice'. Cited from F. E. Dzierzynski, *Ausgewählte Artikel und Reden 1908–1926* (Berlin, 1953), 129. It appears logical that Dzierzynski, as Tscheka-chairman, was also appointed in 1921 as the People's Commissar for Transportation in order to fight with state terror against 'the main enemy within': deficient work productivity, speciality schooling, deficient work motivation, etc. The industrialisation politics were conducted as a war of faith against the population, which laboured according to the pre-industrial work ethic. Economic efficiency was to be forced through the faith-terror of the pre-industrial Inquisition. In connection with the Schachty trial, thus Szevera:

between 1928 and 1931 approximately 7,000 skilled workers were barred from industry, deported to camps or placed under house arrest. That means at that time for the Soviet Union that 10% of the entire technical cadre was withdrawn. This appears all the more nonsensical insofar as the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] undertakes the first Five Year Plan at precisely this time and urgently needs technical workers. Through imprisonment, the leadership levels – which were understaffed with specialists in any case – were further weakened.

(Walter Szevera, "'Schachty" und die Opferung der technischen Intelligenz', Wolfgang Neuegebaur (ed.), *Stalinismus-Analysen* (Vienna, 1994), 61–70, 61–62)

- 177 Compare E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (London, 1937). This is the classic study on witchcraft understood as an attribute of fictive causal agents used to explain otherwise 'inexplicable' accidents. The witch-trials are construed according to this causal logic. Friedrich Adler, 'Der Moskauer Hexenprozess', *Mitteilungen über die Lage der politischen Gefangenen* XIII, no. 14 (1936), 53–75, has rightly referred to the witch trials (56–57) and emphasised their connection to the show-trials via the coerced confessions. Yet Adler missed the decisive difference: the medieval Inquisition trial was not construed as a modern legal procedure, but as an attempt to replace the judgement of God, which had been previously customary, with a legal process that was regarded as legitimate by the medieval legal order. The proof that the Stalinist inquisition committed a series of 'directorial mistakes' (58) can only be conducted in the context of the validity of modern legal processes.
- 178 The study of W. Banning, *Der Kommunismus als politisch-soziale Weltreligion* (Berlin-Dahlem, 1953) is a popular-scientific history of Russian Communism, not an analysis of the Communist world religion. Only on pages 239–44 are Indonesia and China under the influence of this world religion treated.
- 179 'Die Einundzwanzig Bedingungen (1920), in Julius Braunthal, *Geschichte der Internationale*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1978), 557–61, especially 558. Article 13 demands periodic purification 'in order systematically to purge the party from the petty-bourgeois elements that creep into it' (*ibid.*, 560).
- 180 *Ibid.*, 559.
- 181 Impressively expressed by Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig, 1924), especially vol. 1.
- 182 Compare Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Deviation Control: A Study in the Dynamics of Doctrinal Conflict', *The American Political Science Review* 56 (1962), 5–22.

- 183 Compare Leonid G. Babitschenko, 'Die Kaderschulung der Komintern', *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin, 1993), 37–59. This has substantial failings, as far as the dating and naming of the cadre smithies instituted for the missionisation of China are concerned.
- 184 *Die Einundzwanzig Bedingungen* (1920), op. cit., 558.
- 185 Compare Hermann Weber and Dietrich Staritz (eds), *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten. Stalinistischer Terror und 'Säuberungen' in den kommunistischen Parteien Europas seit den dreißiger Jahren* (Berlin, 1993).
- 186 The history of this illegal security apparatus has yet to be written. As an individual study, the revolutionary career of Wollweber – an explosives expert for the Ministry of State Security – is paradigmatic. Compare Jan von Flocken and Michael F. Scholz, *Ernst Wollweber. Saboteur, Minister, Unperson* (Berlin, 1994).
- 187 Compare Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt/Yael Azmon (ed.), *Sozialismus und Tradition* (Tübingen, 1977). Critical of it: Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Der Sozialismus als Modernisierungsideologie. Bemerkungen zu S. N. Eisenstadts Theorie des Sozialismus als "universalistische Tradition der Modernität"', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 1 (1979), 109–23.
- 188 Compare Demetrio Boersner, *The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question* (1917–28) (Paris, 1957), 97–134.
- 189 'Aufruf an die Ostvölker', *Die Kommunistische Internationale* 15 (1921), 141–51, 149.
- 190 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 191 Compare the informative collection of documents in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North (eds), *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920–1927. A Documentary Survey* (Stanford CA, 1964), 243–396.
- 192 Compare Jane L. Price, *Cadres, Commanders and Commissars: The Training of the Chinese Communist Leadership, 1920–45* (Boulder CO, 1975), especially 31ff.
- 193 *Ibid.*, 90ff. See also Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Konversionsprozesse im Marxismus-Leninismus: Die Sun Yat-Sen Universität in Moskau (1925–30)', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 2 (1982), 299–315.
- 194 Compare C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-Ying How (eds), *Documents on Communism, Nationalism and Soviet Advisers in China, 1918–1927* (New York, 1972).
- 195 Compare Lydia Holubnychy, *Michael Borodin and the Chinese Revolution, 1923–1925* (New York, 1979); Dan N. Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge MA, 1981).
- 196 Compare Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China 1917–1924* (New York, 1953), especially 236ff.; Conrad Brandt, *Stalin's Failure in China 1924–1927* (New York, 1966), especially 30ff.; Robert C. North, *Moscow and the Chinese Communists* (Stanford CA, 1963), especially 56ff.
- 197 In Chinese, there is no correspondence for Maoism. Compare Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organisation in Communist China* (Berkeley CA, 1973), especially 30–33.
- 198 Mao Tse-tung, 'Untersuchungsbericht über die Bauernbewegung in Hunan (1927)', *Mao Tse-tung, Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 1 (Peking, 1968), 21–63, 23.
- 199 Compare Helmut Martin, *Kult und Kanon. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Staatsmaoismus, 1935–1978* (Hamburg, 1978), 7.
- 200 A conspicuous structural analogy to the socio-genesis of absolutist state force and the 'king mechanism' in the sense of Norbert Elias, *Die Höfische Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1979), especially 415. The parallels to the Weberian type of charismatic rule are obvious. Compare Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, op. cit., especially 839.
- 201 Mao Tse-tung, 'Beschluß über einige Fragen der Geschichte unserer Partei', Mao Tse-tung, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1956), 222–85.

- 202 Compare John E. Rue, *Mao-Tse-tung in Opposition 1927–1935* (Stanford CA, 1966), especially 137–203; also Lazlo Ladany, *The Communist Party of China and Marxism 1921–1985: A Self-Portrait* (Stanford CA, 1988), especially 59–62.
- 203 Thus, probably, had Chen Boda written the first catechism for the Party in 1937, with his selection, *Mao Zedong lun*. Compare Raymond F. Wylie, ‘Mao Tse-tung, Ch’en Po-ta and the “Sinification of Marxism”, 1936–38’, *The China Quarterly* 79 (1979), 447–80, 458. Also Peter M. Kuhfus, ‘“Ein Held, wer mit der Zeit geht.” Über eine verbotene russische Mao-Edition und den chinesisch-sowjetischen Dialog’, Karl-Heinz Pohl, Gudrun Wacker and Liu Huiru (eds), *Chinesische Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert. Zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Hamburg, 1993), 209–332, especially 216ff.
- 204 Here should be mentioned the ‘twenty-eight returned student Bolsheviks’, who – like Wang Ming – were educated at the Sun Yat-Sen University and had at their disposal ideological and personal ties to the Comintern apparatus. Compare Richard C. Kagan, ‘The Comintern, the 28 Bolsheviks and the Alumni of Sun Yat-Sen University’, *International Review of History and Political Science* 11 (1974), 79–89; also James P. Harrison, *Der Lange Marsch zur Macht. Die Geschichte der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas von ihrer Gründung bis zum Tode von Mao Tse-tung* (Stuttgart, 1978), 497; compare also Wang Ming, *50 Jahre KP Chinas und der Verrat Mao Zedongs* (Berlin, 1981), 150–84.
- 205 Compare Peter van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking’s Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley CA, 1971).
- 206 Lin Biao, *Es lebe der Sieg im Volkskrieg* (Peking, 1965).
- 207 Compare Benjamin I. Schwartz, ‘The Chinese Perception of World Order: Past and Present’, John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations* (Cambridge MA, 1970), 276–88.
- 208 Stuart R. Schram, ‘Mao Zedong a Hundred Years on: The Legacy of a Ruler’, *The China Quarterly* 137 (1994), 125–43, especially 134. Schram estimates 30 million dead victims as a result of the ‘Great Leap Forward’ and 1 million for the Cultural Revolution. Despite these horrific figures resulting from the Maoist terror, Schram – a scholar who is very well disposed toward Mao Zedong – characterises Mao solely as a modernisation despot in the footsteps of Peter the Great and Stalin (*ibid.*, 142–43).
- 209 Compare Klaus-Georg Riegel, ‘Die maoistische “Gedankenreform” und Totalitarismustheorien’, Thomas Heberer (ed.), *Mao Zedong – Der unsterbliche Revolutionär?* (Hamburg, 1995), 144–90.
- 210 Thus in his classic study, Jean-Luc Domenach, *Der vergessene Archipel. Gefängnisse und Lager in der Volksrepublik China* (Hamburg, 1995).
- 211 Mao Tse-tung, ‘Den Arbeitsstil der Partei Verbessern (1942)’, Mao Tse-tung, *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 3 (Peking, 1969), 35–54, especially 43ff.
- 212 Mao Tse-tung, ‘Die Millionenmassen für die antijapanische nationale Einheitsfront gewinnen (1937)’, Mao Tse-tung, *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 1 (Peking, 1968), 335–46, 342.
- 213 Benjamin I. Schwartz, ‘China and the West in the “Thought of Mao Tse-Tung”’, Ping-ti Ho and Tang Tsou (eds), *China’s Heritage and the Communist Political System*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1968), 365–96, especially 376ff.
- 214 Günther Roth, *Politische Herrschaft und persönliche Freiheit* (Frankfurt, 1987), especially 89ff.
- 215 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 216 Mao Tse-tung, ‘Reden bei der Aussprache in Yen-an über Literatur und Kunst (1942)’, Mao Tse-tung, *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 3 (Peking, 1969), 75–110, 79.
- 217 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 218 Mao Tse-tung, ‘Reform in Learning, the Party and Literature (1942)’, Boyd Compton (ed.), *Mao’s China. Party Reform Documents, 1942–44* (Seattle, 1966),

9–32, 31–32. The version given here seems to me to be more vivid than the corresponding passage in Mao, ‘Den Arbeitsstil der Partei verbessern’, op. cit., 53. The attempts of doctoral healing arts that are typical of the procedures of cleansing and purification in virtuoso communities are, for example, also applied by Augustine.

If your brother were to have a wound on his body that he would perhaps like to keep secret because he is afraid of being caught, would it not be cruel of you to be silent about it, merciful, by contrast, to reveal it? All the more must you report it, then, so that he does not hide, to his greater unhappiness, within the foulness of his heart.

(‘Die Regeln des Augustinus’, Hans Urs von Balthassar (ed.), *Die Großen Ordensregeln* (Trier, 1988), 135–71, 166)

- 219 Mao Tse-tung, ‘Reden bei der Aussprache in Yen-an über Literatur und Kunst (1942)’, op. cit., 58.
- 220 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of ‘Brainwashing’ in China* (New York, 1969), especially 65–85.
- 221 Sidney Leonhard Greenblatt, ‘Campaigns and the Manufacture of Deviance in Chinese Society’, Amy Auerbacher-Wilson, Sidney Leonard Greenblatt, Richard Whittingham Wilson (eds), *Deviance and Social Control in Chinese Society* (New York, 1977), 82–120, especially 92.
- 222 Compare Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950–1965* (New York, 1993), 28–32.
- 223 Mao Zedong, ‘Weisungen auf dem Forums eines Teils der Delegierten des 1. Komitees des 2. Kongresses des Nationalen Industrie-und Handelsverbandes (1956)’, Helmut Martin (ed.), *Mao Zedong: Texte*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1979), 83–100, 91.
- 224 Compare Hsien Chin Hu, ‘The Chinese Concept of “Face”’, *American Anthropologist* 46 (1944), 45–64.
- 225 Mao, ‘Zur Frage der richtigen Behandlung von Widersprüchen im Volke (1957)’, *Mao Zedong, Texte*, vol. 2, op. cit., 128–74.
- 226 Jean-Luc Domenach, ‘La Chine populaire ou les aleas du totalitarisme’, Guy Hermet (ed.), *Totalitarismes* (Paris, 1984), 179–200, 187.

## 7 Discussion of Chapter 6

### **Felix Dirsch, Munich**

Your paper reminded me in some respects very much of the theses of Michael Rohrwasser in his book, *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten*. In the first two papers, it had already become evident to me that the concept of political religions is related more to external phenomena; that is, it has been transposed onto certain structures – to the church of Marxism, for example, to the virtuoso religions, to the renegades, to the heretics, to the deviationists from this church. Thus, it has been transposed not only upon the truth model itself, upon the respective religion or political religion. One can also conceive of the concept of political religion differently: not only in the sense of externalised structures, but also in the sense that Marxism or Bolshevism – in their respective transformations – are very much also a phenomenon of inner religious energy. I refer only to the phenomenon of property. Certainly, the connection between religious currents and hostility to property has always existed in European intellectual history – in the Peasants' Wars, for example. Thus, there is this inner religion, this inner passion. This of course also to some extent shapes the currents of Marxism-Leninism that are inimical to property. And understood in this sense, the phenomenon of political religion is to be applied solely to Marxism and not to National Socialism – because, in the latter, the connection of inner religious passion and currents that are hostile to property is lacking.

### **Hans Maier**

We have already had a characteristic discussion about the inner-worldliness of religion this morning. The question was the following: are the political religions strictly inner-worldly religions? That was Voegelin's standpoint, which Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch modified somewhat with his statement. Klaus Vondung then countered with the point that talk of Providence, the Almighty and so on is in large part a rhetorical formulation. The Weberian concept of virtuoso religions now permits an ascription to the history of the origin of religions. They are, in other words, not understood transcendentally

or as revealed from outside by a revelatory God, but are generated internally – to a certain extent, in the Durkheimian sense of a community's self-understanding, that of a virtuoso community of monks. I would now ask whether one could understand these virtuoso religions in such a way that they confirm the Voegelinian thesis of the inner-worldliness of political religions?

### **Klaus-Georg Riegel**

Weber circumvents this question because he does not want to express a value judgement. At the outset, I briefly opted for the more interesting version – at least in this area – of Voegelin, because Voegelin does two things. For one, he makes a value judgement: 'is this a surrogate of a religion or is it a genuine religion?' He expresses his abhorrence of the inner-worldly salvation doctrines, but he also initiates a research programme.

The research programme states that he attempts to capture the Christian roots of these inner-worldly salvation doctrines by taking the self-description of Christianity seriously and by formulating the paradox of Christianity. For Voegelin, the paradox lies with the fact that transcendence is able to be experienced by the faithful only through the thin bond of faith. But if transcendence is institutionalised in history, in the Church, then the thin bond of faith is torn; then, divinisation of the human being can make progress. The Christian experience of transcendence had actually already been attacked by Gnosis, by the Gnostic heresy. It was then postponed through the indefinite delay of the *paraousia* and the rule-bound institutional grace of the Church. He then traces the development of this idea through Joachim of Fiore, through the Puritans, up to Hitler and Stalin. And this form of questioning seems to me to be fruitful because it connects both strands of the discussion. This question does not at all exist for Weber. For him, the decisive thing is the charisma of a Hitler, a Robespierre or a Napoleon. Thus, he has taken charisma out of the context of ecclesiastical faith. His approach seems to me to be exciting to this extent.

With Raymond Aron, there is a constant transition of concepts. First, it is a worldly religion, then it is a pseudo-religion, then a political religion, then, only a masquerade; with Communism, it is only a revolution of intellectuals who have had success for the very first time in history. On the one hand, he draws upon the religious-sociological categories used to describe the Christian churches. On the other, however, he continually suggests that these political religions are not genuine religions, but only a poor imitation of them. Mr Koenen has already expressed his surprise and displeasure this morning: that that which he has seen here with Hitler's cult of the dead is a *mixtum compositum* that does not convince him. But this is not the decisive question.

The decisive question is the following: what do the faithful produce, what do their sacral functionaries produce, why do the faithful slip into a delirium?

It is not the question as to whether we ourselves lean back, bored, when we see this documentation. And I believe that this question is always posed this way only because the much more radical question lying behind it is not seen: 'were the crimes of the totalitarian movements possible only because they were motivated in terms of salvation history?' The answer to this question looks different if I regard the political religions merely as a masquerade of power-drives or of irrational constructions or strange compilations. Or are they religions *sui generis*? If the question concerning this central problem is taken to its conclusion, then I believe that we get them both together: the question of the freedom of value judgement and the question of religious-sociological analysis.

### **Hans Maier**

For the time being, it is perhaps useful to distinguish three different perspectives: the perspective of believers in the passive sense, the perspective of those who formulate – and sometimes even generate – the belief and the perspective of science, which regards both from the distance of decades. Repeatedly, we confuse these perspectives – completely unconsciously, of course.

### **Leonid Luks, Eichstätt**

I would like to note the ambivalence of the Bolshevistic attitude towards religion, which is perhaps even more strongly pronounced than that of the National Socialists. National Socialism understood itself as a culmination of German history; it came to power through a compromise with the old elites and this is why National Socialism retained many components of the old world in its new age. It hollowed them out; it corrupted them, but many members of the NSDAP were members of the Christian churches at the same time. Bolshevism entailed a total rejection of the old world, a total break with both the old world and the history of the old Russia. This is why it would be very surprising if this party, which embodies a total break with the past, were to then fall back upon liturgical, religious symbols – and that it was in fact as you have described it.

A second addition or correction concerns your thesis regarding the Bolshevik party as a disciplined machine. This was itself a postulate; it was the aspiration of the *Bolsheviki* during the Leninist period to transform this party into a disciplined machine, but they did not succeed in transforming this postulate into reality. Up until the mid-1920s, the Russian Communist Party was a debating party. In 1917, on the eve of the Bolshevik take-over of power, Sinoviev and Kamenev – Lenin's closest collaborators – revealed the Bolsheviks' plans for a state putsch. They by no means conducted themselves in a disciplined way, then. In 1918, during the negotiations over the Peace of Brest-Litovsk, about half of the party leaders left the party in



protest. Despite the fact that the civil war still dragged on into 1920, the party still debated in an extremely controversial way and it is no coincidence that the prohibition of factions came at the 10th Congress (March 1921). Only at the end of the 1920s was the party successfully transformed into a disciplined machine.

### **Klaus Vondung**

Mr Maier, you said at the end of our discussion this morning that the goal of this conference could perhaps at most be to raise the confusion to a higher level, so far as political religions are concerned. And this confusion is also manifested in the diverse understandings of ‘political religion’ as ‘inner-worldly religion’, ‘pseudo-religion’, ‘ersatz religion’. I would like to take this confusion somewhat further with different conceptualisations of ‘faith’ and ‘religious faith’ and to tack a further question onto these.

Mr Riegel, it occurred to me during your description of the inquisition tribunals that Western Marxist intellectuals used these trials as an opportunity to distance themselves from Stalin and the Soviet Union. They did so on the basis of the clearly exaggerated and all too voluntarily submitted confessions – but not all of them did. Ernst Bloch, for example, stated his suspicion that the accused declared their guilt with such great fervour and enthusiasm only in order to arouse suspicion in the bourgeois West and thence to bring the Soviet Union into discredit. Now, this is a phenomenon to which one would say at first that suppression, auto-suggestion and a *sacrificium intellectus* are involved here; yet it probably nonetheless has something to do with a kind of religious faith. Let us now attempt to observe in psychological terms individual persons who are believers in some way – whether in the context of National Socialism or of Communism. What kinds of facets exist here? I have already suggested the concepts of ‘faith’ and ‘religious faith’. Yet if we now attempt to take up such concepts as ‘suppression’, ‘auto-suggestion’ or *sacrificium intellectus* as well, might not a higher grade of terminological confusion result here? I wanted to ask you how this appears in the context of your area of research. Can one make any distinctions between the different faith-attitudes that were manifested by leaders, propagandists, and followers?

### **Klaus-Georg Riegel**

On the concept of the disciplinary machine, Mr Luks: you are of course entirely correct that I spoke of Lenin’s desires. I did not discuss whether or not these were fulfilled. Lenin’s reaction to the breaches of discipline by Sinoviev and Kamenev – and by many others as well of course – was revulsion, and he used a semantic of destruction even earlier too. Anyone who broke the discipline or even merely expressed criticism was an enemy of the faith.

‘Faith’ and ‘religious faith’, Mr Vondung, would be difficult to fit into my model of the institutional church and virtuoso religion. I now mention only the model of the community of virtuosos. Of course, the faith that is institutionalised in these virtuoso communities via the community of the religiously qualified is above all a faith. To what extent and how deep this belief extends to the inward disposition of the faithful is an empirical question. Through a multiplicity of disciplinary measures, all the virtuoso communities attempt to find out how deep the religious faith of their individual members goes. If a suspicion exists or a fictive, heretical offence is thought up, then it goes to the point of exclusion or physical liquidation. Every virtuoso community in fact continually attempts to set programmes of cleansing and purgation in place. This is done in order not only to maintain the faith at a certain level, but to intensify it. These are perfecting machines for the kind of religious faith that goes further and further. The problem is that wherever such purgation machines exist, they must also always have and invent candidates for the sacrifice in order to keep the disciplined machine running. If all were faithful – perfectly faithful – then the disciplinary machine would have to stop. With each god, that is, there is always also a devil. This is indispensable. If there were no devil, that would be really terrible. Durkheim once said, ‘the worst criminals are in the cloisters and with the nuns’. Even the smallest offences are punished. The entire history of scrupulousness is included here; the insinuation of religious unbelief also occurs on a scale of faith that is so fine that the outsider can scarcely register it. With the model of the virtuoso communities, therefore, we have cycle of religious faith that constantly feeds upon itself, but never goes far enough. This is a cybernetic cycle. These are very exciting stories, when nuns in the cloisters, for example, publicly incriminate themselves, confess what they have done. ‘I closed the prayer book too early’ or ‘I have confessed, but did not go far enough with the *contritio*. What can I do?’ There are infinitely interesting and exciting forms of construing religious faith and its measurement.

### **Hans Maier**

This leads of course into a wide field of discovery of the ego, formation of conscience, memory, self-control, self-discipline – a field in which our daily routine also belongs. Going back to the Roman morning call and the military division of the day, the Benedictine division of time has influenced the entire West. It is no accident that *ora et labora* is one of the mottos that connects the early history of Christianity to the industrial world – but this is only an aside.

At some point, one encounters differences of scientific approach in the observation of such things. I cannot yet justify it, but I have the impression that religious faith and the religious-phenomenological approaches are emphasised more strongly with the more diffuse, Protestant-German milieu.

In the realm of Communist religious faith, it becomes an affair of church-like discipline, of a controlled doctrine. The study of this then also requires other methods: those of ecclesiastical sociology in the narrower sense. The spiritual, sociological and historical background makes a very great difference in this case. In any case, Mr Riegel's presentation has made it very clear that entirely different approaches are required here.

### **Jürgen Gebhardt, Erlangen**

I would not like to go into the material analyses, which I find very convincing, but to follow up here where you, Mr Maier, have also begun – with the scientific approach. What became clear to me was that the concept of religion poses a large problem. Both this morning and now, it is clear that the models – so to speak – are of course Christianity, the Christian churches and the post-Reformation concept of religion (something like Feil and Smith). Before that, the concept of religion did not at all exist. The Greeks had no concept of religion whatsoever. And it becomes very difficult for Max Weber in his *Sociology of Religion*, when he presents the Chinese materials and must act as though there were religion there. Every sociologist of religion says that no concept of religion can be applied in Japan, and nobody there understands what one is actually talking about. Now, this appears to me to be a decisive problem. For his part, Voegelin attempted to begin with William James' concept of 'religious experience', which was very broad. It was, namely, a power that is beyond the human being, that is perceived as divine – whereby inner-worldly and extra-worldly actually play no role in religious-psychological terms. But then he distinguishes between the high religions and the inner-worldly religions in order to make it at all clear what the political religions are about. The problem of course remains: it is the concept of religion, which actually needs a clarification if it is to go beyond working the object into a connection with some modern phenomena. And because it is so problematic, the question is always: is this a genuine religion according to the model of Christianity? Is it superstition or ersatz religion or pseudo-religion, etc? But if one takes – as Voegelin did – the anthropologically meagre formula of William James, then it is genuine religiosity.

A further point bound up with it is the concept of secularisation. For someone who wrote about politics and eschatology 30 years ago – to general astonishment: what does that have to do with political science? – this is of course all very good news. But the problem remains: as long as I believe that something like secularisation would have occurred – and specifically, more than only that the Christian churches have lost their position – I must of course say that totalitarianism does not involve genuine religiosity or religion. Now, we have come so far today that the secularisation concept has become very problematic. The most recent investigations say that one can speak of secularisation for Europe at most. European social science has

taken the secularisation concept everywhere, even though there is no secularisation in Eastern Asia, no secularisation in North America, no secularisation in Latin America and also none in Africa. The question is: was secularisation in Europe? Or is it not that this kind of inner-worldly religiosity is just a modern form of religiosity in Europe comparable to the other religiosities? If one allows oneself to enter into this question, then the matter looks entirely different from how it does if one always says: but Marxism is not religious, Marx is not a religious thinker because he was against the Christian religion. The National Socialists are pagans by comparison.

If one places these extraordinarily valuable investigations in a somewhat different scientific perspective, then these political religions or drafts of inner-worldly religious order are the form in which religiosity expresses itself in modern Europe – a form to be compared with others. Then, one would avoid speaking of religion with all its connotations; one would speak instead of one conception of religio-political order among others. But so long as one holds fast to this entirely specific early-modern concept of religion, then one will always encounter theoretical difficulties. One should concentrate these discussions on the concept of religion and on the following question: has secularisation occurred, or is secularisation merely an attempt to interpret certain deep-going politico-cultural transitions?

### **Hans Maier**

This is of course a fascinating perspective. One could take it even further and say: there is not religion and secularisation, but only religion and the transformation of religion into inner-worldly religion. This would also explain to me the extreme religious fervour of colleagues known to be atheists – a fervour under which I have in fact suffered for many years.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsh**

I would like first to address the theme of Mr Riegel's presentation and then to return to the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.

Mr Riegel, I liked your lecture very much – above all, your outstanding distinction between institutional religion and virtuoso religion. To be sure, I would have inhibitions about applying the concept of religion to the founding phase – to Marx, that is. Is it not better to assume at the beginning that the so-called theory of Karl Marx possesses the character of an ersatz religion? For Marx does not retain the difference between this world and the next in his argumentation. The problem is then shifted in the direction of asking whether Karl Marx – despite all criticism of religion of any kind – still depends upon religious assumptions. This can perhaps be illuminated if one takes the Hegelian category of the negation of the negation as one's aid. Ultimately, Marx accepts the categories of the Hegelian dialectic; and the negation of the negation means not only to negate and

move one step higher, but also to preserve. And with Hegel, the religious reference is unmistakable: the becoming of God as Spirit in history. To have a poor concept of God also means to have a poor state, poor government and poor laws. The state is God's path through the world. Etc. In certain respects, Marx remains dependent upon this view. Marx replaces the god who becomes in history with the human species; or he seeks, as Heinrich Heine poeticises, to 'establish the heavenly kingdom here on earth already'. Ernst Bloch states: '*Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem*, Joachim's kingdom is on the rise in the Soviet Union' – thus does he state it in *Prinzip Hoffnung*. The secularisation consists in the replacement or transposition of God's kingdom in the Beyond to the earthly world.

Now I would like to return to National Socialism as a political religion. At this point, I would like to reduce it to answering the question as to whether – according to the self-understandings of Alfred Rosenberg and Adolf Hitler – a consciousness of collective identity implies faith in a supernatural conflict between God and Satan. With Hitler, God becomes an attribute of the Aryan race, insofar as only the Aryan is the 'highest imagine of the Lord'. Only the Aryan, for example, contains the 'divine spark of genius' (Hitler, *Mein Kampf*). For his part, Rosenberg believes in the 'God-equality' of the soul of the Nordic race (Rosenberg, *Mythus*). This divinisation of the German collectivity according to which the divine potential of the German nation should be actualised corresponds to something that I myself first noticed relatively late: evil, which is something that has been repressed in modernity. More precisely, it corresponds to the belief in the incarnation of evil. The National Socialists thematise evil, they infuse it with content and call it the 'Jew'. Because an otherworldly, all-powerful God (*Mein Kampf*) or a world of the Beyond (*Mythus*: 'towards God' and 'from God') is referred to here, a strictly inner-worldly form of political religion is not present in my opinion.

## **Hans Maier**

But with National Socialism, it is the case that this God rules, certainly, but He does not reign. The natural law reigns and it reigns with all harshness; and to this extent, I still believe that one cannot dismiss this formula as a rhetorical one. The actual ideology, the core of the ideology, then lies in this natural law – one that demands attention to racial differences, and whoever does not do this succumbs as a nation, etc. This is the hard core. The God is in fact deistic, or as one likes to say, present as a kind of mythological understanding within the majority of the population, which believes in God.

## **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

For Hitler, there is no contradiction between God and nature, between the 'will of the eternal creator' (*Mein Kampf*) and the 'will of nature' (*Mein Kampf*) – as he states it. In assessing the problem, I would emphasise the predicate that the 'Aryan' receives. The superiority of the 'Aryan' is not

derived from a Social Darwinist pattern of perception, but from speculations about origins (divine core, cultural creator). And this, if you like, is very clever – because nothing can refute it.

### **Hans Mommsen**

You construct an edifice of ideas that never at all existed in National Socialism as a whole. You can say only: ‘for Hitler in *Mein Kampf* and for Rosenberg in *Mythus*’, but please do not construct an intellectual system. And with Hitler too: you are already trying to make an intellectual out of him, and that is a mistake.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Mr Mommsen, I can prove this precisely to you. On page 421 it stands written: the Aryan is ‘the highest image of the Lord’. Whoever lays a ‘hand’ on him commits a crime ‘against the good Creator’. With the ‘dying out’ of the Aryan, the ‘dark veil of a cultureless era’ would ‘once again descend upon the globe’ (compare page 318).

### **Hans Mommsen**

I doubt only that he intended by that everything you think he did.

### **Mathias Behrens**

It seems to me, very specifically in terms of intellectual history, that the modern principle of *verum factum* looms in the background here. Vico, for example, presented this principle: the principle that human subjectivity has the power to sketch the truth, that the subject is therefore no longer the receptive aspect in discovering truth. This philosophical theory that developed throughout the course of modernity then ultimately found its tragic, practical expression in the totalitarian systems.

With reference to the concept of political religions, it seems to me that your definition of religion no longer understands Marxism and National Socialism sufficiently in terms of their context in intellectual history. To this end, it is necessary to emphasize the relation of both phenomena to the Christian religion. This is why a post-modern concept of religion like the one you, Professor Gebhardt, have suggested, is not capable of doing justice to the actual nature of the phenomena, which clearly stand in a Western, Christian context.

### **Jürgen Gebhardt**

It is always embarrassing to refer to one’s own publications. But you can look up the thing about the particular intellectual-historical context here.

This does not yet solve the scientific problem with the concept of religion. Otherwise, you must continually pose the following question: in a society that is assumed or claimed to be secularised, should that which arises here be called religious or not? If this is true, then one would have logically to say: it is not a religion. You run into difficulties here.

### **Dietmar Klenke, Münster**

I have a minor question for you, Mr Riegel. It would interest me to know to what extent the experiences of war contributed to the spread of expectations of inner-worldly salvation that were present in Marxism and Leninism. I find this question so interesting because it might yield exciting points of comparison for German history. In Germany, too, the socialistic workers' movement displays a certain radicalisation after the First World War. Look, for example, at the worker-singers – where social democrats and Communists collaborated; here, we discover how much the value of violence was enhanced to point of assuming the status of a salvation-bringing instance in the post-war Weimar era. We encounter the characteristic dialectic three-step of capitalist crisis, catastrophe of war and violent revolutionary salvation in the great choral work of 1929, *Kreuzzug der Maschine*. Here, even the world war is positively trans-valuated: specifically, to the status of a necessary stage of transition on the way to salvation-bringing future. It would interest me to know to what extent the experiences of war had produced an eschatological radicalisation on the Russian side too. Did such aspects possibly help Leninism gain its power to break through into world history in the first place?

### **Klaus-Georg Riegel**

I would argue thus: there are two forms of the expectation of salvation. The one is that of the Leninist virtuoso religion, which then commingled in a particular historical situation, with the expectations of salvation of the Russian population, the peasant population. Yet the two signified something different, even if the revolutionary intelligentsia so emphatically represented the expectation of salvation during the Communism of the war era – think of Blok with his poems.

The expectation of salvation of the Russian soldier on the front is a different expectation of salvation from that of Lenin. The possibility that such a virtuoso religion attained significance at all comes only through the war. By chance, two streams of salvation with different intentions met. The Leninists knew which salvation they represented, but the rank and file soldiers did not yet know it – only later. The rebels in Kronstadt say it with absolute clarity: after four years, what has happened? We wanted something completely different.

And you can trace the same thing with the Chinese Revolution. Here too, a war destroyed the powers of the old, traditional powers. The peasant

population then attributed a soteriological significance to Mao, who transposed this significance from the national plane into the trans-national, international, Marxist-Leninist doctrine of salvation. Here too, two currents of salvation merged; they functioned as one stream of salvation for a time and then diverged again.

The situation of war is always decisive and not solely for the attractiveness of the religion. The situation of war created the essential prerequisite that the old, traditional ordering powers could no longer act as a bulwark. In this historically unique situation, the war was the decisive prerequisite for such a thing having been possible at all. Otherwise, Lenin would have died in Zurich some day, not in Moscow.



## 8 Communist faith and world-explanatory doctrine

### A philosophical analysis

*Peter Ehlen*

#### The longing for salvation in the work of Marx

Eric Voegelin's study, *Die politischen Religionen*, appeared in 1938. Devoted primarily to National Socialism, the work also mentions in passing that political religiosity can also be found in the thought of Marx.<sup>1</sup> Soon after the end of the war, Jacob Taubes furnished the proof that Marx was an outstanding representative of the philosophical eschatology of Western civilisation.<sup>2</sup> Shortly afterward, Karl Löwith's book, *Meaning in History*, emphatically underscored the claim of Marxist thought to point out a path to 'salvation'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the question concerning the religious elements in Marx's instruction manual for Communism was extensively tabooed during the boom of neo-Marxism in Western Europe.<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Marx himself was very well aware that the 'human emancipation' at which he aimed went considerably beyond the economic and political improvement of the situation of those who had hitherto been exploited. Yet to inquire as to the religious motives of his emancipatory goals seemed to him to be completely mistaken. Was not, after all, the overcoming of 'all relations of servitude' – the cause he defended – not to be achieved entirely as a matter of course solely through earthly powers in this world?<sup>5</sup>

Marx scarcely reflected upon his own rootedness in Judaism, nor did he recognise its significance as a possible source of inspiration for his striving for emancipation. Beyond this, it is by no means foreign to Jewish thought to expect the messianic kingdom as an earthly kingdom that includes the social and political dimension.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, the religious character of a longing for salvation arising from the Jewish inheritance is all the more easily overlooked.

Finally, it seemed to him that Hegel had philosophically guaranteed the conviction that the human spirit works its way up in history to a free identity with the necessity of reason; nor did he revise this conviction after he had renounced the idealistic premises of Hegel's philosophy either. In order to turn Hegel from his head onto his feet, Marx believed that it suffices to understand 'labour' – the secret of Hegel's philosophy – in an objective and

sensory sense.<sup>7</sup> Thus did the motif of the Christian faith in salvation – a faith that was also influential to a large extent in the Hegelian dialectic – continue to remain vital, even if was not recognised as such.

An experience that might cause the religious motif to enter into one's own interpretation of the world is the 'basic sense of creaturely abandonment',<sup>8</sup> an experience to which Voegelin had already referred as a possible source of political religiosity. In Marx's literary efforts as a student, we find the experiences of helplessness and loneliness to be dominant motifs; his awareness of existential abandonment might have been intensified even further through his empathetic observation of the social misery that gave rise to his solidarity with the rebellion of the dispossessed.<sup>9</sup>

The example of Moses Hess – a Jew like Karl Marx and one having had no little influence upon the latter – demonstrates just how strong religious motifs were during the early period of the Communist movement.<sup>10</sup> In 1837, Hess was one of the first to represent socialist ideas in Germany, to demand a community of goods and the elimination of both money and the right of inheritance.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, he is clearly aware that it cannot suffice for the establishment of a just social order to distribute goods and money afresh; the human life as a whole would have to be renewed as well. Its promise of such renewal attests to the 'saving power' of socialism, he wrote in 1844 – at the same time that Marx demanded the liberation from 'servitude' of every kind.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in 1843, Hess too used the concept of Communism.<sup>13</sup> Already in 1835 and 1836, as he was working on his historico-philosophical work, *Die Heilige Geschichte der Menschheit*, he noted in his diary that he felt himself called 'to announce the work of the Holy Spirit' and, as the apostle John had once done, 'to bear witness to the light' that shines in the darkness. If previously, history had been the work of God with the human being, so must the human being now – in the third and last phase of historical development – transform his history into a 'salvation history' and press onward to 'salvation'. Hess summarises his view as follows: 'Only the human being is both the saved and the saviour.'<sup>14</sup> His eschatological understanding of history – the decisive reason for his confidence – is stated clearly: all prior history is coming to an end; it merges with 'sacred history' and ends with salvation.

An eschatological mood similar to the one we encounter in the young Moses Hess is expressed in the correspondence of the young Karl Marx with Arnold Ruge. If Hess had stated that we live 'current in a time analogous to the Flood of water and the nations',<sup>15</sup> so does Karl Marx write in May of 1843 – on the occasion of the imminent publication of his programmatic essays – of the 'destiny' towards which the present 'despotism' heads. 'Let the dead bury and mourn their dead. On the contrary to this, it is enviable to be one of the first who will enter living into the new life. This shall be our lot.' And he expresses his conviction that 'all thinking and all suffering human beings' agree with him that the social order of his time, without understanding it, 'enlists recruits for the service of the new humanity daily'.

Marx concludes his letter of May 1843 thus: ‘the longer the events leave time for the thinking portion of humanity to reflect on it and the suffering to collectivise, the more fully will the product that bears the present in its lap emerge in the world’.<sup>16</sup>

But, with Karl Marx, the outrage against the earthly despots had been preceded by the outrage against a God that seemed to him – at the latest after the beginning of his study years – an overly powerful, arbitrary god, one whose mere existence humiliates the human being. In the Prometheus declaration formulated at the end of his dissertation, the expression of this outrage flares up like a torch. His outrage is aimed at the ‘heavenly’ and the ‘earthly gods’ equally; neither of these wants to acknowledge the self-determining, creative reason of the individual as ‘supreme divinity’. His discussions with the young Hegelians about the Bible exegete, Bruno Bauer, had shown him that the humiliation of self-consciousness is documented by the faith in God; further, such humiliation is closely coupled with the rule of the ‘earthly gods’ who treat their subjects as their private property.

In general outline, key aspects of Marx’s conception of history were already clear in his correspondence with Ruge. History itself, as a consequence of its own internal dynamic, will bring forth a new form of life for all human beings. Human beings are required to help bring about this dynamic. History will sweep over those who do not understand the demands of the day; they will have to serve it as blindly executive organs. ‘We show it [the world] only why it really fights; the consciousness of it is a thing that it *must* learn, even if it does not want to.’<sup>17</sup> The self-certainty with which Marx approaches the ‘world’ is almost unsurpassable; he knows himself to be the ‘organ’ of the world-spirit.

Of great significance to understanding Marx’s concept of the new society is his programmatic essay, ‘On the Jewish Question’, written in the autumn of 1843. Here, he develops the concept of ‘human emancipation’ as opposed to merely ‘political emancipation’.

Marx’s question asks: does the strict division of religion and state – the achievement of political emancipation in a completely secularised state, therefore – already mark ‘human emancipation?’ His answer is clear: to speak of ‘human emancipation’ is meaningless as long as religious consciousness – even if only in private life – is still present. Its presence is the unmistakable indice for the continuing existence of the alienation of one’s own species being. What is Marx’s conclusion? Because religion can still thrive as a private affair in a politically emancipated state, it follows that ‘the *political* emancipation from religion [is] not the accomplished, uncontradictory emancipation from religion’. ‘Political emancipation’, therefore, is also ‘not the accomplished, uncontradictory path of *human* emancipation’.<sup>18</sup>

In answering the question as to how religiosity – which can also flourish under the conditions of a secularised state – should be explained, Marx takes an essential step beyond the one Feuerbach takes in his *Das Wesen des Christentums*. The ‘lack’ that is manifested by the existence of religion can

be traced back to the very existence of the state. Here, for Marx, is laid bare the genuine ground of religiosity: the state itself – the secularised state too – brings forth religion. For, just as religion is ‘the acknowledgement of the human being by a detour’, so did political life in the states of his era also admit only a *mediated* human existence.

In a sense even deeper than it is for Thomas Hobbes, the state is for Marx a *mortal god*. It is the usurper created by the human being himself, one that robs its creator of his ‘species being’ and thereby forces him to lead a double life. On the one hand, there is life as a ‘*citoyen*’ in an imagined equality of all before the same law; and on the other, there is life as ‘bourgeois’ for which the differences of property are decisive. Taken together – ‘a heavenly life and an earthly one’. In both political and religious life, the human being is forced to achieve his own reality as a communal being by a ‘detour’ – yet without being able to attain this goal. He stops with the illusory acquisition of a species generality that has been transposed upon the state and God and become ‘unreal’ there. The – false – consciousness of such acquisition evinces the same formal structure with both God and the state; it is religious. In the secularised – thus atheistic – state too, therefore, religion is present in all areas of life because the existence of the state fulfils the essential characteristic of religion. It too acknowledges the human being only ‘by a detour’.

Marx concedes that the secularisation attained through political emancipation has marked ‘a great progress’. Yet it is ‘not the final form of human emancipation in general’, only the ‘final form of human emancipation *within* the order of the world to this point’.<sup>19</sup> In order to attain a true human life, it is necessary to leave the ‘order of the world to this point’.

True humanity is realised once the human being has ceased to alienate his individual powers from himself in the forms of religion or of the political state. He has ‘recognised and organised them as his *social* powers’ instead – in other words, where ‘the conflict of the individual sensory existence’ is ‘negated by the human being’s existence as a species’.<sup>20</sup>

Very soon, Marx recognises that the power through which the producer alienates his species powers – in particular, his creative power – is neither the state nor God but private property, the product yielded by alienated labour. Consequently, private property must be abolished – and above all, the private possession of labour – in order to overcome the helplessness of the species powers and religious alienation once and for all along with it. The fundamental alienation of labour is the condition of all other forms of alienation – or so Marx believed. This insight is said to provide the possibility of determining, with scientific certainty, the Archimedean point upon which the ‘present world order’ hangs.

Which force will fulfil the hope for a renewal of the human being in terms of his creative social productive power – a power in which Marx saw the ‘essence’ of the human being? It is in the answer Marx that provides to this question that the genuine peculiarity of his hope for salvation and, with that, his ‘faith’, is first revealed.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, there is a very informative interpretation of *history* – with history understood in the sense of a salvation process leading through the depth of death up to the heights of resurrection and life. '[T]he human being', it states, 'would have to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he can give birth, out of himself, to his inner riches'.<sup>21</sup> The total loss of one's own creative nature appears to be a 'must' in terms of salvation history. From this loss will issue – with dialectical necessity – the elevation to a 'totally developed individual'.<sup>22</sup> This is analogous to the Christian belief in the saving power of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

Faith in the restorative powers of history is by no means restricted to the 'young' Marx. The expectation of liberation and a salvation understanding the human being in his deepest 'reality' pervades the first volume of *Das Kapital*, which was published in 1867. It also pervades the essays that were written on the occasion of the Paris Commune and the political testament of 1875. In the latter, he conspiratorially reminds the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany that had just been founded in Gotha that, for all its pragmatism, it must not lose sight of the ultimate goal of Communism: the development of individuals 'in all respects'.<sup>23</sup> In the *Pariser Manuskripten*, in the manuscripts of *Das Kapital* and in *Theories über den Mehrwert*, we find similar invocations of the 'must', the 'kenosis' that will justify the salvation. For example 'it *must*, through this contradictory form' in which the human subject is devaluated to an object, 'be undergone, just as the human being *must* first define himself as a power that is independent of the religious one'. 'Historically regarded', this is a 'necessary point of transition'.<sup>24</sup> The goal of being saved from determination by others of any sort remains the same: the new creation headed towards the 'total human being',<sup>25</sup> the 'realm of freedom' in which 'the absolute development of his creative capacities' has become 'a goal in itself'. In this condition, the social human being is united with nature and his own history; 'producing his totality', he 'does not seek to remain something that has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming'.<sup>26</sup>

Under Marx's assumption, the social coexistence of the liberated human being cannot be expected to be the result of a *moral* conversion. For, according to his materialistic understanding of history, individuals' moral powers – before they are liberated – are corrupted in a much more lasting way than they are according to the Christian doctrine of original sin. The Christian theology holds a conversion of the heart through the help of divine grace – and thereby the attainment of full humanity – to be fundamentally possible at any time. Yet according to Marx's understanding of history, the members of the bourgeois and of all prior classes are not even able to recognise their *conditio humana* in a way that is commensurate with reality. This they are unable to do because such recognition would include the insight into the historically limited nature of the rule of their class. Only the proletariat is privileged with an historical self-knowledge that is true to

reality; the theory produced by members of the other classes is ideology, *false consciousness*. Yet the very emergence of the proletariat and its revolutionary, salvation-creating act requires the fulfilment of certain specific historical prerequisites. The Communist expectation of salvation lies at the mercy of linear time in a way that Christian salvation, the *kairos* of which is beyond time, transcends. As soon as the proletariat has entered its *kairos* – as soon as the historical conditions of its existence have matured, therefore – its ‘goal and historical action [are also] obvious, irrevocably prefigured’. The proletariat is then required to do ‘that which, in accordance with its being, it will be historically compelled to do’.<sup>27</sup>

But upon what is the absolute necessity of Communism, the culmination of human emancipation, based? Marx believed he had found the answer in Feuerbach’s sensualist philosophy, one that spares him from taking recourse to a saving God and the free conversion of the human heart. Feuerbach’s philosophy told him that the human being exists in a fundamental dialectic unity with the world of sensory objects and that it itself changes with alterations in this world of objects. Thus can the collapse of the production of goods and the necessary consequence of such collapse – the abolition of private property – also radically changing the human being understood as a sensory being that relates to objects.

If the inexorability of the new world order had in fact been proven in the sense of an ‘iron necessity’, the unpredictability of freedom would have had to be excluded entirely. Marx did not want to go this far. For he saw very well that the objective side, the material powers of production, always develop in dialectic relation to the creative human power of production. Yet creative innovations presuppose free decisions. Marx did not solve the problem as to *how* necessity should be reconciled with freedom. His successors withdrew to the answer stating that necessity means so much as compulsion, that the laws of the production of wares and the competition of actors will therefore relentlessly *compel* the abolition of private property.

That Marx based the new interpersonal relations on the necessity of natural law rather than on a *free* interpersonal gift probably also has to do with his personal life-conduct. A gift that is free and can therefore be refused might have seemed to him to be a grace that humiliates the receiver.<sup>28</sup> In his *Manuskripten*, he offers the following:

a *being* considers itself to be independent only when it stands on its own feet, and it stands on its own feet only when it has itself to thank for its *existence*. A human being that lives from the good graces of another regards himself as a dependent being. Yet I live entirely through the grace of another,

it is said with regard to God as the Creator,

if He, beyond that, has *created my life*, if He is the *source* of my life.<sup>29</sup>

To dependence upon the free gift of another, Marx opposes ‘the being-through-onself of nature and of the human being’, life as ‘one’s own creation’, ‘birth through onself’.<sup>30</sup>

But what if history does not confirm the expectation? What if the desired renewal of society does not materialise? In his unpublished ‘rough drafts’ of *Das Kapital* written at the end of the 1850s, there can be found an admission that scarcely conceals his resignation: ‘The requirement can be satisfied solely under the conditions for which it can no longer be made.’<sup>31</sup> But this also means that, under the conditions of bourgeois society, all proofs that would attempt to demonstrate the necessary fulfilment of this requirement must fail. The human being cannot attain this new level of existential quality through his own powers, not even through his power of thought; much more must he let the historical dialectic throw him into it. Yet this dynamic can no longer be established with scientific sobriety. With the cry with which Marx concludes the first volume of his *Das Kapital* – the capitalistic mode of production ‘must be destroyed, it is destroyed’<sup>32</sup> – he skips over the scientifically deficient result of his analysis and lands at his hope of salvation.

The simplistic account of history mocked the expectation of salvation. In this despairing situation, as Friedrich Engels conceded in his direct and open way, nothing remained but ‘to correct the logic’ of the conflicting facts, to strip them of their wilful ‘historically coincidental nature’. This had to be done in order to be able to understand history – against all hope – as aiming towards the rise of Communism after all.<sup>33</sup>

Marx had begun his work with a declaration of his belief in the Titan, Prometheus, who revolted against the order of the gods. But who is the Prometheus who establishes the new ‘world order’ in the place of the former one? Marx had seen the dialectic of history to be a predominantly creative power. Yet the subject of this dialectic is not the self-determining self-consciousness – neither the individual self-consciousness nor that of all humanity. The *individual* is alienated from himself; not even what the individual *proletarian* thinks can be decisive.<sup>34</sup> For its part, *humanity* gains the capacity to govern itself rationally in the new ‘world order’ only after it has suffered the ‘the quintessence of injustice’ with the proletariat.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Marx’s iron historical necessity must be conceived as an inanimate natural necessity; it brought the human being forth as a consciously acting productive power and will ultimately attain its ‘true resurrection’ in the self-regulating Communist society.<sup>36</sup> But whence does nature get the strength for this resurrection? Marx did not answer this question. Friedrich Engels, who understood that it must be answered, provided an answer in his ‘Anti-Dühring’ – stolidly and in the style of the *Weltanschauung* philosophy of the late nineteenth century. The laws of the *dialectic* themselves are Prometheus,<sup>37</sup> the laws that are in both the molecules of inanimate matter and the life of the individual soul; they are the omnipresent creative, quasi-divine principle, the ‘*deus in materia*’ that governs the meaningless ‘eternal circulation’<sup>38</sup> of resurrection and death.

As our result is to be recorded the following: (1) Marx expected from Communism a *salvation* and renewal that would overcome the hitherto corrupted path of human existence. (2) Insofar as such an expectation would be 'utopian', the salvation is not the result of a free moral conversion. (3) The victorious saving power that will overcome all resistance rests with the contradictions of history. Once these have matured, they will make the renewal necessary. (4) In order to make the rise of Communism completely independent from the unpredictability of free decision, Engels postulates a dialectic of nature that precedes the dialectic of history.

### **The peculiarity of 'faith' in Marx's concept of Communism**

This result permits us to determine the peculiarity of the Communist expectation of salvation more closely. In what sense can it be characterised as 'faith?' Because it involves an expectation of salvation, this question arises especially when considering its comparability with the Christian religious faith.

We assume that, in terms of its formal structure, faith is a special mode of knowledge. Specifically, it is a kind based upon the information of knowledge that *another* has of a reality. The elements of faith are the communicated knowledge, as the content of faith, and the one whose communication is believed because he is held to be credible. The formal reason for the acceptance of the communicated knowledge does not lie in one's own insight, but in the *trustworthiness* of the one doing the communicating. This attests to the truth of the thing being communicated. For its acceptance – for the faith, therefore – the element of trusting *attentiveness* to the primary knower is essential.

Often, 'faith' is also understood in the sense of unwavering *hope*. Of a sick person who hopes for his convalescence, it is said: he believes firmly that he will become healthy again. Thus is it said in the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Hebrews 11: 1). In the place of the communicator that bears witness to the truth of the faith-content, there is the guarantor who ensures the fulfilment of hope. But here too, faith is directed at something that is 'true'; here too, *trust* is an essential aspect in order to be able meaningfully to speak of faith. With faith in the re-establishment of health, trust can be directed at the power of nature or at the goodness of God, which will secure that which is longed for. A faith that takes no account of the trustworthiness of the witness or the guarantor would be blind faith.

That there is a faith-content in Marx's expectation of salvation, a *fides quae*, is unmistakable. But how do things stand with the second element, with the acceptance of that which is believed in terms of attention to the communicator or the guarantor of faith, the *fides qua*?

The different nature of the Communist faith from the Christian religious one is manifest not only in the content – this is obvious – but in the



acceptance of the faith too. With the Christian faith, the faith-content cannot be accepted without a personal attentiveness towards the one who vouches for that which is believed. Here, the faith-content is not a fact that depends upon the personal quality of the one who vouches for it – of the God who reveals himself. Rather, it is primarily this quality itself. In a double respect, with respect to both its faith-content and its act of faith, the Christian faith is defined by the trust that is shown to a person. Trust lives from the certainty that it is accepted and is answered in turn with attentiveness. Yet this is fundamentally a *free* occurrence. Freedom as an inalienable, personal element of faith is the source of its peculiar certainty, a certainty that is distinct from all logical (or other type) of inevitability. In the real experience of attentiveness, faith is more unshakable than all certainty based upon logical proof. Yet it is also more open to contest by reflective scrutiny insofar as it cannot call upon scientifically demonstrable data.

By virtue of his trust in nature (or in God), the faith the sick person has in the re-establishment of his health is also distinct from the certainty of a logical or mechanical necessity. Nature is presupposed to be a freely guaranteeing power and thus always tends to be either demonised or divinised.

With Marxism, Marx does not present himself as a witness of faith who claims something like a knowledge that should be believed. In accordance with his scientific claim, it is an objective given – history in its dialectically contradictory course – that guarantees the certainty of salvation. Just as little as Communism depends upon the free, moral act of the human being, so is it by no means the free gift of history. In Marx's view, history is not an instance that could grant or withhold, and this holds even more for Engel's 'dialectic of nature'. With the originators of the Communist 'faith' in the renewal of the human being, we observe an attempt to replace the free gift with a scientifically demonstrable 'iron necessity'. By eradicating freedom, they attempt to give the certainty a new quality. Yet through this manipulation, the life-blood of faith has been drained and it becomes a bastard. The desired salvation of the *entire* human being – a salvation that includes the salvation of his freedom – is to be achieved without freedom. Because such salvation is not based upon freedom, it seems to be possible to capture its 'scientific' character. But this possibility is illusory. The claim to 'scientific' certainty cannot be redeemed because freedom cannot be abolished.

### **The altered structure of 'faith' in Marxism-Leninism**

As a supplement, we will cast a glance at Lenin, the representative for the intention of faith for what would later become Marxism-Leninism. Although Lenin's language is more radical than that of Marx, his thought is far less radical: he contents himself with the negation of the bourgeois in favour of a socialist-proletarian society. Although he did have access to Marx's descriptions of it, that which Marx intended with his goal of 'human emancipation' remained closed off to him. Thus, although both speak of

socialism-communism, they mean different things by it. If for Marx, Communism was a synonym for the permanently attained 'self-determination' of the social human being, so was it the following for Lenin: after the civil war had pushed the country into misery, 'Communism = Soviet power plus electrification of the entire country'.<sup>39</sup>

Only on a superficial level did his essay of 1902, *What Is To Be Done?* revolve around the 'organisational question'. At its core, it marked the decisive step that was to lead Lenin increasingly further away from the Marxian sketch. Henceforth, the proletariat, empowered by history, would no longer be the class that would accomplish the liberation of humanity. Regarded as being in the age of minority, the proletariat is placed under the guardianship of a 'party of a new type' and its elite leadership. Neither in political practice nor in his theoretical reflections did Lenin ever tolerate any doubts about it that he alone, Vladimir I. Lenin, was capable of determining the party's course validly – in his language, this meant 'objectively'. His own political will sought the destruction of the previous social order; for him, this was always the primary given and it formed his image of the world. The philosophy that takes shape in his thought – which is epistemology and interpretation of the world in one – is an instrument of his will to change the world. Although laid out already in Marx's concept, the identification of a subjective will to power with the objectivity of the development of the world gains unique expression here. In all his writings on this subject, especially in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1908) and in the explanations of the dialectic that were later published under the title *Philosophical Volumes*, he tirelessly condemned all 'subjectivism' and vigorously demanded that his political and philosophical opponents acknowledge 'objective' reality. Lenin solved the epistemological problem as to what should be defined as objective very simply: he alone, nobody else, recognises the given as it is 'objectively'. He can portray his politics as an execution of the objective dialectic of reality because the reality of the world gains 'objective' form solely in his judgement. An example of this self-estimation, one for which Lenin feels himself justified 'objectively' to determine not only the goals of politics, but the ultimate standards of human orientations towards the world as well, is provided by his speech of 2 October 1920 at the Third All-Russian Congress of the Communist Youth Alliance. The rhetorical question was: 'is there a Communist morality?' 'Of course there is one', the answer went,

We say that our morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of the proletarian class-struggle. ... Morality is that which serves the destruction of the old, exploitative society and the joining together of all workers around the proletariat, which constructs a new, the communist, society.<sup>40</sup>

According to the premises of Leninist theory and practice, there is no doubt as to who was justified to declare what served the class struggle – thus, who

was to decide what would hold as ‘good’ and what as ‘evil’ without consciously raising a metaphysical claim that would have gone beyond the exercise of power.<sup>41</sup> Certainly, the ‘new’ society is still characterised as a Communist one and the goal of creating a new human being through it remains. During his forced period of leisure preceding the seizure of power, Lenin again sketched the new type desired in an essay entitled *State and Revolution* (1917). In the Communist society, the essay stated, the state would die and the wares produced would be distributed according to the needs of each. Yet to point the way to this goal would be exclusively a matter for the leader and his party. The scrupulous considerations as to whether terrorism means might perhaps surreptitiously pervert the human-friendly goal – considerations that plagued Georg Lukács, who served in the Ministry of Education in the Hungarian Soviet Republic<sup>42</sup> – were foreign to Lenin. In 1917, he authoritatively established it: in the party, ‘we believe to see the reason, the honour and the conscience of our epoch’.<sup>43</sup> (In 1921, Lukács seized upon this sentence in agreement!<sup>44</sup>) Nonetheless, Lenin shrank from revealing himself as the ‘superman’ who is both legislator and granter of meaning in place of the dead God. The subjective will to power is still disguised in the garb of an ‘objective’ global movement.<sup>45</sup>

With his claim to be the sole and infallible mouthpiece of the party, and even more through his presumption to be the interpreter of the final instance of the objective world-movement, Lenin redefined the ground upon which the Communist renewal would be based. Henceforth, it would be the will of the leader. The will of the leader demands a kind of submission for which trust is no longer an integral aspect. Power understands itself as absolute power and knows to lend itself a quasi-numinous appearance. Although it demands reverence, fear suffices. The adherents are to surrender their wills and conform them to that of the leader, who represents the objective law of the world; such subjection is supposed to occur as *surrender* and as *self-sacrifice*. The quasi-religious forms that accompany the self-apotheosis of the leader aim to make the subjection total. The individual who is deprived of the right of decision can find himself *securely* within the objective whole and can know that he has been enlisted by it. As experience teaches, moreover, he can also derive satisfaction from his self-surrender. The ‘faith’ that is demanded by the leader and offered to him is perverted in its essence by the self-abandonment of the ‘faithful’ that is connected with it.

With respect to the expectation of human social existence that was cultivated by Marx and Lenin, therefore, we can speak of ‘faith’ only in a very restricted sense. Certainly, the universality of the claim made in Marx’s understanding of history – the claim to have understood history in its goal of the ‘total’ social emancipation of the human being – bears religious features and can be characterised as an expectation of salvation. The historical dialectic that Marx invokes for the justification of this claim is withdrawn from testable insight; it must be accepted as an object of faith. On the other hand, the *freely* given *trust* that is essential to religious faith is lacking. Not

only is the dynamic of history said to have been scientifically proven (although this claim cannot of course be redeemed); the leader's monopoly on interpretation is established as absolute. Trust is even excluded from it.

### Notes

- 1 E. Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Vienna, 1938).
- 2 J. Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Berne, 1947). Published again with an appendix in Munich, 1991.
- 3 K. Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949). Löwith had already drawn attention to the universal claim of the Marxist view in *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (1939).
- 4 A noteworthy exception is presented by Ernst Bloch: allusions can be found already in *Prinzip Hoffnung*, then more clearly in *Subjekt-Objekt* (Frankfurt, 1962). In *Atheismus im Christentum* (Frankfurt, 1968), 349, Bloch reminds us that 'without previous preoccupation with religion and the critique of religion that accompanies it, Marx's theory of alienation and critique of goods would hardly have arisen'.
- 5 Universal human emancipation, he noted in 1844, 'is entailed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers ... because all human servitude is involved in the relations of the worker to production and all relations of servitude are only modifications and consequences of this relation'. K. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, Marx-Engels-Werke* (henceforth *MEW*), Supplementary Volume I, 521.
- 6 Compare Gerschom Scholem, *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt, 1970), 121ff., 130ff., 141 f. Further, H. Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Berlin, 1929), 361.
- 7 Compare Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, MEW* Supplementary Volume I, 574ff.
- 8 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen*, op. cit., 16, 60.
- 9 Compare here too H. Monz, 'Der Waldprozeß der Mark Thafang als Grundlage für Karl Marx' Kritik an den Debatten um das Holzdiebstahls-gesetz', *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 3 (1977), edited by the Administration of the Provincial Archives of Rheinland-Pfalz.
- 10 On Moses Hess, compare among others Z. Rosen, *Moses Hess und Karl Marx. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der Marxschen Theorie* (Hamburg, 1983). Further, S. Na'Aman, *Emanzipation und Messianismus. Leben und Werk des Moses Hess* (Frankfurt, 1982). Further: A Cornu and W. Mönke, *Moses Hess. Philosophische und sozialistische Schriften 1837–1950* (Berlin, 1961). W. Mönke, *Neue Quellen zur Hess-Forschung* (Berlin, 1964).
- 11 M. Hess, *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit, von einem Jünger Sponozas* (Stuttgart, 1837). In *Ausgewählte Schriften*, selected and introduced by Horst Lademacher (Cologne, 1962), 75.
- 12 M. Hess, 'Über die sozialistische Bewegung in Deutschland', in op. cit., 176.
- 13 M. Hess, 'Philosophie der Tat (1943)', 135, 143ff., 156.
- 14 Compare Z. Rosen, 13, 16. In 1850, as he had already renounced his faith in the Christian God, Hess still described himself as an 'apostle' of the socialist 'new gospel' (Moses Hess, Letter to Alexander Herzen, circa February 1950, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 387).
- 15 Z. Rosen, 14.
- 16 K. Marx, Letter to A. Ruge, May 1843, *MEW* 1, 338ff.
- 17 Letter to A. Ruge, September 1843, *MEW* 1, 343. Marx understood himself and his programme, also later, as an expression, as an 'organ' of history. Compare *MEW* 4, 143.

- 18 K. Marx, 'Zur Judenfrage', *MEW* 1, 353.  
 19 K. Marx, 'Zur Judenfrage', *MEW* 1, 356.  
 20 *Ibid.*, 370, 337.  
 21 K. Marx, *Philosophisch-Ökonomische Manuskripte*, *MEW* Supplementary Volume I, 540.  
 22 Thus states the formulation in *Das Kapital* (1867), *MEW* 23, 512.  
 23 K. Marx, 'Kritik des Gothaer Programms', *MEW* 19, 21. Further, it is stated here that

all physical work would have also to be able to be accomplished as spiritual work and, by virtue of the insight into its necessity, to satisfy the one that performs it; it would have to become possible that the distribution of the comrades' riches not only be oriented solely towards the varying abilities of the human being, but also consider their varying needs.

- 24 K. Marx, *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863–1867, Teil 1, Das Kapital*, book I, chapter 6. 'Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses', *MEGA* (Berlin, 1988) vol. II/4.1, 65. Italics are mine:

Historically regarded, this reversal ['of the subject into the object and vice versa'] appears as the *necessary transition point* in order to force the creation of wealth as such, that is, of the thoughtless productive powers of social work – might alone could form the material basis of a free human society – at the cost of the majority. This contradictory form *must* be gone through, just as the human being *must* first develop his intellectual powers as independent from religious ones.

Compare also K. Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert* (vol. 4 of *Das Kapital*), *MEW* 26, 2, 110ff.

- 25 'The human being appropriates his all-round being in an all-round way, thus, as a total human being', *MEW* Supplementary Volume I, 539.  
 26 K. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin, 1953), 387.  
 27 K. Marx, F. Engels, *Die heilige Familie*, *MEW* 2, 38.  
 28 Compare here P. Ehlen, 'Zur Frage nach Gott im Denken von Karl Marx', O. Muck (ed.), *Sinn gestalten. Metaphysik in der Vielgestalt menschlichen Fragens* (Innsbruck, 1989), 156–73. On Marx's understanding of 'laws', compare the foreword to the first edition of *Das Kapital*.  
 29 K. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *MEW* Supplementary Volume I, 544.  
 30 *Ibid.*, 544 and 546.  
 31 K. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin, 1953), 89.  
 32 K. Marx, *Das Kapital, Vol. I*, *MEW* 23, 789.  
 33 F. Engels, review of Marx's *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin, 1859), published in the newspaper *Das Volk* (August 1859). *MEW* 13, 475.  
 34 K. Marx, F. Engels, *Die heilige Familie*, *MEW* 2, 38.  
 35 K. Marx, *Kritik der hegelischen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung*, *MEW* 1, 390.  
 36 K. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *MEW* Supplementary Volume I, 538, compare also 539 and 546.  
 37 'But the dialectic is nothing more than the science of the general laws of movement and development of nature, human society and thought'. See F. Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft' ('Anti-Dühring'), *MEW* 20, 131f.  
 38 F. Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, *MEW* 20, 327.

- 39 V. I. Lenin at the Eighth All-Russian Soviet Congress (December 1920), *Werke*, vol. 31, 513.
- 40 V. I. Lenin, *Ausgewählte Werke in 3 Bänden* (Berlin, 1964), vol. 3, 538ff.
- 41 Compare here P. Ehlen, *Die philosophische Ethik in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1972).
- 42 G. Lukács, 'Taktik und Ethik', *Politische Aufsätze I*, 1918–20, edited by J. Kammler and F. Benseler (Darmstadt-Neuwied, 1975). Further, *Der Bolschewismus als moralisches Problem*, *Werke*, vol. 2.
- 43 Lenin in the newspaper, *Proletarij*, no. 10 (6 September 1917), *Werke* (4th edn), vol. 25, 239.
- 44 G. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Amsterdam, 1967), 53.
- 45 According to Nietzsche, the 'superman' is characterised by absolute loneliness. That is, he is characterised by the knowledge, after the 'death' of God, of being supported by no other objective instance – whether a moral order or a self-assured reason – in granting meaning to existence. Those – perhaps the majority of human beings – who cannot summon the strength for this absolute loneliness after the death of God hold fast to an ersatz of God. These then resemble the 'last men' for whom Nietzsche reserved total contempt (in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*).

## 9 Discussion of Chapter 8

### Hans Mommsen

I recall the material in the Smolensk archive where the personal data on Lenin are to be found – data that he returned to the party organs. Here, one can sometimes glimpse a desperate attempt by Lenin to move the comrades, as it were, to right action. Are there insights with the late Lenin that this was perhaps a mistaken path after all?

### Peter Ehlen

Whether intellectual insights were involved, I do not know. I believe that his illness and the feeling of no longer holding the reins played a very large role here.

### Felix Dirsch, Munich

In the first section of your paper, you have offered some very interesting formulas – formulas like those of the total human being or of the realm of freedom, for example. Such formulas incorporate Marx into Western intellectual history. Hobbes also presented this motif of the reconciliation of religion and politics: the unification of the two heads of the eagle that is cited often by Professor Maier. Connecting up with the debate about utopia and Marxism, it would interest me to know how these formulas should be classified. With the question as to whether Marxism is a utopia, the same problem as the one we had with religion is posed. Subjectively, Marx and Engels did not want to be utopians; they distanced themselves from utopianism in the famous essay, *Von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft*. But one might say from the current standpoint – with someone like Joachim C. Fest or Helmut Jenkes – that Marxism is a utopia after all. How do you classify these formulas, formulas like that of the realm of freedom? Do you regard them as religious formulas, as eschatology in the sense of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth? Or are they utopian, in the sense of the creation of a kingdom in the here and now?

## Peter Ehlen

The formulas come from Marx himself. He speaks of the total human being; he speaks of the individual developed in all his facets. The talk of the kingdom also arises from him. How Marx comes to select these concepts has, to my knowledge, not clearly been demonstrated. I would like to assume that, as an educated person of the first half of the nineteenth century, he knew such concepts from his discussions with the young Hegelians – in particular from his religio-critical conversations with Bruno Bauer. I would assume, then, that he indeed took them from the great treasure of the Western tradition.

The ‘total human being’ is a concept that was developed during the Renaissance: the *uomo nuovo* who develops all his capacities, who determines himself completely and is free of all determination by others. These were *topoi* that Marx could then assume.

Regarding the last question, the one as to whether the peculiarity of a utopia is indicated here: I see the religious aspect of the Marxian sketch in its claim that it is capable of curing the whole human being – salvation as cure. It might then be asked, what is meant by this ‘whole?’ Does it also include characteristics that are attributed to the human being in something like a Christian anthropology? One would perhaps be able to say – Mr Bärtsch alluded to this – that certain expectations Marx has of the fulfilled human being would render it a quasi-divine being. This obtains above all for the characteristic of self-determination. It is God’s prerogative to determine himself in a way that is independent of all circumstances. If I understand it thus, then it is utopian. It must therefore be asked: how broadly does Marx understand this postulate of self-determination? What does it comprehend and what does it not? A Faustian element comes into play in his almost hymnic presentation – in the so-called *Grundrissen zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* of 1857 – of a perpetual becoming that knows no limits but is continually striving forwards anew. This borders upon the utopian.

## Leonid Luks, Eichstätt

I wanted to point out that, at base, Bolshevism and Leninism in power have always wandered between two poles: between utopianism and pragmatism. At first, in the period of war-Communism and of the civil war, for example, there is an attempt to adapt reality to the utopia. In 1921, after the civil war had been won, there is the pragmatic Lenin – the attempt to adapt the doctrine to reality.

And now a few words on that which Mr Mommsen had to say about Lenin’s final years: of course, Lenin attempts to correct some things. But, on the other hand, he also says that only the party has the right to correct itself. This is the claim to absoluteness. The party cannot be checked. The



whole time, Bolshevism is characterised by this field of tension spanning the utopian and pragmatic poles.

Stalin embodies utopianism and the doctrinarian style of Communism, but Khrushchev – he marked a renewed adaptation of the doctrine to reality. Bolshevism always has these two basic components.

### **Peter Ehlen**

This adaptation, this back and forth between pragmatism and idealism, also characterises Lenin's own work, *State and Revolution*. The work is often cited in order to show to what extent Lenin remains with Marx's original goal of the renewal of the human being. But if one looks more closely, this culminates in the image of the cook who is also capable of governing the state. Lenin's governing cook is something entirely different from the fully emancipated human being of Karl Marx. Certainly, one must always consider with Lenin what he knew of Marx and what he could have known. Numerous writings of Marx – among them, the most important – had not yet been published in Lenin's lifetime. This probably includes the essay on the Jewish question, where there is talk of the emancipation of humanity. But Lenin could have taken the formula of the 'totally developed individual' from *Das Kapital*.

### **Gerd Koenen, Frankfurt**

I would tend to place the things as far apart from one another as possible. Marx still experienced 'Marxists' in his own lifetime. This was something that shocked and alienated him not a little. And specifically, Russian 'Marxists' were involved here. In Russia, his writings – above all, *Das Kapital* – gained a reception that he also immediately experienced as a kind of expropriation, an appropriation into context for which his criticism of society and construction of history opened up an entirely different perspective and an entirely different dynamic of action. I believe that his instincts were completely correct here. Such an act of appropriation into a different context means, after all, that the system of thought also begins to function differently. You, Mr Ehlen, rendered it in the nice formula that stated that Lenin was much less radical in his thought than Marx was. That is, under the pressure of a movement that is really developing but is nourished by its own motives, a reduction in terms of thought occurs, an operationalisation in favour of an organisation that is already fighting. This organisation then fits itself out with a 'scientific *Weltanschauung*'.

At most, Marx attempted to have a revolutionary influence himself. But the whole thing ended in petty, sectarian quarrels. Marx was not made for such a thing and the timing was not right. Thus did German Marxism – the adaptation of Marx's ideas within the German context – also end up becoming something that was completely different from Russian Marxism.

And the Leninism that then arose was something different in turn from the original Russian Marxism; it originated in an historical and sociological context entirely of its own. The same can also be said for Maoism in China. The differences, it seems to me, were at least as large as the ones between Italian Fascism and German National Socialism.

In this entirely different, Russian context – I go back here to the prior discussion – one element that Mr Ehlen has correctly emphasised with Marx comes to bear: namely, the Promethean element. I am too little educated in the philosophy of religion to classify it correctly, but I perceive this creative gesture of the Bolsheviks to be (a) anti-religious (in the sense of a subordination to a higher being) and (b) so far as the forms of religious faith, the rites, etc. are concerned, more as para-religious. This means that, in psychological and habitual terms, these rites and formulations of faith fill up the empty space that had been previously assumed by religious rites and formulas. But I do not perceive this as being genuinely religious.

At the beginning stands the Promethean claim radically to reshape a given society. The rhetoric of world revolution only adds one more to it here. But the frame of reference is still one's own society. And here, even the formula of the 'new human being' was no mere article of belief, but a piece of frighteningly pragmatic social practice. The attempt to create a 'new human being' was undertaken in fact, right down to the claim to investigate the biological, natural-scientific side of the production of 'new human beings'. It is hardly a coincidence that one of the last theoretical formulations of Stalinism was concerned with the theory of genetic inheritance – thus, with how one might transfer the qualities of human beings raised as 'humans of the Stalinist type' into the genetic inheritance.

Can one really regard this as conduct oriented towards salvation history? At the beginning, certainly, there was a world situation that was perceived as apocalyptic; this had gained its expression in the world war. There was the radical idea of eliminating the primordial evil of exploitation – that is, of purifying the world of all exploiters. But this already had more the sense of a naïve demonology than of a sober – let alone scientific – analysis of society. And then there arose a state power that prescribed a total reformation of the society in its sense and in its image, and in doing so had a great need for legitimation.

Thus, once again: I do not know whether one can regard this as being a conduct aimed at salvation, or as a legitimation of the need to go further and further. The latter would end at most in a religion of the state – that is, the state would create itself a religion centred upon its existence. But again, I would talk more of a para-religious phenomenon.

### **Peter Ehlen**

Among the evils of which the society would have to be purified because they prevent the 'construction of Communism' count precisely those things that

Leninist jargon calls ‘individualism’, ‘subjectivism’, or ‘parasitism’ – any kind of ‘egoism’ that resists the whole, which is represented by the party. The requirements of state politics and personal strivings for power in this ‘whole’ are contradictorily connected to the idea of a renewed, saved society. Political opposition is described in moral terms – as egoism – because it opposes the salvation of humanity.

With Marx, one must examine his connection to European intellectual history. He was a person who was educated in the humanities, one who knew Prometheus from Aeschylus’ tragedy, *Prometheus Bound* – Prometheus, the light-bringer. Here, it is said that Prometheus gave the people hope by freeing them from the certainty of death.

In the *Pariser Manuskripten*, Marx took up in passing the question of death. He attempted to answer it such that the fear of death would be taken from the one who knows that he merges with the entire process of the history of nature. Here too, then, there is a Promethean consolation and hope: the individual loses his severance from the whole, his isolation and alienation, and enters into the rhythm of nature.

It seems to me that death does not play the same role with Marxism-Leninism that was demonstrated by Mr Becker with respect to National Socialism. Here, one makes more of a detour around the phenomenon of death instead. The question of death in Marx and then in Marxism-Leninism would merit a treatment in its own right.

## **Hans Maier**

I would like to make a comment on the theme of death. The first collision between Lenin and the party on the one hand and the Orthodox Church on the other was triggered by the cult surrounding the relics. Relics were valuable, and during the war – later, during the civil war – the state had seized Church property. And there arose here a dispute that one can still be followed very nicely in the files. It surrounds the question, what belongs to the Church? Lenin was no fanatical destroyer of the Church from the beginning. Although he was always an opponent of the Church, he also sometimes had his pragmatic moments and sought to leave the Church what it required for its worship in the strict sense, for the exercise of its functions. He rejected bells, monstrances and expensive equipment for the purpose of show or processions within the Church, however – and above all, he rejected that which he perceived as a stockpiling of treasures. The treasures were to be sequestered and requisitioned. And the first conflict between the Communist state and the newly elected patriarch, Tychon, erupted over this. (Tychon later played a memorable role in the history of religion. First thrown into prison then placed under house arrest, he finally appeared to have agreed to the measures of the state. No one can precisely reconstruct what happened to this day.)

The basis of the Communist Party then goes over simply to confiscating this treasure from the resisting Church. And it now comes to a massive

plundering of relics that goes well beyond this functional goal. At base, the Party attempts to destroy this entire world of relics. This is actually the earliest directly hostile measure taken by the state against religion. It is almost an irony of history that the destroyer, Lenin, was later embalmed and – as is well known – displayed in Red Square for veneration by the faithful to this day.

Certainly, it was disputed for a time under Gorbachev and then under Yeltsin as to whether Lenin should be buried at his mother's side in St Petersburg. But the files are firmly closed on this. He will probably remain in the mausoleum in Red Square. I wanted to mention it only because your words of death brought to my mind the connection between the relic cult, self-staging and the historical overcoming of death.

The history of the persecution of religion in Communist Russia has not yet been written, by the way. And large portions of it can probably also not be written. It is also very strange that, in many things, the Communist state entered into spheres of action that the Russian Church had never occupied, or had relinquished early on. The Orthodox Church concentrates entirely upon the internal processes of faith and liturgy. Yet it has neither educated a deacon nor set forth ideas of its relation to the world; there is neither ecclesiastical law nor scholasticism nor a theory of society . . .

### **Interruption**

Nor theology . . .

### **Hans Maier**

Yes, at base, there is no theology either. There is a liturgy, but no theology. Communism then entered into this enormous sphere. In a more precise analysis, one would also have to describe the realm of action of the respective churches and compare it to that of the new totalitarianisms. Here, a comparison in Russia would look entirely different from the Communist Eastern Bloc later on. And this in turn would look entirely different from Italian Fascism and German National Socialism.

### **Hanns Leiner, Augsburg**

you are absolutely correct when you emphasise the dependence of Marx on Feuerbach and when you see, in his anthropology, predicates that are usually applied to God. It is also correct that you see here a certain divinisation of the human being, *homo homini deus*.

### **Peter Ehlen**

Yet I ask myself both here and in the second contribution to the philosophy of history, whether one must not first ask whether the religious expressions

that were used here did not simply seem to Marx and the Marxists to be the ones best suited to expressing what they wanted to express. Thus, perhaps what is involved here is not a religion, but the enlistment of a religion in stating their own matter. This would be something different. I can simply think of – now this goes over into the sphere of speculation – no healthy human being who speaks of the aseity of the human being and knows what he is saying when he does so. These statements intend something different. And to discover what they intend is the actual business of the interpreter, the historian of philosophy. And this, I would regard more in the context of a renewal of the entire human being and the entire society: to overcome dependence and determination by another in this sphere.

### **Manfred Spieker, Osnabrück**

I wanted to pick up the strands of Mr Leiner's comment. I too believe that when we inquire about religious or counter-religious elements in Marx, the anthropology and philosophy of history must occupy the centre rather than questions about how he used the concept of 'God' or what he said about transcendence. In the anthropology, the Prometheus myth plays a key role. In the foreword to his dissertation, he already explains that Prometheus is *the* saint in his calendar of saints and that Prometheus would also have to become a saint in the calendar of German philosophy. This is then reflected in what he says about the human being in the *Deutsche Ideologie* and *Das Kapital*. In the *Deutsche Ideologie*, there comes that famous image of the human being existing in the realm of freedom who can hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, raise livestock in the evening and conduct criticism after dinner – exactly as he pleases and without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (Ernest Mandel, by the way, makes something completely modern of this picture: one might be at once medical doctor and architect, mechanical engineer and nuclear physicist. This is then no longer so archaic as it is with Marx in the *Deutsche Ideologie*.) But in the first volume of *Das Kapital*, he expresses this very abstractly and says that the human being has 'absolute disposability'. And here is that which you have also addressed: the human being is based upon himself. He becomes like God. And this is already the primordial temptation in the book of Genesis: to become like God and no longer to die. This is the one thing. And here, it must be said that he imitates the religious desire of human beings in order to attain his goals; he is consistent here with his context within the nineteenth century. And as far as the philosophy of history is concerned, it is palpable that Marxism – beginning with Karl Marx himself and up to the politburos of the governing Communist parties – claimed not only to know the course of history. Marxism also – and this is the root of the terror, the root of the despotism – claimed to know the path to the end of history. Marx and Engels expressed it clearly in the *Communist Manifesto*: prior to the rest of the proletariat (and here one might add of course, prior to those

who are not members of the proletariat), the Communists have seen the limiting conditions, the path and the general result of history. This means that they know the course of history – they know that which only God knows to all believers, regardless of their religion or confession. This too is a political religion, if you will, and one with very practical consequences. For whoever does not bow or conform to this knowledge of the course of history is then no longer merely the political opponent with whom one argues; he is the unenlightened, the enemy, the one to be eliminated.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsh**

I cannot add much to what you have said, Mr Spieker, because I wanted to say almost the same thing. Taking up Mr Leiner's remark, I would like to examine Marx's postulate of the person's 'being through one's own self' in the so-called *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. What can the 'self' mean in this context beyond an *ens causa sui* – or human becoming from one's own self and through oneself? According to this, the person forms himself and makes himself to that which he, in himself, *is* in history. Yet this conception depends upon a certain understanding of God or of God's becoming in history.

With respect to the much-cited 'self' in the intellectual history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I would like to refer to the affirmative use of the concepts 'self-realisation', 'self-development', 'self-consciousness' and 'self-feeling' in Rosenberg's *Mythus*. This relates to and results from the doctrine of the divine substance of the Nordic soul and of course applies strictly to this. With respect to the implications of the conception of the 'self', there is a certain structural similarity between the young Marx (and other traditions) on the one hand and Rosenberg on the other. These implications concerning the 'self' can be classified as Gnostic or mystic – but the entire matter requires closer investigation. A further structure similarity exists in yet another respect. Disregarding for now the distinction between national and universal application – which is by no means unimportant – I mean here the relation of the present and the future that is assumed in each case. As in apocalyptic literature, poverty, misery and catastrophe are the necessary transitional stage of the transformation. These precede the liberation and salvation in the future. In light of the goal of the human agents – by contrast to the apocalyptic literature of Judaeo-Christianity – to establish the future blessed state *on their own*, all means are valid as sanctified. Murder and terror become historically necessary or legitimate.

### **Peter Ehlen**

If I read, '*homo homini deus*' or 'become like God' and similar statements in an author's work, and if I do not want to suspect too hastily that the author

in question is guilty of committing a blasphemy or does not know what he is saying, then I must attempt to interpret this sentence in a restrained way. And I would not so quickly attribute to Marx – or later, to Nietzsche either – the intention of blasphemy. Instead, I would ask: can this be interpreted otherwise? Namely: can it be interpreted as a statement that is motivated by a desire for salvation, for the state of being saved from the many ways in which others determine a human being? And this desire articulates itself – I state this as an interpreter – in such statements of aseity. If I cannot interpret in this restrained way, then I must conclude that the man did not know what he was talking about. And I would say that one who knows what aseity means and wants to appropriate it is in fact insane.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsh**

Salvation from determination by another can also occur through God. But every belief in the attainment of salvation assumes an omnipotent subject, whether human or divine. This occurs in order to make it possible to destroy the powers that have become historically influential with any kind of success. Rosenberg, for example, fought – in accordance with his obsession – against faith in the both foreign and false god of the Jewish ‘counter-race’. And Karl Marx fought the faith in any god that was both powerful and transcendent. What I am getting at is that liberation of the human being by the human being requires the assumption of a potential omnipotence or divinisation of the self. Otherwise, logically, the liberation from determination by another cannot work – in light of the miserable reality of the so-called prehistory.

### **Peter Ehlen**

Much can be entailed in the wish for self-determination precisely because much can be experienced as restriction of self-determination. Among such restrictions are not only the givens that unjustly handicap me, but also those that belong to the *conditio humana*. Indisputably, even God’s omnipotence is experienced as determination by another, whereby a very precise image of God is of course assumed. It is an image in which God is held to be a possessor of power and a legislator that is utterly *foreign* to the human being.

### **Hans Mommsen**

I would like very much to pose a further question on this presentation, which is of infinite importance to me. It pertains to the relationship of Marx to Lenin. Might I be permitted to bring in your citation, your formulation? ‘We show the world only that for which it actually has to struggle.’ In my

understanding of Marx, I always have the feeling that he regards himself as an instrument of world history, but does not make this history. And here, there always occurs to me his famous statement about the Paris Commune, about 'the political form that has finally been discovered'. This means that it is by no means the case that an omniscient knowledge of events is now here and, with it, the possibility to direct individuals towards the goal of world history, as it were. They come to it – this is my understanding of it – on their own. One might say that this is a democratic vision.

And where Lenin is concerned, what occurs to me here is that famous statement by Clara Zetkin to August Bebel to the effect that it makes no sense to enlighten the older generation; one might only raise – that is, indoctrinate – the younger generation. And I wanted very much to direct the following question to you. How, then, does this particular voluntarism that can be found in this theory of education in Leninism and that I would be inclined almost to call decisionism, in fact relate to the original Marxian position? The reference to salvation history, as it were, shifts very far: from a position in which human beings bring themselves to historical insight, even if under social conditions that exclude individuals, to the avant-garde theory of Lenin. The transition to the totalitarian seems to me to be of great significance. Certainly, there is a voluntaristic element in the Prometheus myth from the beginning, but I think that it is curbed. And I would ask you whether one would not then be forced to make a clear distinction from Leninism in this respect – and, in particular, from its epigonal form in Stalinism.

### **Peter Ehlen**

I can only agree with what you have said, Mr Mommsen. Marx does not understand himself as the maker of history. He does not seek to drive Communism forwards, but only to make visible the laws or effective forces that bring about the change of the society through their own power, through their own instance. And I also agree with you that there is a voluntaristic element in the Prometheus myth; yet this is offset by the Enlightenment element. As Marx understood it, Prometheus is the one who brings the light and makes us understand in what determination by another – by both the heavenly and the earthly gods – consists. I believe that the voluntaristic element lies in the fact that Marx understood himself as the only legitimate spokesman of this historical process. And here is anticipated something that we then once again find in perfected form with Leninism: this voluntarism. Marx also tolerated no foreign interpreters beside himself. His entire correspondence is full of this.

### **Interruption**

From Lasalle!



### **Peter Ehlen**

You can look wherever you like. But Marx is aware that, in methodological terms, he must distinguish his own self-estimation from the law that is at work in history. And with Lenin, a series of non-Marxian motifs come into play. Certainly, *norodnitchestvo*, the ‘friend of the people’, and the terrorist streams that issued from it influenced Lenin in a major way. These attempted to bring about the new society in relative independence from insights into the philosophy of history. There are investigations that show how Lenin was at first a follower of the *norodnitchestvo*; but then, after he had become acquainted with Marx through his older brother, he was preoccupied with an ‘objective’ analysis of social development. Nonetheless, even after he had taken over the leadership of the Party, he continually returned to the voluntarism of the national tradition. Here, the influences coming from Marx connect up with those of contemporary Russian history.

### **Hanns Leiner, Augsburg**

Prometheus – the light bringer. He snatches the light from the gods. Thus, the struggle against God is expressed within the light bringer himself. And as far as history is concerned, even if Marx does not say that the human being is the maker of history, he certainly does not say that God is. Instead, it is the laws. But he is the first to claim to have discovered the laws of history through the use of science. To this extent, therefore, I would certainly mention this radical element as one of the decisive ones.

### **Peter Ehlen**

This I grant you; there is a voluntaristic element entailed in the fact that Marx believed himself to have been the only one able to interpret these laws correctly. But concerning Aeschylus’ Prometheus figure: the god who snatches the light from him is Zeus. And Zeus has deceived Prometheus. Thus – and this stands in the background with Marx; he cites the verse(s) from Aeschylus – when this Prometheus hurls at Hermes the words ‘I hate all gods!’, the hate against the gods articulated here is certainly justified. Zeus is not ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.

### **Mathias Behrens**

I would like to follow up on this theme and also to respond again to Mr Bärtsch: to the relationship between the ‘self’ and the divinisation of the human being, the absorption of God into the human being. At the beginning, the ‘self’ referred solely to the development and establishment of truth, to knowledge within the self. It subsequently underwent a transformation that led up to the statements that Mr Ehlen has presented: to

emancipation self-consciousness, to a complete self-determination that involves all of Being. And I therefore believe that the two concepts possess an internal connection, although I would agree with you that they are not identical. If the human being steals the divine light, what light now essentially signifies undergoes a transformation. And because it undergoes this transformation, it is no longer so entirely mistaken, or it has again become conceivable in a certain way – because the Christian concept of Creation, for example, has been abolished here. Creation – specifically, self-creation – is intended in the same way that the Christian concept of Creation had been intended earlier. A given material – of course, not ‘given’ in the genuine sense, as given by God, but an already existing thing – finds itself in a process. And within this process, it then comes to determine itself. To this extent, I believe that the Promethean claim again becomes conceivable. It can once again enter into the discourse, even though it is of course entirely questionable.

And now I have two further, smaller matters. What would interest me, Father Ehlen, is the connection between the collectivity, the self-surrender of the individual and the regaining of individuality. In preparing for this conference, I found precisely this de-personalisation in the collectivity to be an important characteristic that distinguishes the political religions from the Christian religion. According to your portrayal, however, this would probably have to be revised: the collectivity is only a transitional stage, so to speak. One might then identify it with death – as you have done. In this sense, Communism and National Socialism would have to be distinguished once again with regard to the meaning of the collectivity and the nation: the nation would be something that is not transcended, whereas the collectivity would be transcended in the direction of individuality.

And I have yet another question pertaining to this morning. Here, political religion was frequently distinguished from ideology. In my view, ideology is the setting up of a partial aspect of reality as absolute. And in this sense, I would also understand political religion as an absolutisation of the polis. Would one not have then to say that political religion is a kind of ideology?

### **Peter Ehlen**

The second point is perhaps the easiest to answer. Here, one would have to distinguish between the Marxian intention and that which became of it for internal reasons – *also* for internal reasons. The intention seeks to expose the powers that bring into being the individual as a social being. Marx is not a collectivist. This is an important statement. To him, the individual he encounters in bourgeois society is divorced from his sociability; he has lost his being. And this alienation from the society is supposed to be overcome – primarily through the socialisation of labour, the creative power that makes up the essence of the human being. But this does not mean for Marx – this

can also be supported – that control over human labour might then be delegated to some kind of instance that would then control the single individuals through some plan or other. Rather – and here we step over the border to the utopia – what is involved is the idea of a society of individuals in which each can survey the whole. This society is self-regulating and therefore does not require planning by an entity that is removed from it: by a state. With Lenin, this is different. Because the Marxian model could not be realised for internal reasons, it needed the Party that would speak for the proletariat. But this too has an internal logic.

As for your first point: with an author like Marx or with other philosophers as well, how far can we trace an idea back to its assumptions with logical consistency? Do we not always stumble at some point on premises that the author had not seen or had seen differently from how they appear to our logic? In Marx's understanding of history, we stumble upon axiological premises that Marx did not recognise as such. With Marx too, we could go to the point where we would have to say, 'here you get mired in contradictions or make unjustified assumptions'. But, first, one should ask, 'what did you want to say, regardless of the logically unjustified assumptions or conclusions that I expose in your thought?' Perhaps something different results then.

And the third is a very difficult question, one that envelops the entire conference, the question: 'what are the characteristics of "political religion?"' Is ideology the absolutisation of a partial aspect? To this I would agree, but access to this point seems to me to be easier if I begin with the longing for salvation. This too seeks to understand the human being at its base, but it takes *pars pro toto*. It seeks the salvation of the whole human being, but restricts the whole – both in the starting-point and the goal – and it absolutises a partial aspect in doing so.

### **Hans Maier**

Here, too, there are the parallels in the history of dogma. Such a thing is described in Christian terms as a heresy, and a heresy is none other than *hairesis*: the taking out from the whole, from the catholic.

### **Juan Linz, New Haven**

I have two questions. We have spoken a lot about religion and a lot less about politics. We are discussing here whether religions are involved in the political religions. But the latter's fundamental aim was to create a political, a social order. And this is what the other religions – almost all of them, I believe – have only incidentally as a goal. It is of course the result of each great religious tradition that it creates a social structure as well, but the main goal is nonetheless not the social structure and the political power structure. But in the case of the political religions, the central phenomenon is politics. And this, I believe, we have overlooked a little bit.

We have spoken about Marxism-Leninism as a revolutionary, anti-religious soteriological religion of a secular kind. But we have not spoken about another version of it, one that existed at the same time: anarchism. The relationship between anarchism and Marxism would perhaps illuminate some of the problems that we have discussed today, mainly because anarchism was much more anti-religious on principle even than Marxism. Marxism believed that religion would disappear with modernity, whereas anarchism believed that it would first have to be fought in order to create the new, improved society. In addition, the latter also manifests many chiliastic and voluntaristic elements that cannot coexist with the deterministic, 'scientific' elements of Marxism. A person we have named is Sorel, with the ethicisation that Sorel seeks to bring about; but it also has a certain influence on Lenin and stands behind Fascism.

These are the two problem areas that I wish to address only briefly; perhaps someone will take them up.

A further, very important point is the sociology of religion, which we have left out completely to this point. Who believes in all these things? Who are the carriers of these movements? How do these different political religions address certain sectors of the society? Weber's sociology of religion tells us very little about what religion is; he even says that he does not want to explain it. But he tells us an enormous amount about how the different forms of religion and different dogmas and different liturgies, etc., appealed to certain social structures and enjoyed to different degrees an affinity, a spiritual relation, to certain social classes and groups. What are the social affinities of the political religions? Why and at what point in time are these social groups susceptible to gospels of salvation of a political character?

But the great question is still: *how many* people accepted or did not accept *which* elements of the political religions? To what extent was this faith lasting? Or was it merely a certain ephemeral form of the moment? We have been more Durkheimian than Weberian in our analysis; we have spoken more about the social self-expression that forms communities. According to Durkheim, religion is merely an expression of the society; transcendence does not exist for him. We have remained with Durkheim and have not brought in many problems of the Weberian sociology of religion. Mainly, this is an ethical problem of the moral unpredictability and injustice of human existence – of existence in its entirely concrete personal, private sphere too, in the sphere for which religion has always sought to give answers: death, sickness, all concrete problems of all human beings, misfortune of every kind. The political religions have nothing to say to these. Here, the difference between religion and political religion appears to me to be very great. Despite all ceremonies and rituals – births, weddings and funerals – what is involved on this point is mainly an imitation of religion. The ethical self-analysis of the individual and the giving of meaning to personal life – these are the strengths of the Weberian sociology of religion. This is why he cannot be passed over in the discussion of our theme.

### **Hans Maier**

Many thanks, Mr Linz. May I make a brief remark on this? It is indeed correct that we have not developed it in detail. But invisibly and at base, these aspects were of course already present in the old, simple distinction between *fides qua* and *fides quae*. Thus, what does one believe the content of belief to be? If one believes, where does trust come into play? Where is something passed on that I do not myself know, but hold to be credible as the knowledge of another? I believe that this distinction contains the entire programme of the sociology of religion. I do not know where this formula, this distinction, originated. Did it exist already with the patriarchs, or was it first developed by the scholastics?

### **Peter Ehlen**

Certainly in the controversy theology, at the latest.

### **Klaus-Georg Riegel**

The entire outline that I offered about the virtuoso religions is based upon Weber. I also showed that the sociology of intellectuals is involved here.

With regard to Durkheimian sociology, I would concede that you are correct. Religion is a form of strengthening the collectivity. This too I brought in very briefly with the metaphor of the Leninist order: a revolutionary order in which the disciplined machine fits everything together. And as a third model taken from the sociology of religion, I very briefly noted that of Eric Voegelin: the religious bond that is torn and that then continues as the desire for inner-worldly salvation. Thus, at base, three sociologists of religion have been very explicitly and very extensively discussed.

### **Hanns Leiner, Augsburg**

A brief remark on Prometheus and Zeus. Years ago, Jan Milic Lochman wrote a very nice book entitled *Christus oder Prometheus*. And a sentence from it has remained with me: 'the God of the Bible is no Zeus'. Unfortunately, Marx did not acknowledge this difference. And here, in my opinion, is where the tragedy lies.

But I would like to return once again to anthropology and the self-divinisation of the human being. I would very much like to accept your restrained interpretation, but Marx's wording is too strong for me. It is indeed true: it is madness when the human being wants to divinise himself. He does not succeed in it, but he does it over and over again despite this. Not for nothing does the Bible describe this as original sin. This was mentioned previously: 'you will be like God'. And this moves in a subterranean way – like a red thread, so to speak – throughout the history of Christianity

and throughout the history of religion. I wanted also to support it with an idea that has not yet been mentioned and that hardens it, to a certain extent, into a mirror reflection, namely: the justification of Marxian atheism.

The atheism of Marx – and here I invoke Helmut Gollwitzer's *Die marxistische Religionskritik und der christliche Glaube* – is not justified by the failure of the Church in the nineteenth century alone. In principle, it is also justified precisely by the fact that the one who wants to thank himself and not another – above all, not a god – cannot acknowledge God, he can only deny him. Thus seen, Marxism is actually not atheism, but anti-theism. And in a certain sense, it anticipates the statement of Nietzsche: 'if there were gods, then how would I bear it that I am not a god?' It is megalomania, but such a megalomaniac is the human being.

### **Peter Ehlen**

I would like to make another small comment on this. 'You will be like God' – 'eritis sicut deus scientes bonum et malum'. Who said that? God? No, it was the snake. This is not unimportant. The snake lies and those who have eaten from the tree of knowledge are by no means the knowers of good and evil. And we all suffer from it, not to know so completely what good and evil are. I mention this only as an aside.

Then, concerning what Mr Linz said: once again, you have opposed religious religion and political religion. But there is also a unique connection between the two. What is striking to me is just how many outstanding people in the socialist movement were of Jewish origin – in Germany, in Russia and in other countries. Then I ask myself whether, aside from many social reasons, this does not also have one root in the religiosity – to be sure, sometimes very diluted religiosity – of those in question. When I read the little book by Gershom Scholem, *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* and again in this context, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* by Hermann Cohen, I became aware of how strong one stream of Jewish thought is. In this stream, the eschatological messianic kingdom can be recognised in the fact that political, moral and social deficiencies have been overcome. For the Jew, the Messiah cannot have come as long as need and crime continue to govern the world. Scholem says this almost polemically against the Christian belief that the kingdom of God that has already broken in, insofar as the human deficiencies, miseries and crimes have lost their deadly power through the resurrection of Christ. If the Messiah comes, he will establish a kingdom in which these social, political and other deficiencies are also abolished. Is this not a hint at the existence of a direction of thought within Judaism itself that sees the political – political religiosity – as being identical to perfected religiosity? By no means all of Judaism, but there is a stream. I am not entirely competent in this area. This is why it is more a suspicion that I express here, but the fact astonishes me repeatedly: so many Jews in socialism, how is that to be explained?

**Hans Maier**

Karl Löwith referred to similar points of contact. Admittedly, your suspicion leads me to a question. Theologically, a certain ‘Messiah-scepticism’ – I state it briefly here – is native to Judaism. If it does not want readily to identify the one who appears as the Messiah – and this, indeed, is the state of the controversy between Judaism and Christianity to this day – then why does this Messiah-scepticism then progressively diminish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Is it the assimilation into a secular society and the disappearance of the old Jewish theological ties? At very least, this question could be posed for reflection. And then there is something else, something that is always alive in Judaism. It has socio-historical roots in the minority status, but is perhaps also justifiable in religious terms: the search for justice. And we will not be allowed to deny the fathers of Communism – many of them, at least – their origins with the hunger and thirst for justice.

# 10 National Socialism as a political religion

*Hans Mommsen*

As developed by Eric Voegelin, the concept of political religion arises from the assumption of a history of decay of the European West that has been progressing since the Renaissance epoch. According to this assumption, the advance of an ontological immanence and of the idea that history, in principle, can be created by human beings rather than by a transcendent actor led to the replacement of the inherited religions with thought-attitudes directed at the mundane world. This is said to have culminated in the development of 'political religions'. According to this conception, these attained their purest character in the modern totalitarianisms – Stalinism, National Socialism and Fascism.<sup>1</sup>

A comparable historico-philosophical perspective can also be found in the more closed group of the Kreisau circle. It too assumed that National Socialism marked the end of a process of secular decay, a decay that set in with the relinquishment of Christian universalism and the religious tie of the individual and reached its climax in the cultural circle of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Consistently, Helmuth James von Moltke and Peter Yorck von Wartenburg represented the understanding that the demise of the National Socialist regime would be removed by a secular new beginning and that, although the mounting resistance should prepare itself for the day X, it would have to let the regime burn out.

This globalising classification of National Socialism has a certain persuasive power. It is the counterpart of conceiving of National Socialism as a 'political religion' – thus, as a particular culminating point of the secularisation and depersonalisation that had begun in the era of the Reformation and that ultimately led to the establishment of totalitarian movements. The intermediate stages of this movement were: the anonymous institutional state, the capitalist system that burst open the organic social order, and the transformation of society into a mass oriented increasingly towards mere consumption needs.

It would be mistaken, however, to classify National Socialism – and other Fascist movements, which have herein their *tertium comparionis* – within a unilinear course of this kind. Undoubtedly, National Socialism should be regarded as a movement that attempted to counter the development of



society – in a direction that was seen to have produced a cultural crisis – since the late nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, new features begin to emerge in the Fascist movements, and these features are distinct from parallel neo-conservative and extremely nationalistic streams. Aside from the chameleon-like ideological flexibility that enabled them to adapt to the prevailing social resentments and their mobilisation of elements that were temporally widely disparate,<sup>3</sup> they were characterised by markedly decisionistic and voluntaristic elements that distinguished them from their predecessors and fellow travellers. Their decisionism lay with their hypostatisation of the sheer use of the will in a ‘cult of the will’, as J. P. Stern has called it; and through their hypostatisation of the will, Fascist movements hypostatised pure action. The ideological contents themselves pale against this background.<sup>4</sup> ‘Fascism demands the doer, the human being loaded with all powers of the will’, Benito Mussolini declared,<sup>5</sup> and his proximity to the ideas of George Sorel is manifest. The erosion of political content in favour of external action, together with the degradation of principled value-attitudes into manipulative building blocks of an arbitrary actionism, distinguished National Socialism from its popular predecessors and the bourgeois, nationalistic right alike. In ideological terms, the latter displayed a wealth of agreement with the National Socialist programme – also with respect to its anti-Semitic features. In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hanna Arendt saw the specific characteristic of both National Socialism and Bolshevism to be that both marked a form of decay of the political and led to the destruction both of politics and of its psychological basis. In the totalitarian systems, she saw at work a ‘principle that ruins all human social existence’ and produces the self-dissolution of all social ties.<sup>6</sup> The tension between the voluntaristic mobilisation of violence and the tendency to self-destruct in fact seems to be the defining element of the National Socialist regime.

In terms of this starting point, it is difficult to apply the concept of the ‘political religion’ to National Socialism. This is because the concept assumes the emergence of a secularised ideology that claims to present a contingent, philosophical-theoretical system and extinguishes – or seeks to extinguish – existing social norms and religious structures. Externally, there are numerous indications of such a tendency: a secularisation of the Führer and NSDAP, for example, is reflected in the rituals of the Party conventions and the creation of a political religious faith among Party adherents.<sup>7</sup> Further such indications are the widespread use of Christian concepts and ideas in National Socialist propaganda, the reinterpretation of Christian symbols and creation of a new holiday calendar that is reminiscent in this sense of the Christian churches. Primarily, however, the assumption of a Christian semantic that was emerging everywhere had a propaganda function aimed at the manipulation of public opinion, not at the creation of an alternative religion.<sup>8</sup>

Although there were isolated attempts in this direction – by a group like the *Schwarzen Korps* – there was no serious attempt to shore up the

National Socialist world-view through a pseudo-religion. This went back not the least to the course that was followed by Hitler and his small group of leaders beginning in 1921 and was strictly maintained after that: to avoid all commitment of the movement on religious and confessional questions. 'The religious doctrines and institutions of his people must always be inviolable to the political leader', Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*. He pursued here a tactic of non-option.<sup>9</sup>

Consistently, he blocked all attempts to shore up the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* in a religious way. This began with his rigorous rejection of Otto Dickel, whom he accused of seeking to create a 'Western alliance',<sup>10</sup> as well as of Artur Dinter, whose novel, *Die Sünde wider das Blut* tried to make the racist alignment of the Party into a starting-point for a religious-like cult. The Führer rejected both as sectarian strivings.<sup>11</sup> Hitler had ridiculed Alfred Rosenberg's attack on the official churches in the latter's *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Further, he saw to it that the controversial title – which was especially opposed by both churches – was not taken up as part of the official Party literature and was characterised as a private work of Rosenberg.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the dictator poked fun at Heinrich Himmler's occultist inclinations and his attempts to revive the ancient Germanic cult and clothe it in ritualised forms.

Without exception, Hitler rejected the tendency to create a mundane National Socialist religion represented by individual representatives of the NSDAP. In his *Tischgesprächen*, he commented in October 1941: 'a movement like ours cannot let itself be drawn into metaphysical digressions. It is not the task of the Party to imitate religion'. Nor was an ironisation of his Gauleiters lacking: being 'saints' 'did not become them'. With a clear barb aimed at rabble-rousers on the Church question, Hitler added: 'If we, at this point in time, were violently to exterminate the confessions, the people would unanimously beseech us for a new form of religious worship'.<sup>13</sup> Despite his clear hostility to Catholicism, Hitler held a *modus vivendi* with the churches to be necessary for the time being, even if he might have hoped in the long term to be able to dry them up and ultimately to eliminate them.

To be sure, Hitler proceeded with this resolutely pursued line in clear opposition to the anti-clerically oriented group in the NSDAP – among them primarily the SS and Gestapo under Heydrich, at first also Martin Bormann as chief of staff and later as head of the Party Chancellery, and – above all – Josef Goebbels. After the crucifix controversy in Oldenburg, in the Rheinland and in Bavaria had sparked substantial resistance in the population, however, Goebbels and Bormann – who mutually accused one another of rabble-rousing<sup>14</sup> – fell into line on the side of a politics of barbed remarks against the churches. The hostile measures taken in 1941 against the Catholic cloisters and orders issued primarily from the Gestapo; but these too had in large part to be retracted.

Heinz Hürten has put together impressive material in order to demonstrate the tendency of National Socialism to become a church. Yet this was

by no means the maxim of the regime's political practice, which sought to restrict the churches to their strictly spiritual sphere, to avoid open conflicts with it wherever possible and to strive for a sharp delimitation between state and church. Within the party, considerable pressure to leave the church was exercised on party members – especially in the context of annexed Austria. Yet even Bormann warned that leaving the church out of opportunism was not to be permitted.<sup>15</sup> For the Gauleiter Josef Wagner, his consciously retained church ties were interpreted to his disadvantage and provided an additional justification for his removal from office. A formal commitment of the NSDAP occurred in Martin Bormann's well known memorandum of 9 June 1941, a statement in which he explained that National Socialist and Christian understandings were 'irreconcilable'. Less well known is that the Party Chancellery, the position of which was still not firmly established, was formally compelled – on Hitler's orders and also on the basis of protest within the party – to withdraw the memorandum.<sup>16</sup>

From the beginning, Hitler tended to avoid an open conflict with the Catholic Church. Bormann faithfully followed Hitler's instructions to postpone the confrontation with the churches until the end of the war. This was especially since the vast majority of the clerisy – Duke Galen included – had become almost brothers in arms in the 'defensive fight' against Bolshevism. Even after 1941, SS circles tried to disrupt the silent *modus vivendi* with the Catholic Church. This did not go so far, of course, as the Party Chancellery opposing the special rulings of church-political relations that had been inaugurated by Gauleiter Greiser in Warthegau – even if these were not carried over to the entire expanded Reich.<sup>17</sup> Despite its declared opposition, therefore, the regime's attitude to the Catholic Church was not well coordinated, and its attacks were locally determined. In addition, the structural incapacity of the system worked to set limits to its own radicalisation. This inconclusiveness of Hitler played a role in the attitude towards the Protestant churches; it contributed to the result that German Christians failed all along the line in their attempt to found a Protestant Imperial Church with clearly nationalistic and anti-Semitic features.<sup>18</sup>

Thus did National Socialism dodge an open confrontation with the Christian churches and religious groups, so long as these did not begin to get in the way in certain political areas – racial hygiene, euthanasia and persecution of the Jews. An attitude of regime loyalty predominated with the Church too. This gained concrete expression in its continuing to care for the souls of the military and in its theologically justifying the war against Russia. With the increasing radicalisation of the Party after 1943, however, tensions with the Catholic Church and the Protestant confessional Church also intensified. And the latter, for their part, had contacts in the resistance movement of the Twentieth of July.<sup>19</sup>

The secularisation thrust that had been promised by the regime, however – the expulsion of the churches from education, pastoral care and youth work – remained limited. Further, the number who left the churches dwindled

after 1938 until finally, the trend reversed and the churches regained their popularity. The Catholic Church secretly became an object of great admiration; and, as the Röver memorandum that arose from the Party Chancellery in 1942 impressively proves, the Party Chancellery of the late period tried to imitate its pastoral practice.<sup>20</sup> The contest between Party and the churches in public funerals and the like also belongs in this context.

Now, for the middle term, there cannot be any doubt that the National Socialist regime would have planned the complete control of, and if necessary the smashing of, the churches – following more its own power dynamic than a clear programme in doing so. The attempt gradually to eliminate the role of the churches, and to erode their social function through corresponding ones offered by the National Socialist People's Welfare and the National Socialist community houses, were also part of this increasing rivalry. The rivalry was also fed by the experience that church attendances clearly increased during the course of the war. That said: the attempts to provide an alternative to the churches' social occasions – baptisms, confirmations, weddings and burials as well as the religious festivals – failed miserably.

The strongest indication of a religion was the inclination of the SS to establish rituals and lifestyles that were analogous to religion, but the corresponding efforts of the order seem peculiarly esoteric in retrospect. As the experiment of Wewelsburg shows most strikingly, what was involved was ritualisation without serious substance; and it is difficult to see more than an arabesque of an exercise of power that was otherwise so lacking in demands in the elitist Germanic cult of Heinrich Himmler and its stylisation of the tradition of Heinrich the First.<sup>21</sup> To this extent, the ideological substance necessary to do much more than simulate a 'political religion' was lacking in National Socialism as such.

Possibly, things were different with regard to the regime's anti-Semitic goal, although the system discredited itself profoundly – even in the eyes of many of its sympathisers – with its implementation of the Holocaust. The anti-Semitic component of the National Socialist ideology entered into a close connection with the voluntaristic attitude and ended in the obsession to create racially homogeneous conditions through violence. In the final phase of the regime, this obsession assumed a broader scope and now included all potential opponents, not only the racially suspect ones. The lack of racial homogeneity was made responsible for the failure of a comprehensive bundling of the moral energies of the people – a bundling that would smash and ultimately conquer every conceivable resistance, if only total internal uniformity were attained. The struggles against the internal and external enemies complemented one another.<sup>22</sup>

As far as the stereotypes are concerned, National Socialist anti-Semitism and the race theory were no different from those of the popular movement; the polemic description of the Jewish opponent lacked all originality. Its world-historical influence despite this was due to the translation of anti-Jewish resentment into direct action. Certainly, not all sections of the

NSDAP and not even all members of the leadership class were driven primarily or decisively by anti-Semitic motives. Much more did a minority of extreme anti-Semites – with their support-base with Hitler – push their programme through under the specific systemic circumstances; and it took years of systematic, anti-Jewish indoctrination of the majority of the population to create the necessary public force for the anti-Semitic slogans.<sup>23</sup>

The vision of a racially homogeneous society was always accompanied by the idea – of a voluntaristic stamp – to attain the internal unity of the will of the nation through systematic education. In this context, one could almost speak of a racist ‘political religion’ of National Socialism in which a divinisation of the racially superior element was stipulated; and alongside that was a salvation myth that regarded liberation from the ‘Jewish yoke’, from ‘Jewish subversion’, from ‘Jewish foreign-determination’ as the task of history. This was no novum in the history of anti-Semitism. It was, however, taken to an extreme by National Socialism and driven *ad absurdum* with the Holocaust.

Yet the persecution of the Jews was the very least thing that brought the regime into open conflict with both confessions. The Party’s postulate of exclusivity with regard to the ‘leadership of the people’, an exclusivity that Bormann emphasised precisely with respect to the churches,<sup>24</sup> necessarily had to lead to confrontations. The concept of an alternative religion was not required for this, however, and it was correctly said that National Socialism was understood as being above all ‘non-religious’ *vis-à-vis* the churches.

With the Hitler cult, by contrast, a pseudo-religious element would be demonstrable. The ideological impulses moved the majority of ‘national comrades’, even if they did not belong to the NSDAP or its structures, to feel an unconditional loyalty towards the person of Hitler; such impulses were to be seen primarily in the nationalist conviction that, together with the attitudes of the authoritarian state, was exploited by the regime. The cult of the Führer, which was increasingly detached from the party and its representatives, was fed not the least by the equation of Hitler with the destiny of the nation as such – such was the aim of Goebbels’ propaganda. It becomes immediately apparent that psychoses of this kind neutralised the will to resistance and triggered the followers’ unconditional loyalty, especially in the context of the Bolshevik-Stalinist threat. The exculpation of the Führer at the expense of his governors represented a social-psychological venting of the need for national identity. It is not necessary to explain this psychological mechanism by drawing an analogy with religious attitudes.

In fact, the regime lacked sufficient ideological consistency to have squared off seriously against the Christian confessions. The details of internal politics show clearly enough that, although the National Socialist regime indeed claimed to be capable of eliminating the influence of the churches and ultimately of rendering them superfluous, it was in no way able to redeem this claim in reality. The resistance of the population in the crucifix

debate, to the introduction of the community school and the attacks on the clerisy had made this clear, even if the terror of the Gestapo won out in the end. Under the wartime conditions, the basic principle of avoiding unrest in the population took a clear priority over the anti-clerical strivings of individual National Socialist hotheads. On questions of persecution, there was from time to time a silent cooperation between the Gestapo and the Bishopric's General Vicariate, as has emerged from investigations about the Saarland.<sup>25</sup>

In general, the high estimation of the factor of ideological indoctrination that follows from application of the concept of 'political religion' would seem inadequate to reflect the relations in the Third Reich. The mass mobilisations in the early phase of the regime – those in which emotions of 'national elevation' still had an effect – continued during the stabilisation phase after 1935, only with restrictions. There was, to be sure, the staging of the Party Convention, but the spontaneous mobilisations subsided in favour of parades that were organised down to the smallest detail. To this extent, the climate of emotionalised, faithful masses grew into a mass loyalty only through equal doses of terror and indoctrination. After the first successes in Poland and France, it was transformed once again into spontaneous agreement. Following the Russian campaign, it progressively diminished, only to undergo a significant stabilisation under the influence of the bombing war.

The decisive objection to applying the theory of 'political religions' to National Socialism is that the theory attributes an ideological stringency and coherence to it that it – a merely simulative movement in every way – did not possess. Certainly, promotion of the 'National Socialist idea' – an empty formula that Hitler, Goebbels and Bormann liked to cite – served to generate a convergence of convictions and thereby to attain an unlimited mobilisation even as it blended away real interests. The 'National Socialist idea', however, was not well suited to ascending to the status of a 'political religion'. In this, it cannot be overlooked that this 'National Socialist idea' resembled a vampire: when held up to the sunlight, it melted. Likewise, National Socialism was as good as completely extinct as an ideological syndrome by May 1945. That the collapse entailed a certain socio-cultural purification, albeit one that lagged far behind the expectations of Moltke and Yorck, is the stuff for a different page.

## Notes

- 1 See Hans Maier, "Totalitarismus" und "Politische Religionen". Zwei Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs', Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus' und 'Politische Religionen'* (Paderborn, 1996), 233ff.
- 2 Compare Hans Mommsen, 'Der Kreisauer Kreis und die Neuordnung Deutschlands', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (1994), 366ff. See also Hans Mommsen, 'Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstands', Hans Mommsen, *Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Hamburg, 1991), 245f.

- 3 Compare Ernst Bloch, 'Der Faschismus als Erscheinungsform der Ungleichzeitigkeit', Ernst Nolte (ed.), *Theorien über den Faschismus* (Berlin, 1967), 182–205.
- 4 J. P. Stern, *Der Führer und das Volk* (Munich, 1978), 72f.
- 5 Benito Mussolini, *Der Faschismus* (Munich, 1933); I thank Hans Buchheim for this citation (compare Buchheim, 'Despotie, Ersatzreligion, Religionersatz', Maier, 'Totalitarismus', 263).
- 6 Hannah Arendt, *Ursprünge und Elemente totalitärer Herrschaft* (Frankfurt, 1955), 699.
- 7 S. Gerhard Paul, *Aufstand der Bilder. Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933* (Bonn, 1990); Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt, 1993).
- 8 A divergent position is represented by Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918–1945* (Paderborn, 1992), 299ff.
- 9 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, 1933), 365.
- 10 S. Werner Maser, *Der Sturm auf die Republik. Die Frühgeschichte der NSDAP*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1976), 26ff. Georg Franz-Willing, *Die Hitler-Bewegung* (Frankfurt, 1962), 105.
- 11 Compare Wolfgang Horn, *Führerideologie und parteiorganisation in der NSDAP (1919–1933)* (Düsseldorf, 1972), 76.
- 12 Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, vol. 1: *Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen, 1918–1934*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt, 1980), 97 and 119ff.
- 13 Adolf Hitler, Werner Jochmann (ed.) *Monologe aus dem Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims* (Hamburg, 1980), 84ff.
- 14 Compare H. G. Hockerts, 'Die nationalsozialistische Kirchenpolitik im neuen Licht der Goebbels-Tagebücher', *Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, supplement to *Das Parlament* (30 July 1983), 23–38.
- 15 Circular letter of the Deputy Führer to the gauleiters dated 15 March 1941 (BA Koblenz NS/18/151).
- 16 IMT XXV, Dokument 075-D, Inspector of Security Police to Main Office of Reich Security on 12 December 1941 as well as transcript of the decree of Bormann to Gauleiter Meyer of 6 June 1941 alongside memorandum no. 8/41 of 6 July 1941.
- 17 Compare Paul Gürtler, *Nationalsozialismus und evangelische Kirche im Warthegau. Trennung von Staat und Kirche im nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauungsstaat* (Göttingen, 1958).
- 18 Compare the writing of the Deputy Führer to Hermann Göring of 18 April 1940: 'The Führer has not only given up the plan of creating an Imperial Church that had once been pursued; he now rejects that plan entirely.' Compare Georg Denzler, V. Fabricius, *Kirchen im Dritten Reich. Christen und Nazis Hand in Hand?*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt, 1984), 165ff. See also K. Meier, *Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992).
- 19 Worth noting is the role of the Committee for Matters Concerning Orders. Compare here Antonia Leugers, *Georg Angermaier. 1912–1945. Katholischer Jurist zwischen nationalsozialistischem Regime und Kirche Lebensbild und Tagebücher* (Mainz, 1994).
- 20 IFZ, NSDAP Party Chancellery; compare Hans Mommsen, 'Die NSDAP als faschistische Partei', R. Saage (ed.), *Das Scheitern demokratischer Legitimationsmuster und die Zukunftsfähigkeit der Demokratie*, (Berlin, 1995).
- 21 Compare Karl Hüser, *Webelsburg 1933–1945. Kult- und Terrorstätte der SS. Eine Dokumentation*, 2nd edn (Paderborn, 1987).
- 22 Compare Hans Mommsen, 'The Dissolution of the Third Reich', Gerald D. Feldman (ed.), *May 1945. The End of the Second World War in Europe* (Berkeley CA, 1997).

- 23 Compare here the work of Dieter Obst, '*Reichskristallnacht*'. *Ursachen und Verlauf des antisemitischen Pogroms vom November 1938* (Frankfurt, 1991).
- 24 Compare Dieter Rebentisch and Karl Teppe (eds), *Verwaltung contra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers* (Göttingen, 1983), 23–32.
- 25 Compare Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Paul Gerhard, *Das zersplitterte Nein. Saarländer gegen Hitler (= Widerstand und Verweigerung im Saarland 1933–1945)* (Bonn, 1989). On the fundamental loyalty of the clergy in the war in the east, compare Gordon C. Zahn, *Die deutschen Katholiken und Hitlers Kriege* (Graz, 1965).



# 11 Concluding discussion

## Rudolf Lill, Villa Vigoni<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of my comparative study of Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, I hold the element of ‘political religions’ to be absolutely important for a refined knowledge of the subject. In the – predominantly social-historical – perspective of many colleagues since the 1970s, this aspect has not been seen; and flagrant misunderstandings arise here.

National Socialism and the consensus it formed in German society – above all, in the sectors that were already secular – can also be explained by National Socialism’s emergence as a nationalist, populist *Weltanschauung* and thus as a political religion. It made the pretence of communicating to each individual a comprehensive explanation of the meaning, not only of his own life, but of that of the nation and of history as well. Because National Socialism arose as a new and political religion – as is so often the case in the foundational phase of a religion having a fundamentalist claim to a monopoly – it had to become totalitarian. Moreover, it had ultimately to fight the religions that contradicted it – *in concreto*, Judaism and the Catholic confession – uncompromisingly; whereas it attempted to integrate the more nationally based Protestant confession into its own concept. The foundation and centre of this *Weltanschauung* was racism. On its basis was developed a new cult that attested to the religious claim of National Socialism above all others. Even the architecture of National Socialism consistently took the National Socialist awakening to new and unlimited heights of novelty.

Italian Fascism was completely different. Its decisive difference from National Socialism, perhaps, is that it did not make this kind of religious claim. Nor did it have racism as its foundation. It too referred to old myths (those of the Roman imperium and of a single Roman culture); by contrast to Rosenberg’s *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, however, these myths had a foundation that had been historically established. The political consequence of its relinquishment of a religion and its declared will to follow all Roman traditions was that Italian Fascism did not seek to oppose the churches; it arrived at an agreement with the ‘Roman’ Catholic Church instead. Yet the

consequence of precisely this relinquishment was that Fascism could make or assert no total claims upon the society and, in particular, upon the youth.

Among other things, therefore, the new kind of claim made by a political religion – or lack thereof – explains why the one regime was totalitarian in the full sense and the other paid at most lip-service to totalitarianism.

### **Philippe Burrin, Geneva**

I would like to raise some questions concerning the concept of political religion. Scepticism is always a good scientific method, and what I will present in the present case can also be traced back predominantly to my own uncertainty as to the question of relevance – if not of the concept itself, then of the expression that is used to describe it.

My first point arises from my feeling that implicitly different definitions of the word ‘religion’ are present in our discussion. What does this word mean when it is applied to phenomena like Fascism, Nazism and Communism?

One can understand it, first, in connection with Christianity. This occurs as soon as one lifts the motifs and themes that are present in the symbolic world of these political phenomena from the Christian heritage. Such a use is difficult to situate precisely between the poles of tactical imitation and unconscious or subconscious mental structuring; and it throws up even more problems of meaning insofar as these political phenomena understand themselves as anti-Christian and the Christian heritage as nothing but a part of their cultural surroundings.

In the second place, one can study the word ‘religion’ as though it related more to the concept of the religious than to a religion. In this case, we must choose between a phenomenological definition and a functional definition. Those who opt for a phenomenological definition hold fast to a certain number of criteria in characterising the religious experience. Yet these criteria, which must of course possess a heightened degree of generality, neglect certain features that one might hold to be critical – such criteria as the supernatural, for example, or reference to the beyond. For their part, those who prefer to use a functional definition emphasise that the political phenomena in question replace the traditional beliefs and fulfil the same cognitive, affective and normative functions that religion fulfilled in the past – an idea that sociologists like Pareto, Mosca, Le Bon, etc., already discussed with regard to socialism at the end of the nineteenth century. The conception of the transference of sacrality is the most banal form of such a functional definition. At the same time, it shows its limits insofar as it involves a demand that was, so to speak, never discussed or justified. Most of the time, everything takes place at the level of the vocabulary – one uses ‘religious’ in connection with a political phenomenon. If one asks what this sacred is and what its modes of its communication are, then these questions are left hanging.

Whether one adopts a phenomenological or a functional approach in these two cases, one distances oneself from Christianity, even though Christianity is the specific cultural terrain of Fascism and Communism. One neglects the possibility of recognising how resumption and change occur simultaneously in the context of new configurations of cultural themes that were derived from Christianity. One might say that I accord too much importance to the aspect of religion without sufficiently taking into account the fact that the formula 'political religion' seeks to designate the tension between religion and politics. In the same measure to which 'religion' is the substantive and politics is nothing but the qualificative element, this idea risks leading to confusion. And above all, it risks obscuring that which seems to me to be central: that one is speaking of regimes that are situated mainly in the political field and in an epoch of secularisation (the concepts of nature and history are the basis of their cultural identity). This risk holds even if, on the other hand, the concept possesses the advantage of directing one's attention to a continuity with the cultural world of the past.

My second point relates to the question as to whether we know what we want to talk about when we use this formula. Can we do so without taking recourse to the other ideas in its constellation?

If we use the idea of political religion to denote the organisation of collective life through a regime that is total in terms of both morality and politics, then there is obviously an overlap with another idea – that of totalitarianism. But would not the second idea allow us to specify the first more precisely? *Grosso modo*, totalitarianism emphasises the novelty and modernity of the apparatus and methods of domination by according an important place to terror, manipulation and control. Political religion throws up the question as to historical continuity and emphasises – so it seems to me – at least three dimensions that are captured only partially by the preceding concepts. These are (1) a dimension of the imposed 'discourse of truth', with all the myths, representations and symbols that constitute this discourse; (2) a dimension of ritual, of celebrations that are planned in order to yield agreement and to constitute a faith-community; (3) a dimension of religiosity, which becomes transparent in the relation to politics possessed by those portions of the population that are politically active or important to a certain degree.

The idea of political religion offers a useful point by which to access these aspects, which are underestimated – if not neglected – by other approaches. It might complement certain aspects that are emphasised by the concept of totalitarianism and might generate reflection where divergence or opposition exists. For example, the concept of political religion seems to place the phenomenon of terror – to the extent that the latter extends beyond the persecution of heretics and opponents – at the margin of interest. But on the other hand, it causes one to approach the genocide of Jews in a different manner and one that probably explains more. But is the expression 'political religion' indispensable as such? We have at our disposal conceptual tools

with fewer connotations: ideocracy (W. Gurian), charisma (M. Weber), political cult and liturgy, social fictions (B. Baczko). In my opinion, the question remains open.

To conclude: it seems to me that whatever our opinion on the more or less auspicious formula of 'political religion' may be, its content is certainly useful as a partial concept applied in conjunction with or as a parallel to other concepts. Again, it is necessary to hold rigorously to an ideal-typical perspective that avoids the illusion of essentialism. Thus, one must create an ideal type that one might then apply to the historical reality in order to ascertain deviations on the one hand and to place comparative criteria at our disposal on the other.

### Harald Seubert

First, I would like to offer it up for consideration that Eric Voegelin has been cited exclusively as the *locus classicus* of the question of 'political religions' here. Perhaps the conceptual spectrum would be meaningfully broadened if some aspects of Aron's conception of political religion – conceived independently of Voegelin's, in a review of Halévy's *L'ère des tyrannies* in 1939 – were also to come into view. The direction of Aron's thrust – to which Hans Maier referred in his introduction – has been decisively influenced by the Enlightenment critique of religion. Aron's concept does in fact bear systematic weaknesses, which could be attributed primarily to the circumstance that Aron did not attempt to clarify the concept of religion; against his own will, he remains with Durkheim's sociology of religion. Klaus-Georg Riegel has quite properly referred to these contradictions. Yet the Aronian concept seems to me not to have been done away with only with that.

The strength of Aron's concept of political religions lies – or so it appears to me – in the fact that its character is exclusively descriptive, not normative. Thus, it is very flexible when applied to different empirical findings. According to Aron, totalitarian systems exhibit the character of 'political religions' only in certain phases: in the Soviet Union around the years 1934–38, in the era of the 'great purges'. Indisputably, individual works of historical research should be enlisted in order to broaden this conceptual framework. (With Aron himself, one finds at best rudimentary attempts at such research). Yet the research could perhaps be combined more readily with Aron's conception than with the Voegelinian one – see here the considerations of Hans Mommsen. Aron's interpretation of political religion as the furthest extreme of an ideology might also answer the question concerning the connection between 'political religion' and 'ideology'. It might be this differentiation according to several levels that caused Aron – by contrast to Voegelin, by the way – to retain his concept of 'political religions' even in his very last publications.

On the discussion following Peter Ehlen's paper, I would like to permit myself a second, brief remark. The great significance of his contribution

seems to me to lie in its having laid bare the basic philosophical concern of Marx. Not only in his early writings but in his entire work, by the way, this concern to reconcile the inner tornness of the human being and the world is narrowly linked to the beginnings of speculative idealism. And he has contrasted it to a second, highly influential Promethean tendency that had likewise already been established for Marx himself – that of the *deus in materia*. This differentiating probe, which had been so carefully established in the lecture, disappeared repeatedly in the discussion: when Claus Bärsch, for example, found the genealogy of the Promethean tendency to self-divinisation, the construction of human ‘aseity’ in the entirety of modern philosophy on subjectivity. Yet here, one would do better to pay more careful attention to the basic forms. There is a difference, namely, between the constructs of a pure ‘I think’ – sketched in the transcendental perspective as a limit concept in the organisation of thought, the psycho-physical contamination of which is continually specifically reflected, or at least *can* be reflected – and ideologies of self-divinisation. If this distinction is blurred, then not only might the concept of ‘political religions’ unravel to the point of being unrecognisable, but the face of the tradition becomes amorphous as well. For ultimately, the difference cited might not be able to distinguish philosophical from ideological texts.

### **Gerd Koenen, Frankfurt**

Undoubtedly, we found in the various presentations yesterday an impressive phenomenology of parallels between religious expectations and types of action and the modes of self-portrayal and self-legitimation of the twentieth-century totalitarian movements and regimes. Certainly, the concept of ‘political religions’ offers stuff for reflection. Beyond this, however, the perspective is also suggestive. Parties and movements really begin to resemble churches in the end, or to be tantamount to them. Hans Mommsen made some emphatically sober remarks on this, remarks to the effect that the leaders of these movements by no means intended something of this kind. Certainly, they did not seek to establish a finished sketch of salvation in the world and to create a social organisation having a church-like structure and function for it. If something of that kind then arose, then it was at most behind the backs of the actors. Or such parallels were planted into National Socialism with a certain propagandistic ingenuity and consciousness.

I have analysed the leader cults in particular; it is in these that the para-religious character of the totalitarian mass movements actually came to a head. To be sure, there are fundamental differences here. In National Socialism, the leader was the one who created the movement in the first place; that is, the Führer is primary and the cult around his person is essential from the beginning. And this Führer who stands at the beginning then enlists all possible ways of leading the human being, right down to the organisation of the everyday routine. These forms might rely on Christian

rites; but they rely just as much – as I already said yesterday – on such things as the youth movement. This forced syncretism of National Socialism, its oft-described chameleon nature, was one of the reasons behind the success of this regime. Through it, the regime found those forms of emotion that were suited to it and in which it could move and express itself – except of course, that it did not express itself to those who had been excluded from the national community from the beginning on grounds of race or other grounds.

With Communism and the Bolshevik movement, it was entirely the other way around. It is authentically recorded that Lenin emphatically rejected any kind of divinisation – in particular, of his person; he had to be dead before he could be divinised in these cultic forms. But what actually happened at that time? The Party created an apotheosis of itself in the figure of Lenin. Following his death, not only did the city of St Petersburg have its name changed to Leningrad; not only were factories, kindergartens, etc., named after Lenin – all this there had already been previously to some extent. No, a dam broke with Lenin's death. At least one city of the realm and factories, kindergartens and so forth were placed at the feet of each leader of the Party – and these were men aged 35 or 40. Old cities that had existed for centuries were named after the leaders of a movement that had been half-way established in power for only four, five or six years. For this there is no historical precedent to my knowledge. The enormous arrogance of a party is expressed in this – a party that set out to form the entire country in its image and to set itself up as the model of a superior human being – 'of the super-man, if you will', as Trotsky put it. That is this Promethean element of which I spoke: arrogance to the utmost degree, which of course points to a series of basic tendencies of modernity that culminated at the beginning of the twentieth century.

I always seek to recreate the structures that motivate the actions of human beings in their concrete lifespan, in their 'chronotope'. The partly productive – but also partly problematic aspect of the concept of 'political religion' – seems to me to be the fact that all these twentieth-century movements appear as arranged on a continuum of many thousand years; that is, they emerge only as the metamorphoses of a single human history that continually writes itself. But to me, it would be more important to describe these concrete movements in their specific chronotopes and as the results of a profound historical breach in Europe, and more specifically, in certain European countries. The movements should be understood as a reaction to rapid secularisation, as a flight from the fear of the contingency of modern existence, and at the same time as the Promethean-like, exaggerated claim at the threshold of the twentieth century to be able to form a modern bureaucracy and modern economic organisation using the means of modern science.

Perhaps yet a final point. As I said, I have recently very intensively studied the German projections of Russia – above all, the effects that the Bolshevik

rebellion in Russia had on German observers of the most varying provenance. What is conspicuous here is that the totalitarian and terrorist aspects of the endeavour by no means solely repulsed, but also in many cases attracted. What was perceived in it was the expression of a will to go for everything. This kind of logic emerged above all in direct contact with the leading representatives of the Bolsheviks, who exerted a considerable aura as intellectuals in power over human beings. Arthur Hollitscher, for example, said that he went to Russia to find a new religion of humanity, but what he found was only a party after all. Thus he was disappointed in his genuinely religious expectations. But then he, the pacifist and humanist, was profoundly attracted by the figure of Dzierzynski. Such a cultivated man, he wrote, and with such a history of martyrological suffering, yet he takes it upon himself to assume the office of the head of the Tcheka; is he not actually a modern Francis of Assisi? Just as earlier, he had been – according to the legends – prepared to empty out the garbage bins of his fellow prisoners in the tsarist prisons, so does he now take upon himself the sacrifice of disposing of the human garbage of the old, exploitative society, to expedite it into the grave in order to purify and liberate the society.

This connects up once again with the point about human sacrifice as the actual *numinosum* of that which has been mentioned here. I also recall in this context Himmler's speech before the leaders of his stormtroopers – in 1943, I believe. It oozes with self-pity and, at the same time, with a perverse pride in having made the sacrifice – namely, in having liberated the Aryan race from its enemies. Here too, there is the pride in having jettisoned the human garbage from the world. And only future generations would know to be thankful for this sacrifice that his SS men had taken this upon themselves . . . . The 'sacrifice' consists not so much in the sacrifice of the enemy on the altar of a new religion; the 'victims' here are those who supposedly sacrifice themselves in that they do this ugly work that is supposed to be a final, earthly liberation. But actually, one can hardly imagine a greater contradiction to the profane, brutish butchering of the masses by SS stormtroopers or the NKVD formations than the religious human sacrifices of antiquity.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Mr Mommsen, let me recapitulate my impression of your present contribution. You showed at the end, *ad oculos*, that the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* has religious dimensions.

### **Hans Mommsen**

If I am said to have done that, then I ask that you forget it. For strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

That is not true. Hitler, at least, uses the title *Weltanschauung* to describe the programme of the NSDAP.

### **Hans Mommsen**

What is true is that I have never used it.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

What is important here is the argument surrounding your claim that the concept of ‘political religion’ is not suited to an assessment of National Socialism. It maintains that National Socialism is not a political religion.

To follow up on the conclusion of your contribution to the discussion, the connection between sacrifice and anti-Semitism, I respond: the racist anti-Semitism of the National Socialists is overgrown with religion. For Hitler, sacrifice is a criterion by which to determine the collective identities of the ‘Aryan’ and the ‘Jew’. On page 329 of *Mein Kampf* one reads that the Jew constitutes the ‘most powerful contrast to the Aryan’. The interesting thing for our purposes is that the ‘Jew’ – by contrast to the Aryan – is said not to possess either the ‘capacity for self-sacrifice’ or ‘religion’, either ‘faith in the beyond’ or ‘idealism’(page 335f.). And in the same context, the ‘capacity for self-sacrifice’ – thus, self-sacrifice, according to Hitler – is the source of the Aryan’s superiority (page 320f.) Thus Hitler argues using religion as the value and criterion by which to determine collective identity. In addition, I must now repeat that, according to Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg, Jews are the incarnation of evil. Thus, the anti-Semitism of the National Socialists – indisputably a fundamental characteristic of National Socialism – possesses a religious dimension. Corresponding to that, the same holds for the constitution of the collective identity of the German people. The so-called Führer cult – also a central feature of National Socialism – likewise possesses a religious dimension. All statements by Rudolf Hess, Julius Streicher, Joseph Goebbels and Baldur von Schirach about the qualities of Hitler can be subsumed precisely to Max Weber’s ideal type of the charismatic ruler. It was believed of Hitler, for example, that he was an intermediary between God and the German people; and Hitler believed that himself. This can be read in the speeches published by Domarus. Only Rosenberg was hesitant with regard to belief in Hitler’s charisma.

### **Hans Mommsen**

Bormann and others ...



### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

It can be demonstrated that most National Socialists believed that Hitler possessed supernatural qualities. Thus, three elements of the National Socialist ideology already have religious implications. And if I recall correctly, you are also of the opinion that National Socialist racism represents a divinisation of the nation. I cannot understand, therefore, why you do not come to the conclusion that National Socialism is a political religion if essential elements of the National Socialist ideology – Third Reich, nation, Führer and anti-Semitism – have religious implications and are interconnected by those implications.

Perhaps you find it so difficult to conceive of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* as a political religion because the topos of ‘political religion’ has not as yet been sufficiently defined. The ones responsible for providing a sufficient definition are those in political science who defend it. As for you, Mr Mommsen, I must accuse you of researching predominantly the history of events and attending far too little to ideological foundations, which are important because they are formative of action.

### **Hans Mommsen**

You mean the sources.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Yes, the sources. *Mein Kampf* or *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* are historical sources that must be analysed and interpreted. I now see myself to be compelled to submit a series of categories that will serve our comprehension of the materials and enable their classification as a ‘political religion’. This series might then provide the sufficient definition of ‘political religion’ that remains to be achieved. First, I would like to submit the following thesis: whoever fails to appreciate religion does not know politics, or at least not as long as people continue to interpret their existence in a religious way or to grow up in a tradition that is defined by religion. This follows already from the circumstance that political reality must always be constituted and – as Voegelin put it – is dependent on the consciousness of person, society and history. The problem of the constitution of collective identity poses itself precisely in modernity. (Whether or not it is reasonable to use the category of ‘identity’ to describe the constitution of collective identity or perception of social existence can be left an open question at present.) This means that, in modernity, the bond or the coherence of the entire society in which human beings interpret themselves as individuals must be found or invented. In order to determine whether a case of political religion is present, I suggest as a provisional criterion – not as a definition – the following: one can speak of political religion if statements about politics have

religious implications and statements about religion have political ones. Or, formulated in terms of the consciousness of society, if statements about collective identity have a religious implication and statements about religion have a collective implication – one that influences the people. A political religion is *not* present if a human being's belief and actions direct his life exclusively towards salvation in the hereafter. Likewise, piety, mercy, love and hope are *not* criteria of a political religion. That is, if statements or actions of piety or mercy are denied, it cannot be claimed on this basis alone that a political religion is involved. Equally, I would plead that we not identify political religion with political theology. The non-presence of a systematic theology offers us no reason to prevent us from attributing a particular perceptual pattern of human, society, history or world the character of a political religion. Of course, this does not suffice to define the relation of politics and religion in a political religion. For this, I am convinced that we must draw in a significant number of categories on various levels and mutually interconnect them. Level I is the categories of existence. Among these would number physio-material categories (concerning reproduction and economic-material relations) and physio-psycho categories (these involving both the passions and the forces, wrath, fear, anger, etc.). Among the categories of existence, I would also include spirituo-cognitive categories (soul, spirit, understanding, reason). On Level II would be the categories of knowledge (identity, difference, homogeneity, heterogeneity, causality, substance and time, for example). Of interest in politics is whether social existence is assessed using the categories of substance or identity or whether it is understood as being the mode of causality. Level III concerns the order of human being, society and history – society is the heading under which people, nation, ethnos and church should be subsumed. To this level belong the ruling and power processes, institutions, law, constitution and organisations (administration, party) as well as the paradigmata of political existence – such ethics or values as freedom and equality, for example. And now, I come to the level that is in my opinion the most important one: the one pertaining to the meaning of existence. Level IV can be subdivided into the classical themes of philosophy and the content of religions. Within the sphere of religion – and therefore of interest for the politology of religion – should be counted God, the sacred, salvation, saviour, sacrifice, evil and Satan. It can now be postulated that a case of political religion is present if a society's consciousness is shaped by a religious interpretation of existence. The decisive thing, in my opinion, is whether political actors plan their actions within the context of the various levels and whether faith enjoys the most important and authoritative significance. The question concerning the true religion or the truth of religion in the philosophic sense is not of interest for the analytical understanding of it; it is of interest, however, to the critique of the respective case. Above all, tools by which to register political phenomena must be worked out first of all. This I would like to emphasise here. For at many lectures and discussions on Hitler, Goebbels,

Rosenberg or Dietrich Eckart, I have repeatedly heard an objection that more or less states, ‘but what you present and cite here was not really intended. In other words, Hitler or Goebbels did not really believe that’. As a counter, I ask: why should Hitler, when dictating *Mein Kampf* in the Landsberg prison in 1924, or Goebbels, when writing his early diaries, have lied about their world-views? Whoever claims that Hitler or Goebbels consciously lied in presenting their central ideological statements bears the burden of proof.

I would also like to add that in my opinion you, Mr Mommsen, down-play the significance of Alfred Rosenberg too much. After all, Alfred Rosenberg was Dietrich Eckhart’s successor as chief editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. In 1934, Hitler charged him with leading and overseeing the entire education in matters of the intellect and world-view in addition to the education of the National Socialist movement. During the war, moreover, he received further important governing functions. This is why one cannot overestimate the elevation of Hitler.

### **Hans Mommsen**

You forget the borders to factual existence . . .

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Rosenberg’s *Mythus* had a large circulation. Besides this, we must consider that National Socialist ideology was not a closed system with dogmas that had been thoroughly worked out. What is decisive in my opinion is that the leading representatives of the NSDAP, even Julius Streicher, acted in accordance with their belief.

### **Hans Mommsen**

Just one statement on the tasks that were given to Rosenberg. Hitler’s delegation to him of education in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* of the NSDAP represented his escape from the embarrassing circumstance that Rosenberg and Ley were arguing bitterly over the leadership of culture. And then Hitler made the wise decision to give this title – which had no content of any kind – to Rosenberg. That is the sense of it.

### **Hans Maier**

This, therefore, is similar to Munich receiving the title ‘capital city of the movement’ at a time when the title no longer had any meaning because Berlin stood in the foreground. This was a consolation prize. This too is little known.

**Claus-Ekkehard Bärsh**

That is not exactly correct.

**Michael Ley, Vienna**

Mr Mommsen, you have provided two definitions of National Socialism *en passant*. First, you said that National Socialism was pure actionism. But National Socialism, of course, was not Dadaism; it was not pure actionism, but more. The second definition – here, I agree with you. You said that National Socialism was an extreme nationalism. I am entirely of your opinion, only an extreme nationalism is a political religion. One cannot understand European nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries without recognising its religious, in part apocalyptic, roots. And an extreme nationalism is of course extremely religious; it is an extreme political religion. Thus, I think that you contradict yourself here. And a second remark in terms of content: when you reproach the National Socialists and Hitler for not having opted for an exercise of totalitarian rule. . . .

**Hans Mommsen**

That was not a reproach.

**Michael Ley**

You ascertained it . . .

**Hans Mommsen**

Hitler did it thus in fact.

**Michael Ley**

The Nazis did it in the sense of charismatic rule. If you look up in Max Weber the routinisation of charismatic rule, it is clear that the charismatic leader – who has a revelation when he comes to power – must either come to an agreement with the pillars of government, or kill them. If he does not kill them, then he must reach an understanding with the pillars of government; otherwise, he cannot routinise his charisma and consolidate his rule. And this was the reason for his agreement with the Church, with the economy, with officialdom and with the military. This, then, was the non-option of the Nazis – their having backed away.

**Hans Mommsen**

Of Hitler, not of the Nazis.

### **Michael Ley**

Okay, of Hitler. This is a defining characteristic of charismatic rule and not – as you always say – of Hitler’s ‘absence of leadership’. This was my second point.

### **Hans Mommsen**

I have never said ‘absence of leadership’.

### **Michael Ley**

Good, then his ‘lack of leadership’. Second: on the question as to how religious National Socialism was, I would like to demonstrate only one point. Following the defeat at Stalingrad, when all the supply lines were urgently needed, the deportations to Auschwitz for destruction were increased dramatically. In the sense of governing politics, therefore, this was a completely irrational action: instead of sending people and war supplies to the east, increased numbers of people were sent to be gassed. Here you see what the priority of the Nazis was. That priority was not even to win the war; the priority was the destruction of Jews – this was much more important than winning the war. And if that is not a religion, then I do not know what a religion is supposed to mean.

Now for my final point: yesterday, you objected to Mr Bärsch that Hitler was of course not an intellectual who had read Nietzsche and Wagner and Hegel and everything. That is completely correct – only, you forget who helped make Hitler great. Hitler had a teacher, and this was Lanz von Liebenfels with his *Ostara* volumes. Indeed, he even went to Lanz in his Vienna years because he was missing two volumes of *Ostara* and he wanted to have a complete set. And in these *Ostara* volumes and in other publications by Lanz, you find a great part of that which you can read in *Mein Kampf*. The Aryanosophy that Lanz developed, a racist salvation doctrine set upon Christian, racist foundations – these were all ideas of Lanz von Liebenfels. And Hitler plagiarises them. This is why he prohibits Lanz’s writings following the march into Vienna in 1938, because nobody is allowed to discover that he plagiarised Lanz. With Lanz, then, Hitler finds all the ideas of Romanticism and the nation – everything we discuss in intellectual discourse – in a form that was comprehensible for him. This was a popularisation of the entire Romantic thought on the nation and of Christian-racist thought. If you have read Lanz and his works, then you know the source of a large portion of Hitler’s ideas.

### **Hans Mommsen**

You will permit an answer. You say that the charismatic leader must in fact attempt to integrate and avoid choosing options for this reason – this is certainly possible, but not necessary. But Hitler’s inclination not to opt

politically and instead to move within the visionary realm is specifically National Socialist. However, this should not be flogged to death: if I spoke of a dictator who was relatively indecisive, I did not mean an utter lack of leadership. Yet it is very characteristic that Hitler's avoidance of making decisions is related to this tendency to choose no option; this is symptomatic up to the end. Thus I have not represented it as you portray it, because I am also not of the view that Hitler – although he possessed these qualities – did not play a decisive role, at least as a veto power. And the question that we are discussing here – namely, at what points Hitler's veto power blocks the anti-clerical streams in the NSDAP – reveals itself precisely.

Further, very briefly: I have offered no definition of National Socialism here and thus feel myself to have been very misunderstood. For if I had, then it would have been somewhat more differentiated. I have only pointed out its differences from the most extreme nationalism of the bourgeois right and the national movement as well as the characteristic feature of Fascism: namely, this specific element of the decisionist will. And this you will hardly be able to dispute.

Finally: Lanz von Liebenfels. The more recent Hitler research, which has in part not yet been published, will show that this influence of Lanz von Liebenfels can in no way be maintained regarding the early Hitler of the Vienna days. And if Hitler then prohibited Lanz von Liebenfels from writing in 1938 – I had no knowledge at all of this – then I can only thank you for the argument. For in this case, he knew that under no circumstances could he let religious sectarians of this type write with the support of the Party. It is somewhat mistaken to believe that these ideas of Lanz von Liebenfels are genuine Hitlerian ideas, even if some resonances of them are present in *Mein Kampf*. There are . . .

### **Michael Ley**

He literally plagiarised it.

### **Hans Mommsen**

That may be, but despite this, it is true and I do not feel myself at all alone in this position. Almost no one represents the view that Hitler transformed the sectarian writings of Lanz von Liebenfels into NSDAP dogma – this is simply false. He avoided this, then. And one should also always read *Mein Kampf* in its entirety; then one will see that *everything* is there. It is by no means very clear. And this is perhaps the problem with the exegesis of Hitler's texts, leaving aside entirely the problem that we must also attend to the question of how the respective versions came into being.

### **Juan Linz, New Haven**

I believe that almost everything that I would have to say or would like to say has been said. And the Philippe Burrin's statement especially has clarified

many things. We must bear in mind that we are dealing with complex phenomena here: the National Socialistic ideology and rule on the one hand and the Leninist-Stalinist development in the Soviet Union on the other. This enormous complex of phenomena can be grasped by use of a variety of conceptual tools. Thus, it makes no sense to say that one should take totalitarianism or the authoritarian as one's approach, as one's foundation for understanding this regime, or that one should take the perspective of political religion or the concept of Fascism. All these approaches are valid and valuable and illuminate certain aspects of the phenomenon. This is why I would say that political religion, as a concept, a typology or a type does not exclude the concept of totalitarianism. Nor is it identical with it; rather, it captures only one portion of the phenomenon.

Fascism is a European phenomenon – perhaps a world-wide one, but with a clear central emphasis in Europe. It bears a certain resemblance to political religion and there are certain overlaps; but, of course, not all Fascisms possess the dimension of a political religion. I always say that it is like a tree upon which certain popular, Nazistic, anti-Semitic and other elements of German culture were grafted and then the branch became so strong that the entire tree was torn down along with it. Otherwise, we would perhaps still have Fascism around today as an ideological alternative.

If, therefore, one sees these three ideas, these three conceptual circles – the types of non-democratic regime, then Fascism, and then the problem area of political religion – there are of course several areas where these three concepts overlap. For example, one would have to test to what extent Voegelin's concept also applies to such other historical phenomena as one part of the era of the French Revolution. Or, one can also ask oneself to what extent national religions, religions in the traditional sense – something like Shintoism – would also have been political by virtue of their being tied to a certain people and nation. The Jewish faith as the faith of a people also has a certain political, community-forming power that other world religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism) do not possess in this form. Then, our sphere of problems would be broadened. Through our having restricted ourselves to two forms of political religion, we have perhaps misunderstood the problem a little.

A further form of the relation between religion and politics is the use of religion for political goals. In this context, Hans Mommsen's question gains great significance. In fact, the politician in power will want to limit and weaken the influence of the churches and of organised religion as much as possible. If he is not dependent upon religious voters, as is very probable in a democracy, then this is his goal. A position of absolute power yields a greater potential for conflict. Lenin, for example, partly renounced the activist godless movement in his letters to Gorki. Certainly, it is supported and is even a part of the regime, but the basic idea is that the Church has more or less rotted away; a few old women will remain, but if science and culture develop, then the people will no longer believe. One can wait for it.

Of course, this kind of attitude is not that of a founder of a political religion; and in this respect neither Lenin nor Hitler nor Stalin adopts this line. This is why they can either compromise with the churches or attack the churches, depending upon what seems to them to make sense in a certain situation. This is a very pragmatic political element.

What then remains of political religion? The concept has a certain value and I would like to find that value in the fact that, within secularised circles of the societies we are investigating – in the circles that move in the proximity of power and identify themselves with a political movement or the personality of a leader – there develop elements that we can best describe using religious terminology. There develops an emotional tone, an attitude, a rhetoric, etc., that is pseudo-religious or semi-religious. These elements are often only very loosely connected, but they still pose a danger to the old, authentically religious structures. But to create a religion on the basis of political power – thanks be to God – is not so easy. This is why the political religion has not become a religion.

Yet the desideratum that has already been addressed and the open questions from the realm of empirical research remain. How many people believed in these things? Which circles, which sector? The supreme elite? The regime's middle elite? The successors, the party members, the members of certain organisations within the regime? Did this faith undergo a crisis if the results were negative? Mr Mommsen has worked out very nicely just how ambivalent the relation of the people to the political religion was. It was attempted to integrate the sacraments of marriage, of baptism and of burial into the political religion, but this did not work; the resistance was too great. It was even too great in the Soviet Union, at least as far as burial was concerned.

The totalitarian regimes were in power, came into power, maintained themselves in power with elements that are very different from terror, and one of these elements was the imitation of religion. We must also ask ourselves to what extent democracy is a political form that is devoid of aesthetic content and can perhaps even be unaesthetic. Repeatedly, many intellectuals and artists have stressed that Fascism brought an aesthetic component into politics. This is perhaps something different from political religion – or at most a partial element of it. We should see the concept, with all its limitations, as a specific dimension of the political and of the struggle between politics and religion, state and religion, politics and state. In no case can the concept be thrown overboard solely because it seeks to structure highly complex empirical material and, in doing so, can be generalised to only a limited extent.

## **Hans Maier**

I am very grateful to Claus Bärsch for demonstrating to us the concept of political religion with an almost Voegelinian force. Yet I am also thankful to Hans Mommsen for having shown us the difficulties of working with this



concept. Both approaches are necessary, and this reminds me of old discussions that I had with Eric Voegelin in the Geschwister-Scholl Institute in the 1960s. In one discussion, he once dealt me following reproach: 'you are an historicist and a relativist'. These, to be sure, I am not, but I have always asked for the empirical foundations, of which Juan Linz has once again reminded us. I believe that one must approach the object from both sides.

What, now, is the structure of political religion? Here, I want to make a reference to Bonhoeffer. You all know the short memorandum, *Nach zehn Jahren*, the one he concealed behind a roof beam in his apartment in 1943; it was discovered only after the war. That was perhaps the most perceptive determination of the latitude and longitude of the resistance – above all, of the Christian resistance. Bonhoeffer did not assume a leading role in the resistance, but he was probably its most reflective thinker. And in many respects, he does see features of a counter-religion in this Brown Reich. Specifically, he sees it in three respects: the first is the enormous confusion of the concepts, the masquerade of evil. He reminds one in this context of Diabolos, the confounder. The confusion of concepts, the destruction of language – one can also find this with Hannah Arendt: the transformation of reality into fiction, a mad world created by words. In the process, the words of course lose their foundation in the social existence of human beings. Loyalty and faith dissolve, the language no longer serves to ensure one of reality, to establish connections between varying interests – thus, this total unleashing of the language, the erection of a kingdom of fictions. This Bonhoeffer describes using religious language.

The second is the Führer cult, the *pompa diaboli*. An ancient concept from early Christian times still lives on in the baptismal rite to this day: 'do you renounce the devil and all his pomp?' Bonhoeffer not only rediscovered this *pompa diaboli*, he also rediscovered a piece of Christian immunisation against it: the arcane discipline, also an early Christian tradition.

And the third: Bonhoeffer argues from a long Christian tradition maintaining the distinction – not the separation! – between church and state, between religion and politics. And he repeatedly cites Luther – he remained fundamentally a Lutheran right to the end. They want us to believe what they believe and think what they think, he says: this means to seize God down into the regiment. Thus, this overextension of politics into the realm of church and religion: this was very visible to him. And I remember a statement of Hans Mommsen's here. He said that National Socialism could not bear coexistence in the final analysis. And you have also conceded that, if it had gone further, then of course the confrontation between this 'political religion' and the traditional religions would have ended in a final struggle – as already alluded to in Warthegau and elsewhere.

Alfred Delp, whom you have mentioned, should also be named here; some members of the Kreisau circle should be named, but also even Goerdeler, who slowly works up again from a Kantian basis to religion.

I believe that one could also link the concept of political religion to contemporary ecclesiastical history. And that is what I wished to stimulate with this contribution.

### **Klaus-Georg Riegel**

I wished only to indicate that, in the Weberian sociology of rule, all characteristics or arguments that you have used to prove that the National Socialist religion did not and cannot exist are actually characteristic of charismatic rule. And specifically, they serve here as proof that there is such a thing as charismatic revelatory religion. During his lifetime, the leader who receives the revelation vehemently objects to its regimentation, to its recapitulation in a dogma, to its precise instruction, to its precise formulation by sacral specialists. This would mean a castration of his claim to charismatic leadership. Consistently, that which you have applied as your concept of religion is the religion that is preached and recapitulated in the institutional church: a religion that is systematic, internally consistent, regulated in instructions, in catechisms, etc. This means, therefore, that only if the movement phase is finished, if the leader is dead and an institutional church then forms from the routinisation of charisma, can we speak of religion. This means that you have actually applied all the criteria of the institutional church in order to prove that Hitler's charismatic rule and revelatory religion did not exist. That is a reversal of the argument.

### **Klaus Vondung**

We are actually doing two things here. First, we are testing the concept of political religion for its explanatory capabilities when applied to Communism and National Socialism. And here, I have understood Hans Mommsen's presentation as a testing of this concept from a more critical, sceptical perspective. But we are also doing something else, although I think that we are not always entirely aware of it: namely, we are discussing what the concept of political religions means in the first place. I have the impression that there are also somewhat differing understandings here. For example, I have the impression that Mr Bärsch's understanding of the concept of political religion is completely different from that of Mr Mommsen. And I think that some things remain to be clarified here. I would like to attempt that *en passant* by entering once again into a few points of Hans Mommsen's argument.

Mr Mommsen, one of your central arguments against the applicability of the concept of political religion to National Socialism was that there was actually no ideological substance that could have produced such a thing, that the ideological contents were paltry at base, that there was instead a strong hypostatisation of pure action. You have cited J. P. Stern with his *Kult des Willens*. I do not think that this is necessarily an argument against

the applicability of the concept of political religion. To return once again to Voegelin: in his interpretation of National Socialism as a political religion, Voegelin already characterised just this actionism as a special feature of the stimulation provided by the political religions. Right at the end of his book, he says: 'these religious stimuli lead to the intoxication of the deed'. In 1938, that is already remarkably perceptive, I find. And in fact, one could also almost speak of National Socialism as a religion of attitude instead of a religion of contents. Repeatedly, the importance of the attitude is emphasised. One can support this with countless citations. For example, Goebbels writes in his diary: 'it is not of so very much importance what we believe in, only that we believe'.

Now, this is of course only the one side. On the other side, there is indeed a core of faith-contents and you yourself, Mr Mommsen, also mentioned this at the end. I would not go so far as Claus Bärtsch and claim that you have contradicted yourself here, but I also heard you making certain concessions as to the applicability of the concept of political religion. Specifically, you admit a phenomenon that you have called the divinisation of race. Divinisation of race and salvation myth together with anti-Semitism and the Führer cult: these, I believe, are such central components that one could regard them to a certain extent as the faith-contents of the political religion of National Socialism. Your restriction stating that these are not specific to National Socialism is only relative, at base. If one turns to the precursor movements – mainly to nationalism – then one can of course also find elements of political religion there. But I believe that this too is no real refutation of the concept of political religion. At best it is merely a relativising objection against the exclusivity of National Socialism as political religion.

An entirely central objection in your argument against the applicability of the concept of political religion to National Socialism was that Hitler continually rejected metaphysical excesses and sectarians in popular religion – that he rejected Arthur Dinter and was also sceptical about Rosenberg. And this, I find, is an interesting argument in conjunction with the question of the meaning of the concept of political religion. At the end of my presentation, I referred to that important 1938 speech of Hitler, the one in which he said: what concerns us is not the mysterious ancestors, but clear knowledge and honest confession. The key word here is *confession*. What Hitler rejects is not the political religion, but religion in the sense of mystic religion – thus, what he finds with Dinter or Lanz.

In distinguishing the different applications of the concept, I also have the impression that you, Mr Mommsen, place the accent more strongly on the religious aspect in your understanding of the concept of political religion, whereas I would actually place it more strongly on the political one. If one accentuates the political, an entire series of phenomena – phenomena that are also indices of the political-religious – falls into place. When you said, for example, that there was no central steering committee: of course there was no central steering committee, but there was this cult. And it is also

interesting to see how the cult was steered. Albert Speer explained to me, for example, how the rituals of the Reich Party Convention were sanctioned. The responsibility rested with the individual sections; the Reichsarbeitsdienst held its rally, the political leaders on the Zeppelinwiese held theirs, the SA and SS at the Luitpoldhain held theirs. And in conclusion, there was the discussion of the situation. And Hitler now sanctioned, to a certain extent *ex cathedra* – this concept practically forces itself upon us here. He said that this and that have proven themselves, this form of the march-past has proven itself – we want to retain these for all time. With that, the celebration orders were canonised. Or he said that something did not function so well, that it must be done differently next year. Now this is the matter seen, so to speak, entirely from above. But we also find central steering measures on a lower level – to open up once again the question as to what influence Rosenberg exerted on the planning of the festivals. Towards the end of the war, the two brawlers, Rosenberg and Goebbels, did not perhaps work together in person; on the basis of their posts, however – the positions of Rosenberg and of the Head Office for Culture and Management of Reich Propaganda – they worked together very closely. The entire planning of celebrations was made practically from one mould – not by Rosenberg and Goebbels personally, but by the important subordinates (Karl Cerff and others) who were the main assistants here. To this extent, therefore, there was indeed no central committee, but there was still a kind of central steering of this type. And there was also the sanctioning of rituals, the religious effect of which was also sought by Hitler. Otherwise, he would not have marched along before his blood order in a re-enactment of the march on the Feldherrnhalle.

The question as to whether one places the accent more strongly on the religious or more strongly on the political with the concept of political religion has an even broader background. Jürgen Gebhardt referred to it yesterday. Namely, if we have the model of Christian religion all too much before our eyes when we use the concept of political religion and if we define the criteria that characterise it on the model of Christian religion, then we will be more sceptical that a thing like political religion is present. At most, we will arrive at concepts like ersatz religion or pseudo-religion. Yesterday, Gebhardt pleaded – and I think that it is an idea worth considering – for regarding the appearance of political religions much more as a genuine phenomenon in its own right. It should not be seen so much as a phenomenon that is parallel to or a substitute for Christianity. The application of Christian symbols that was pointed out by you, Mr Mommsen – one to which you ascribed a more propagandistic and manipulative function – comes into a different perspective here. That is, if people with a Christian socialisation within the cultural sphere of Germany want to express certain religious needs, wishes and hopes, they can at base do nothing other than fall back upon the vocabulary and symbols of Christianity. But this does not mean that we are faced here solely by an ersatz

function or the like. Rather, Christianity is the symbolic apparatus that stands at their disposal; it is the vocabulary they have at hand and the one they use. In my context, I mentioned this fact to Johst and Schumann.

### **Dietmar Klenke, Münster**

The basic gist of your lecture has not convinced me, Mr Mommsen: namely, your deep scepticism of the thesis that National Socialism was a kind of 'political religion'. First, I will take up your comment that this astonishing activism was a significant specificum of National Socialism. Now, what you have described as specific and perhaps even as original here was absolutely not typical of National Socialism. On the contrary, such activism possessed an ethical tradition that extended far back to that which we already encounter in the activist idealism of a national religious, pietistic stamp during the wars of liberation. For this fighting role model stood above all Theodor Körner, the martyr-poet of 1813. At first, Körner's model had upheld the national movement, and the state-bearing estates of the empire were connected seamlessly with it. What is important in our context is the indication that this inheritance remained vital up to the total collapse of National Socialist Germany. Without this model of the struggle that is powerful in deed and prepared for sacrifice – a model that was intensified into religious-cultic dimensions – the frightening capacity for endurance of both generations of German front-fighters in the twentieth century can hardly be explained. The manly ethic of the unity of word and deed that is captured by the slogan 'one man – one word' was omnipresent in German political culture: in countless songs, poems, celebratory speeches, school books, short stories and so on. At about 1900, this model was once again refreshed in the Bismarck cult. Körner and Bismarck were held to be decisive, god-fearing, death-defying men; not big on talk, they were, in brief, vigorous 'German men'. This world of ethical ideas gained an enormous influence over the masses and became the basic consensus of a highly differentiated system of clubs and associations. The world-view took on the quality of a religious axiom. Consequently, it was also able to become relevant for action; that is, it could be invoked at any time and emerged with full force precisely at the moment when a society – shattered by war and post-war confusion – longed for manly energy and a vigorous fighting spirit. The manly energy and vigorous fighting spirit that were the heart of the virtue of the traditional 'German man' certainly paved the way for the totalitarian unleashing of nationalism. Above all, it also encouraged the blurring of the boundaries between religion and politics. Not to be forgotten either was the elimination of all humane barriers in the choice of political means. These are elements, Mr Mommsen, that I believe have been short-changed in your characterisation of National Socialism.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the German national consciousness almost always drew a close connection between nation and god.

I cannot imagine that this world-view of countless Germans, one that was channelled by a national religion, suddenly disappeared during the era of National Socialism. The foundation of the idea of God did not necessarily have to be the biblical God. Beginning with the Wilhelmian era, the Germanic mythology of Felix Dahn, for example, experienced a Golden Age. The Germanic war god, Odin, for example, became an important ally of the 'German man'. In the Kyffhäuser myth too, the national-religious component resonates. For in Barbarossa, who supposedly had made the Germans the rulers of a universal Christian kingdom, the vigorous, power conscious and warlike emperor of the Middle Ages was honoured. In this mythological world, the one for whom the banned Barbarossa waited was no less than the national Messiah who was to bring national salvation to the Germans. The German national movement had already taken things a long way with its expectations of a national-religious salvation. What do I want to say with all this? In 1933, there was an iron core of ideologemes of the traditional, national religion – or, as far as I am concerned, they were ideological clichés that went unfiltered into the self-understanding of the National Socialists. The new power-holders did not need to exert themselves particularly to find ideologemes; they needed only to draw upon solid, mature traditions and build these into their radicalised image of the world. The specifics of the National Socialist ideology may have had their changing fortunes, but this hardly shook the foundation of their rule – a foundation that rested upon a core of nationalist ideologemes, which could in part look back upon a much older tradition.

In conclusion, Mr Mommsen, I would like to take up your thesis that Hitler's restraint in terms of church politics may have had to do with his having had no political-religious ambitions. This suspicion seems to me to be entirely implausible. A comparison with the history of the cultural struggle (*Kulturkampf*) will illuminate the source of my doubt. You know the view of modernisation theory: the view according to which the Catholic Church was fought over primarily because it was perceived – in the view of liberal modernisers – as backward, irrational and medieval. Yet I could present to you equally good fighting arguments of the liberal camp that were of a national-religious kind; indeed, one might characterise these as fantasies of national-religious omnipotence and of the annihilation of the transnational Catholic Church. It was argued here as follows: whoever does not subordinate himself to the holy community of the nation, which is based upon the divine will, is an enemy of the kingdom. This enemy must be fought, must be driven from the country or even annihilated in his existence as a citizen of the state. The history of the cultural struggle is rife with many such examples. The political lyricism of the national liberal camp in particular is distinguished by its remarkable, destructive nationalist energies directed against the so-called 'ultramontanes'. In my view, there is a certain continuity extending up to the Third Reich in this respect too. It is not at all conceivable why one should attribute to Hitler, with his prominent visions

of omnipotence, merely a tactical calculus in interpreting his restraint towards the churches. The cultural struggle has already shown how far even liberals let themselves be driven by their nationalistic convictions when repressive violence against the churches seemed to them to be opportune on grounds of power politics and tactics. I think that certain repressive patterns of National Socialism had precursors; the fanatical drive for unification despite competing world-views had a precedent. If there was in fact a deeply rooted continuity of national-religious attitudes, then it is hardly remarkable that the attribution of political guilt, the images of the enemy and the fundamental pattern of attempting to create meaning by means of the nation intensified, under the conditions of a disastrous national catastrophe in war, to become a political religion. The unleashing of political thought such that it assumed a fanatical and barbaric quality was in large measure a reflection of the merciless, unleashed situation of threat in the trenches, where, for four years, opponents defined by national membership abandoned themselves to mutual annihilation. I think that the significance of differentiated social roles and institutions, of the separation of religion and politics, can easily get lost in situations of extreme existential strain.

### **Helmut Juros, Warsaw**

I have two comments. Yesterday, Juan Linz asked which parts of the society were the bearers of the political religions and why some groups were susceptible or prepared to represent this political religion. Indirectly, in my opinion, he asked about the mutual relationship between the political religion and the religious religion. Today, Mr Mommsen has shown us that adherents of the religious religion – through their Christian churches – in part not only falsified the political religion as religion, but were also prepared to set up a religiously motivated political resistance. Among the representatives of the religious religion – thus, of the Christians – I think that we would have to distinguish and extract yet another particular group: namely, those religious believers who, for the sake of the purity of the religious sphere, were against a political resistance against National Socialism or Communism, as political religions. They hid themselves in the niches with the justification that inner religious religion – religious freedom, therefore – prohibited them from meddling in politics, from political struggle or resistance. They believed that National Socialism or Communism was the first to have made this clean form, this pure form of religiosity, a genuine internalisation of religion, possible for them. I believe that this particular group – one would have to have the research on political religion on hand, but I believe that this was an ideology in the DDR era as well. Many Catholics exonerated themselves from resistance; and, following unification, they then sought a disestablishment of the Church.

And a second comment: yesterday, Klaus Riegel posed a question he found to be fundamental – the question as to whether the crimes of

National Socialism and Communism were made possible solely by the political religions. Would these crimes also have been possible without the political religions? Is the political religion necessarily inhumane? I hold this question to be very important. The critique of totalitarianism as a political religion places in the foreground the abuse of the religious, the religious perversion. As an undesired consequence, however, it places the perversion of the ethical in the background. In understanding totalitarianism, I think that the inhumanity of National Socialism and Communism as anthropological error, as ethical untruth, must be more strongly emphasised. Perhaps this anthropological falsity and the ethical dimension of the concept of political religion would have to be emphasised more strongly. And in doing so, the degradation of the ethical and the decay or destruction of the political by the political religions would also have to be stressed.

### **Leonid Luks, Eichstätt**

Hans Mommsen has indicated that the National Socialist ideology was not codified to such a great extent as the Communist or Bolshevik one was. In fact, with the Bolshevik regime, a 'partocracy' was involved. There, the Party incorporated almost the entire state, and the ideology of course played the central role for the partocracy. For good reason, many Russian analysts describe the Bolshevik regime as an ideocracy. And ideocracy has a long tradition in Russian history. As we all know, the National Socialist regime entailed a double state. Alongside the Nazi party and the SS state, therefore, the old institutions that had been taken over from the former state continued to exist; but these old institutions – among them, of course, the Church – were continually corrupted and hollowed out by the National Socialist state. At base, the embrace of this traditional institution led to its suffocation. National Socialism created a world-view that competed with traditional Western (Christian) ideas, and it is not for nothing that the theologians describe Auschwitz as the second Fall.

Mr Mommsen stated that after 1939, the National Socialist leadership found itself in a certain sense on the defensive in its struggle against the churches or its attitude towards the Church. Church attendance increased. At the same time, however, the number of gassed Jews also increased. And this is why I wonder what this defensiveness actually means, if the Church and all its believers were not at all capable of halting this continual radicalisation of the National Socialist regime. What, therefore, does 'defensive' mean in this context?

### **Hans Mommsen**

Mr Klenke, you are running straight into my arms, insofar as this particular form of German nationalism had a central significance for National Socialism as the attitude that was to be mobilised and as ideological material.



Whereby I am now admittedly of the view that anti-Semitism was also part of it: namely, it was also latent in this nationalism and was also mobilised by it. You have certain difficulties, however, in stating what the ideological extras of National Socialism are compared to that which you very impressively portray as a continuous line extending from the Körner cult up to the National Socialist era. And it is correct that National Socialism absorbs all elements of the German nationalism of the nineteenth century. One need only look at a schoolbook or reader – everything is in there, nothing is missing except for the Jewish authors who are now excluded. And despite this, a new political formation is involved, and it is characterised not the least by decisionism. I have called it actionism; this could be debated and perhaps be interpreted more precisely. Characteristic of such actionism is the adaptability of political contexts in favour of the mere form. Everything has a prehistory, but here there is an additional novelty. And viewed ideologically, it seems to me to be somewhat characteristic that the Fichtian myth of the primordial German nation – that which is then absorbed in the ideas of 1914 – then rises up in 1918. The myth stamps the entire neo-conservative attitude and is instrumentalised by Goebbels, but is not really absorbed; and in the later National Socialist ideology – thus, in the greater German Reich of Himmler – it falls away completely. In terms of content, the peculiar quality of this nationalist stream is linked to German Catholicism and its religious elements; but according to my understanding of it, precisely this characteristic then begins to change. And let us speak, by the way, of the political religion of German nationalism. I claim only that it does not explain the specificity of National Socialism as a particularly destructive form.

Why did the German nationalists, those who represented the same nationalism, not come to power? If I define it as a political cult, as Klaus Vondung does, then I have no problem with this at all. I can therefore completely agree with all the points that you mention, except that I do not find your conclusion to be entirely convincing, because the central question consists in defining what constitutes the particular dynamite – and this does not rest solely with German nationalism.

### **Felix Dirsch, Munich**

I would like to make three comments. First: at the beginning of Hans Mommsen's lecture, on the difference between Fascism and National Socialism, you said that that is a difference between you and Professor Maier. I believe that a critical difference between the totalitarian regimes and the authoritarian ones exists precisely in the area of political religions. I know that this difference is somewhat problematic because the authoritarian systems also have many totalitarian elements. Yet precisely in connection with political religion, one must see the differences there were with the traditional – I will call them for now 'ideal-typical' – authoritarian systems,

but there was no attempt to found a new religion, new legitimising formulas. Instead, these authoritarian systems were very strongly anchored in traditional Catholic thought – even if only in certain forms. As Charles Maurras stated it: ‘Je suis catholique, je suis athée’. Certainly, Maier repeatedly mentions that Fascism also knew elements of political religion – the new calendar or the attempt to introduce a calendar. But I believe that those were elements that were to be seen only on the margins. Thus, the ‘authoritarian regimes’ were nonetheless supported very strongly – and this also distinguishes them from the totalitarian ones – by their basis of legitimacy in the traditional religion and churches.

The second point: I wanted to note something further about what Hans Maier said about Bonhoeffer. I believe that we have forgotten one aspect a little bit, one that is nonetheless important: namely, the perception of the phenomenon of political religion. If we begin only with this new change in the literature: you have named Bonhoeffer with his *pompa diaboli*, with the great masquerade of evil. One could also add others who noted this: Adorno speaks of the connection with bedazzlement. In this context, one would have to enter very deeply into the literature. At present, I am writing a little essay about Elias Canetti’s *Die Blendung*. The connection with Bonhoeffer and Adorno should be recognised in this work. Above all would have to be named *Doktor Faustus*, also Thomas Mann. And the most important author is probably Broch, *Die Verzauberung*. Here too, one can see how the protagonist that turns up in Broch – Marius Ratti – whirls up the entire social structure and creates a new reality. As you say, this reality is one that is to be understood not only through use of the traditional categories of historical science and empirical research. This, therefore, is something that goes beyond it. And I believe that the literary works – I have named here only a few – have depicted this in a very perceptive way.

Yet a third point: that which has also been a little bit short-changed, I find, is the relation between political religion and civil religion. For some decades now, the concept of ‘civil religion’ has again been discussed in the Western world. I recall here only Robert Bellah, and most recently in Germany, Hermann Lübbe. Civil religions are indeed elements of religion that are generally capable of agreement and generalisation; thus they overstep the sphere of confessional Christianity, also in politics. There are elements here that have a markedly functionalistic value – to the end, for example, of excessively elevating a certain community. This can also be seen in the serious elements of a civil religion – for example, in the swearing-in of American presidents. Likewise, the forms we have with the Basic Law – for example, ‘God’ in the preamble – are still very much part of the traditional Western form of religion. Yet they are elements of civil religion precisely because they overstep these boundaries. I think that National Socialism also intended a political religion understood in the sense of forms within the national community that are capable of engendering agreement. These forms, in the sense of the National Socialist concept, are capable of agreement

and universalisation; indeed, Hitler always said that the difference between the churches and National Socialism is the general difference that the churches are to be responsible for the other-worldly sphere whereas National Socialism is responsible for this world. In a certain sense, therefore, Hitler wanted – so I believe – a transcendence of reality; but he did not want one that would lead to the traditional other-worldliness of the Church. Instead, he wanted to surpass reality. Thus, in his ‘form of religion’, he sought to affix world-directed values that were then capable of general agreement within the context of the entire concept of National Socialism.

### **Hans Maier**

I wish in this context to mention two authors who were at our first conference in Munich last year. One can also discover them in the conference volume. These are Helmuth Kiesel, the Heidelberg professor of German studies who is investigating literature in the Third Reich, and – certainly known to everyone – Michael Rohrwasser in Berlin, author of *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten*. Here is the discovery of an area of literature that has been entirely submerged to this point – thus, Koestler, Glaser, Regler, Hans Sahl and the many others who had a Communist past and then emancipated themselves and whose work is characterised by this break and the attempt to cope with it. This is an important book. And Gerd Koenen is among us; he also works in this area. In fact, almost all of us have touched on this area of literature once already. In terms of methodology, it is always difficult to incorporate literature into our reflections; but sometimes the utopian sketches and the premonitions are so precise that historians absorb them only after some decades have passed. This is why I believe that one simply must incorporate this entire area if one is seeking to write the history of that century.

### **Michael Schäfer**

I wanted direct my questions primarily to Claus Bärsch and his last statements. Specifically: if I have understood you correctly, you have offered a definition of religion. I did not entirely understand this, but I gather that something which either provides or seeks to provide an answer to the meaning of human life – perhaps even, in brackets, of the human life as a whole – can be called a religion. This is how I have understood you. If one begins with this definition, then one must ask whether this was the case. Not only whether it was announced as such, was propagated, but also whether it was believed somewhere. Mr Linz has also pointed this out and has even reproached us for our failure in this respect. I believe that we cannot not in fact get around this question. Did anyone believe in it existentially or see the meaning of his life in that which one could call the National Socialist world-view? I don’t know whether this can be established. Truth be told,

I have great doubts as to whether it is possible to support this position empirically.

Let us take Goebbels as an example. If there was a believing Nazi, then Dr Joseph Goebbels was it. If you read his diaries, they are full of religious phraseology. But even with him, National Socialism does not really resonate in a way that one could say that he finds the meaning of his life in it. Entirely characteristic are the entries he makes in periods of illness. Each time he suffers a total collapse, we read: ‘to what end all this? All this has no meaning at all’, and so on. And this existential crisis usually ends only when he starts work again. This again speaks for the thesis of actionism that Hans Mommsen has presented.

Then you said: propaganda. What is propaganda? Propaganda is the proclamation of a belief, of a doctrine. If, therefore, a genuine meaning of life were conveyed, it would have had to be expressed in the propaganda. But what was propagandised? Rosenberg was not the head of propaganda, but once again Goebbels – and what was propagated here? Anti-Semitic resentment, if it was suitable at the time, staying the course in the war and things of that kind, but no genuine, comprehensive answer to the meaning of human life! This cannot have been the case.

Then two smaller remarks: you – and not only you, Mr Bärsch – always cite Voegelin as the authority on the concept of political religions. But you suppress the fact that Voegelin himself later distanced himself from the concept.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

I did not suppress that fact – I am aware of it.

### **Michael Schäfer**

That may be so, only no one has mentioned it.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

He also did not really distance himself from it. From what did he distance himself?

### **Michael Schäfer**

From the use of the word ‘religion’. In the *Autobiographical Reflections*, page 70, the general sense states: ‘I would now no longer use the expression, “religion”, because it is too imprecise and throws experiences in together with dogma’.

Then, yet another remark on the choice of sources – more precisely, on your selection of sources. You have cited from *Mein Kampf* to support

Hitler's claim to have founded a religion. But there are a large number of passages that state the opposite: something like in the diaries, where Goebbels reports his conversations with Hitler. Specifically, it is stated here that Hitler protested vehemently against being anything like a religious founder; he was a politician and beyond that nothing at all. If one believes that things can be proven solely by the invocation of brief citations of sources, then one should draw in all available passages and weigh precisely what can be proved and what cannot.

**Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

I never claimed that Hitler sought to be a religious founder.

**Michael Schäfer**

The problem becomes even greater if one says: he was one, but he actually did not want to be.

**Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

I did not claim that Hitler *was* a religious founder either.

**Hans Mommsen**

But you said that he felt himself to be a mediator between the nation and God.

**Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

That is something different from founding a religion.

**Michael Schäfer**

You would have to explain the difference to me more precisely.

**Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Jesus Christ was a religious founder – and one about whom, by the way, Hitler made *only* admiring statements. Aside from that, there is also the belief that a prophet or saint has the quality of mediating between the human being and God. But that Hitler objected to being the founder of a religion and Rosenberg still waited longingly for it, this speaks for their having taken the various objects of their belief seriously. In my opinion, it does matter for our purposes whether Hitler believed he was a religious founder or whether it was believed that he was a religious founder. In my

opinion, it suffices if Hitler himself deemed his National Socialist *Weltanschauung* to be a 'faith' (see *Mein Kampf*, 416, 418, 422) and if, in his opinion, the general characteristics of religion ('indestructibility of the soul, of the eternity of its existence, of the existence of a higher being', 417) agree with our religious tradition. The most important thing is that his adherents believed in his charismatic qualities. By the way, I did not wish to provide any definition of political religion at all, but merely to suggest categories that would help us understand the relation of politics and religion. From these, one might succeed in reaching a definition.

### **Mathias Behrens**

In terms of methodology, I approach the question more from the side of philosophy and theology. And with reference to what Juan Linz has said, the thought occurred to me that, on the one hand, it is indeed very correct first to bring the phenomena to light and to describe them. Yet I do not believe that the criteria and distinctions of the concepts then result from the description of the phenomena alone. A philosophical predisposition also comes into play in defining a concept like political religion. Certainly, we have seen in our one and a half days here that we repeatedly imply something different and thereby reach different conclusions. In this context, I would also like to comment on Klaus Vondung's last statement. You have broken down the expression 'political religion' and spoken of different emphases: whether one emphasises the political element or the religious one more heavily. But let us clarify to ourselves to what end we use the concept of political religion – namely, to gain a particular generalisation of totalitarian phenomena that are manifestly political. If this is so, then the specific element would be in the concept after all, and what matters with the actual conceptual definition is what one means by religion. In my view, we do not get around this question. In order to clarify whether a phenomenon that might be described as religion is in fact present, some criteria might be helpful. Somewhat unsystematically as yet, I suggest eight criteria. First: the idea of an attainable end-goal of history. Second: something connected with the first, the idea of a fulfilment of history in general. In this context, then, we find the expressions of salvation and redemption. With reference to the Christian religion, it should be distinguished here whether the salvation occurs through one's own power or through grace. To the extent that it occurs through one's own power, the question poses itself as to whether a Gnostic *Weltanschauung* is not at hand – whether Gnosis would not be a more genuine expression than religion.

### **Interruption**

Gnosis is also a religion.

### **Mathias Behrens**

This relationship would have to be determined in a differentiated way by an adequate concept of religion. I would like to follow here Philippe Burrin, who introduced religion as revelatory religion and thereby distinguished it from Gnosis. Third: the element of imminent expectation, of the fulfilment, the accomplishment, of history. A thermometer of the intensity of a political religion would be – as Hans Maier has already mentioned – knowledge of the opponent. Thus, in the context of totalitarianism, it would be the phenomenon of heresy. What is the connection of the imminent expectation to the development of the potential for violence? Fourth: there is the claim to interpret the whole, whether of history or of Being. The race or class is regarded as the *realissimum*. Thus it is questionable to what extent these categories are the whole, insofar as something particular is set as the absolute with regard to the whole of reality. Fifth: the elements of cult, liturgy, ritual, sacralisation of persons, locations, and symbols. Sixth: the creation of an existing – not merely fictive! – community of believers. Here, the starting point would be the perspective of ecclesiastical sociology, but this would by no means be the only method by which to define the concept of political religion. I had the impression here that your catalogue of categories places this very much in the foreground: the constitution of a collective identity. Seventh: the concept of election. Here, the Führer cult on the part of National Socialism would have to be cited. Eighth, and finally: the production and assertion of a truth-claim, of knowledge of the path as the sole path. Accompanying this – above all, with Communism – is the development of a system of faith. Here, the question that cannot be decided historically poses itself: the question as to whether National Socialism, if it had existed for longer, would have in fact developed such a system or not.

### **Hanns Leiner, Augsburg**

A series of concerns that are elementary for theologians has resonated in the last few statements. This is why I permit myself a few remarks. The question, was this really believed? Here, I must recall my own life-experience. And with very young people, I must say that it was often taken seriously and believed. As difficult as it seems today for the later generations to imagine it, as far away as it is, it was nonetheless a life-forming reality at that time. We did not know anything different. I was born in 1930; prior memory was extensively, hermetically sealed off from us. We grew up in this context. And indeed, proof that it was believed should also be seen in the fact that many young people went faithfully to their deaths for it. The life-sacrifices that National Socialism demanded on all sides – as far as something like young SS people were concerned – were often enthusiastically made. Not by all – there was that too.

In this context, I would also like recall the catalogue of songs we sang at that time. This has not been mentioned at all. I still have only scraps of ideas or memories, but one song – I believe it goes back to Rudolf Alexander Schröder – begins with the line ‘Holy Fatherland in danger, Holy Fatherland!’ And then the well known song of the flag: ‘Our flag flutters before us, our flag is the new era, our flag is more than death’. Youth can be indoctrinated in this respect.

### **Michael Schäfer**

Actually, I wanted explicitly to exclude the indoctrination of youth. To me, it concerned the question as to whether adult persons – in legal terms, those of the age of religious majority – regarded the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* as the meaning of their life and this in an existential sense.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

Whether Hitler, Rosenberg or anyone really believed or not, I am against immediately raising the problem of authenticity. According to my confession, by the way, this is ultimately decided at the Last Judgement.

### **Michael Schäfer**

Do you mean to say by that, that whether or not the concept of political religions can be used is to be decided at the Last Judgement?

### **Interruption**

Then let us wait until then!

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch**

That, of course, I do not mean. I wish only not to delegate to myself the decision as to the objective truth of other people’s religious experiences. What we can do is interpret certain statements and compare them with certain types of conduct – for example, with the preparedness to die or kill.

### **Hanns Leiner**

The more penetrating question is: how was it afterwards? Was it still to be ascertained as a faith afterwards? I can only say that it seems to have collapsed like a house of cards. But it was a kind of iconoclasm; for those involved, the collapse of a world, of a *Weltanschauung* occurred. I can recall the days of the spring of 1945, when this began to emerge. By then, it had gone so far that we could not imagine how things were supposed to go on.



We had, so to speak – thus I once formulated it dramatically – died as youths. That I later gained access to the Christian faith and the theological profession is also connected to this.

I liked Mathias Behrens' nine points very much. I would only make one remark on them here. Most of them are a very nice characterisation of that which one calls 'apocalyptic'. This is the apocalyptic world-view of the two ages of the world: that of this age of the world, which is condemned to collapse, and – following the great dramatic turn – the future age of the world, which is the world of God. This world holds perfection, fulfilment, salvation and everything positive in store – and in the religious context, God alone can bring about this total transformation. In the context of political religion, it is the human being and the movement or the party that brings about this transformation. Indeed, the deadly danger lies precisely in this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has already been mentioned on this point.

The phrase that also fits the context that you have drawn, Professor Maier, is 'masquerade of evil'. This phrase is very important to me. It means that the especially evil thing about evil is that it camouflages itself as the historically necessary and socially useful. But Bonhoeffer says that, for Christians in general, this is the characteristic feature of the diabolical and anti-Christian aspect of this movement. At the end, you noted that Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran. If you will permit, this gives me occasion briefly to present the conception of Luther's that lies behind it. For me personally, this conception will always remain illuminating for the theme that we have treated in these two days. I mean here his conception of God's two kingdoms.

In the long tradition of Western Christianity that had begun already with Augustine's *civitas terrena* and *civitas Dei* and continued through the medieval two swords, Luther's Reformation developed the conception of the two kingdoms. According to him, God rules the world with both hands: he exercises spiritual rule with his right hand and worldly rule with his left hand. Provisionally, we can equate the spiritual rule with the Church here and the worldly one with politics or state. And it is most important to him that God's two kinds of rule – this would be the translation of 'kingdoms' – do not intermingle so long as the world exists. The way he rules with the right hand is the way of the gospels, of the Sermon on the Mount, of salvation. It occurs *no vis sed verbo*; there can be no coercion here, only conviction, preaching, faith. The way he rules with the left hand serves to preserve the world – and it is always presumed here that the world is threatened by evil, by the diabolical. This, certainly, occurs by use of the sword – in the language of that time. Luther was not one of the dreamers who sought to remove the sword from the state's armoury; this is why he was also not a pacifist. Instead, he granted the right to a monopoly on power entirely to the state power, as one would say in a modern way.

## **Interruption**

The duty.

### **Hanns Leiner**

Yes. And what does that now have to do with our topic? Luther probably developed this concept on the basis of two sources. One was biblical statements: on the one hand, the requirement of the Sermon on the Mount for absolute non-violence – which was then taken literally by the dreamers – and on the other, Romans 13: ‘It is not for nothing that the authority does not bear the sword’. And, above all, there were the words of Jesus: ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’. What is Caesar’s and what is God’s are distinguished here; the idea of the two kingdoms is practically already alluded to.

Luther sees the great danger to be the melding or mingling of the two kingdoms. If the Church also wants to be a state, to exercise worldly power – which occurred repeatedly in the Middle Ages – then it becomes worldly, perverted. Then it does something that is actually not allowed it on the basis of the Word; then it betrays Christ.

But the reverse also occurs. If the state wants to be more than a state, if it wants at once to be ‘church’, religion, then the state also becomes perverted. Then that which we understand today as totalitarianism or worldly or political religion emerges. And I am grateful here to Klaus Vondung for having made it clear that it is not institutional religion that is involved here, but rather the replacement of religion by the state. The state sets itself up to a certain extent as an ersatz religion; it absorbs it, as it were, and introduces a religious dynamic, religious hope, religious ardour into an area where it does not belong. The state should be functional, sober, a ‘worldly thing’. Religion is something different, and the mingling of the two is dangerous in the extreme.

### **Hans Mommsen**

One of your remarks touches me personally, Mr Leiner, especially since you mentioned those born in the year 1930. I am in fact very sceptical about what you have said. It is indeed correct that many young people were seduced by the National Socialist ideology; but they were not seduced for long. Nor were all of them seduced by it – it was probably a minority. And I would point out that your line of argument might entail very apologetic conclusions for the concept of political religion; and I do not regard the conclusions to be accurate. This cannot be the case. Nor do I recall that those born in my own year of birth were indoctrinated beyond all limits. And only with very great difficulty will you be able to prove that those who went to their deaths in the years 1942–44 went à la Langemarck, out of the kind of religious patriotism that was to be found during World War I.

This now touches upon the heart of the problem. I am generally inclined to warn against applying the concept of political religion to National Socialism. This is due above all to the fact that that which the regime called 'Weltanschauung' had little substance. The comparative standpoint itself brings in an arbitrary enhancement of the status of the movement. The standpoint can then adequately explain neither the system's self-dissolution, nor its inner structure. Nor – and this is the decisive thing – can it explain the radicalisation mechanisms that then led to something like the Final Solution. Insofar as much of what is attributed to National Socialism as political-religious elements is in truth an ideologeme of the German nationalist tradition and not specific to National Socialism, I encounter certain difficulties here – especially if it is assumed to have been totalitarian from the beginning. Yet this too might have to be inquired into further. To this extent, National Socialism may have manipulated some of that which Mr Vondung has presented in only a particular, mobilising way.

You have made reference to the great significance of the concept of the victim in National Socialist propaganda. Much more could be said about this element, but it would not differ substantially from that which was produced by comparable nationalistic streams and the First World War. And to this extent, my question seeks to convey the specificities that explain to us why the aggregate state of the entire national population then changed rather fundamentally – and politically, not necessarily ideologically – in the late phase of the Weimar Republic. I would discourage you – and you too, by the way, Mr Behrens – from transposing back onto National Socialism, as it were, instruments provided by the categories of the Christian religion. There is always some truth in this, but Hitler did not declare himself to be a saviour. And the masses that followed Hitler probably had entirely different motives from those which application of the concept of political religion attempts to attribute to them.

I admit that I avoided fully defining the concept of political religion at first. For the time being, I have attempted only to ask: beyond having assumed and manipulated Christian elements (including those of an institutional nature), was National Socialism capable of developing a structure of its own? Here, I would answer that it was not – probably by contrast to Leninism and Marxism-Leninism – capable of doing so. And for an entire series of reasons that have not been stated here, it also made no kind of serious attempt at it. I will not try to contradict Messrs Vondung and Becker when they say that we have here an entire series of Christian ritualisations – or at least elements having a pseudo-religious aesthetic or literary form, even if on a demonstrably low level. It is only that I do not believe that these were the most relevant factors that contributed to the growing, destructive power of this regime.

I have left open the question as to whether it might be productive to connect anti-Semitism with political religion. In methodological terms, however, I have excluded this problem by stating that transposition of

eschatological motives and ideas of salvation to the complex of anti-Judaism is not a tendency that is specific to National Socialism. And I also gain no leverage here by which to explain the actual implementation of the Final Solution. For this was the new thing: the idea of exterminating the Jewish portion of the population had somehow existed since the nineteenth century. To this extent, some of the differences can be explained simply by the fact that my questions were directed solely at the National Socialist variant of Fascism.

The answer concerning my use of the concept of Fascism here was perhaps not entirely what I had in mind. The characteristic thing about Fascist movements and regimes is that they replace political content with political form. In brief, one could say that substantive goals are replaced by propaganda as an instrument of mobilisation – and that this instrument is assessed in terms of its success in mobilisation. The visionary final end is also a propagandistic one. And this is why it is so difficult to compare Fascist movements to religions, in that with the latter one would like think that the goal of salvation has more significance than mere mobilisation. My counter-offer would be to call National Socialism in part a *simulated* political religion; and with the concept of simulation, I would like to acknowledge the fact that National Socialism and the other Fascisms entailed derivative and imposed systems – and I am also permitted to invoke Juan Linz in doing so. Fascism involves anti-movements; these have no originally formative political function, as it were, but attempt parasitically to fulfil old goals – goals, as a rule, of a nationalistic, power-statist kind – with new means. This is why I would very much like to maintain the distinction between systems like Communism on the one hand and Fascism on the other, without doubting that the destructive effect of National Socialism was much greater than that of Italian fascism. And I would also maintain the distinction – Mr Maier – without wishing to draw upon myself the objection that I trivialise National Socialism, especially since I have never, ever doubted the criminal nature of the regime. And we must of course also bring this criminal nature into our concept, and this causes us great difficulties. Certainly, I can still understand the ‘Gulag Archipelago’ and the persecution of the Kulaks to have been part of the realisation of the Communists’ distant goal or as a creation of meaning within the Party. But I cannot understand the Final Solution in this way, for the Party members kept it secret from one another and their motivations have no justification – although the anti-Semitic impulse is undoubtedly present with those involved. For this reason, I would also encounter difficulties in attempting to incorporate the scheme of an historical end goal, for the most important thing is perhaps that the National Socialist individual should always be defined by his movement and not by the content that moves him.

To this extent, the political cult that interests you, Mr Vondung, is of course of secondary significance in my opinion. Whether you call it religious or whether it is perhaps defined as political-aesthetic manipulation is perhaps more a question of what one seeks to attain; and I would perhaps wish not to systematise it too strongly. Your references to Bonhoeffer and Goerdeler

are also very impressive, I think. But in neither case are analytical categories involved and to this extent they do not necessarily help us progress further in order adequately to describe the new kind of parasitic politics that we find specifically with National Socialism or – but this would have to be defined more precisely – in the decaying forms of Communism.

I hold the formulation of the destruction of politics or anti-politics that you, Professor Maier, have introduced to be an entirely convincing brief definition of the phenomenon. The destruction of politics – but this of course does not square entirely with a religious definition. If National Socialism is already a destruction of the internal world of politics or of the relationship between individuals as such, then it of course also implies the destruction of any possibility of religion. In this, there is no especial contradiction here at all. To Mr Bärtsch, I would like to say only this: we will certainly not agree on everything, but perhaps we should undertake an exegesis of Hitler together some day.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärtsch**

I agree.

### **Hans Mommsen**

But then we would need great quantities of alcohol in order to endure it.

### **Claus-Ekkehard Bärtsch**

No, I should endure it through my – imposed – education in a Bolshevistic system and with some Protestant discipline.

### **Hans Mommsen**

The difference is that this is a question of literary taste. I reject simply treating these texts – which are mostly not even written by Hitler himself, but are based upon loosely connected oral statements and always have the same pattern, in order to gain the acceptance of a particular auditorium – using the instruments with which one usually interprets systematic philosophy. I reject this; I believe that it leads to error. And this holds for most of the texts, if you make the – in my opinion – desperate attempt to interpret the internal structure of National Socialism using the philological methods that we have inherited from the historical school. I am very sceptical here. I concede that that which I have presented here is of a partial character. Yet I do not believe that it can be so easily shoved aside with arguments that it is internally contradictory.

I warn against it once again, because it resonates over and over: do not endow the so-called National Socialist *Weltanschauung* with some kind of

systematic meaning. I recall Hitler's memorandum of December 1932, one of which Goebbels reminds us again in 1945. From this, we can trace very nicely how Hitler speaks of loyalty to the 'National Socialist idea' in face of Strasser's demand for material politics – in this case, for a constructive entry into Schleicher's offer of a coalition because all else appears utopian on the basis of the election analyses. But the 'National Socialist idea' is an entirely characteristic empty formula. I have briefly described here the difficulties that are raised by applying a theorem like totalitarianism theory on the one hand or political religions on the other – leaving aside for now the different versions. The difficulties lie with the problem itself. But on the other hand I also have certain difficulties with reaching into the theological box 'à la Bonhoeffer' on the basis of aporia into which the interpreting historian slips, and seeking to solve everything by applying the concept of evil – a concept to which constructive analysis of the political process has no access. To this extent, this escape route does not satisfy me either.

### **Hans Maier**

I shall make only a few closing remarks. We know more or less precisely the details of how the great despotic regimes of this century looked: Russian Communism, Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. With National Socialism and Fascism, we know more than with Communism, the researching of which has only just begun. But what is the element that these phenomena have in common? What links them? These questions were taboo until 1989; today, they are no longer. Yet the answers that are given differ greatly. No common name by which to describe these regimes in a summary way has yet been developed. Totalitarianism and political religion are perhaps the best known concepts. We have thoroughly sketched the second concept here – some of us empirically, others through work on the concepts, as Mr Ehlen and Mr Behren have correctly reminded us. Agreement will likely arise only through a common effort undertaken by empiricists and theorists.

I might recall that a consensus has not yet been formed on the year 1989. The historians have not yet even developed a concept for 1989. Some say 'revolution', using such qualifiers as 'silent', 'velvet' or 'non-violent'. Others say 'turn', 'change', still others say 'transformation'. A conclusive, concise formula has not yet been attained. But I believe that it will require continual work at both ends of the craft of the history of philosophy in order that common concepts might be arrived at and pass into the textbooks, into political education and into the general consciousness of history and politics.

### **Note**

- 1 Rudolf Lill's contribution to the discussion was not delivered in person, but turned in in writing and brought in this form to the attention of the participants before the beginning of the conference.



## **Part II**

# **Contributions to research**





## 12 Alfred Rosenberg's *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* as political religion

The 'kingdom of heaven within us' as a foundation of German national racial identity

*Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch*

### On the relationship of politics and religion

All research on the history of National Socialism, as well as every assessment of the actions of the National Socialists, presupposes knowledge of the religious dimensions of the National Socialist world-view. The majority of discourses on almost all topics involving National Socialism are characterised by a sterile agitation. One of the causes of this is that the value of the question as to whether the National Socialist world-view possessed religious dimensions has scarcely been discussed – either within the public realm or in the research. Further: National Socialist ideology is reduced to racism, and this in turn to biologism. Yet this serves only the proliferative goal of continually raising problems without ever being able to solve them. Because the question as to whether National Socialism is a political religion or not is not even properly debated,<sup>1</sup> the immediate goal of this contribution is to document as concisely as possible the connection of politics and religion in Rosenberg's *Mythus*. (The complete and telling title of the work is *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung des seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit*.) All complexities that move beyond this<sup>2</sup> – complexities whose discourses would have to change if it were the case that National Socialism is a political religion – cannot be treated here.

It would also be beyond the bounds of this essay to discuss those questions of methodological theory that ask how a text like Rosenberg's *Mythus* can be – or not be – grasped hermeneutically. Stated in advance, we will attempt here to apply an approach that understands it as political religion. For this reason, we will proceed from the cognitive-cultural patterns of perception of the actors involved. The politically decisive element here is Rosenberg's consciousness of the nation. In the case of Rosenberg, the patterns of cognitive perception usually meet the categories of identity and substance.<sup>3</sup> The questions to be answered here, therefore, are the following: whether the *Mythus* involves the – still to be constituted – identity of the German people, whether a substance is assumed and whether this substance,

in turn, has a content that should be characterised as religious. Even if – this should not be concealed – the mutual interpenetration of religious and political statements in Rosenberg’s *Mythus* can be demonstrated, it still remains problematic as to whether it should already be defined as a political religion.<sup>4</sup> If Rosenberg’s *Mythus* is described as a ‘political religion’, one can, with good reasons, demand that the concept be defined. However, I am of the opinion that it makes sense in the case of National Socialism to choose ‘political religion’ as a term without setting out a definition of the concept in advance. With the descriptor ‘political religion’, we are informed of an evaluation attempted with respect to a certain problem. This then makes sense if the problem has hitherto been unknown to the general public and neglected by the scientific community. Further, it is defensible to attempt – and thus, justifiably, to require – a definition only after sufficient research in a particular area has been carried out. This is not the case here. Neither has a monograph on the National Socialist ideology as a whole been presented by representatives of the discipline of ‘political science’ nor do there exist attempts to create a scientific discipline that might earn the name of ‘politology of religion’ – comparable, for example, to the sociology of religion. Nonetheless, the criteria and characteristics that are suited to the treatment of a topic (political religion) ought to be stated in order to be able to reach conclusions about the material (Rosenberg’s *Mythus*) that is to be subsumed under it. For this reason, we ought first to attempt to provide a sufficient definition of our topos of ‘political religion’.

Political religion means that statements about religion have political implications and statements about politics have religious implications. In the context of the politology of religion, the approach that has been taken here, religion in the narrower sense should first be defined as articulating a faith in the difference between this world and the beyond. (This issue, of course, can be eminently debated.) The orientation of faith and conduct towards transcendence – *sub species mortis et aeternitatis* – precludes us from regarding a mere interpretation of existence as a political religion. In our tradition, a comprehensive perspective on the world – including on the human being and his conduct – can be described using the concept of religion if the existence of supra-earthly powers is held to be true. Above all, it can be described as religion if God and evil are believed to be effective powers in the world, and further, if the immortality of the soul, salvation, sacrifice, charisma and messianism are incorporated into the faith. In considering the occidental tradition, the politology of religion should for the time being count faith – by contrast to science and philosophy – as the essential characteristic when applying the modern concept of religion. For the complex of politics, it suffices in the context of this essay to determine the following as characteristic of politics: the order of human being and society (as a general concept for society, church, people and nation) with which not only power and governing processes but also social institutions (for example law, administration) are constituted, perceived and attributed a

value.<sup>5</sup> A religion shall be held to be political in the following cases: whenever the order of human and society is perceived and valued in terms of a religious interpretation of existence and whenever the religiously defined consciousness of society (for example, nation) includes criteria that guide conduct. The primacy of religion over politics – and with that, the provisionally justified use of the substantive, ‘religion’ – is always present if, through the religious interpretation of existence in the tension of transcendence and immanence, the goal of determining the consciousness of social-political order is directly fulfilled. Thus, a case of political religion is present if the consciousness of collective identity<sup>6</sup> – whether that of one’s own or of another collectivity – is articulated in terms of a dependent relation to such supernatural powers as God, divinity, cosmos or evil.

In this context, we need not enter into the historical and theoretical relationships of politics and religion – relationships usually understood as those of state and theology – or into the difference between the politology of religion and political theology.<sup>7</sup> However, I would still like to mention and follow up on one of the most difficult aspects of our religious tradition: the presence of God. If the presence of God – of which many forms are thinkable – is linked to the question of who are the people of God, then the step to the political is not a big one. Of interest in the sense of the politology of religion is: what form does the connection between God and human being or God and the people assume? If there is faith in a substantive connection – in the unity of divine and human nature, for example – then not only does a dispute as to who the people of God are arise, but the massive problem as to how the identity of other collectivities should be defined is also thrown up. Insofar as political science is oriented towards democracy, it cannot remain indifferent to the penetration of the mundane world – and thus, of the people – by God. In the modern democratic project, that which is to be understood by the *demos* must be socially acknowledged. Relevant in terms of power politics is the following: who possesses the concept of the people and how is that concept understood? As an aspect that is supra-ordinate to this contribution, the following discussion should be opened up: has the oft-quoted disenchantment of the world also applied to the construction of society? Or has the people itself – perhaps behind the backs of the democrats? – become an object of religious desire? Can tendencies to re-enchant the world by means of the sacralisation of the people be ascertained? However this may be, Adolf Hitler, in any case, sought to make a ‘confession of faith’<sup>8</sup> out of the tradition of a national image of the world.

Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) had been introduced to the National Socialist movement by Dietrich Eckart (1868–1924).<sup>9</sup> Himself a close, fatherly friend of Hitler, Eckart had been a national poet supported by Emperor Wilhelm II and the first editor-in-chief of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Without a doubt, Rosenberg can be counted as a representative of the National Socialist view of nation and world.<sup>10</sup> In 1919, he entered the

Party. From 1923 – previously already the right hand of Dietrich Eckart – until 1937, he was editor-in-chief of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. In 1927 he founded the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* and became speaker for the foreign ministry in the parliamentary party of the NSDAP. On 1 April 1933, Hitler called upon him to head the Office of External Affairs of the NSDAP. On 24 January 1932 he was given the task of ‘overseeing the general schooling and education of intellect and world-view’ for the National Socialist movement. In 1937 he was the first German to receive the National Socialist ‘German National Prize’. Rosenberg’s significance grew during the war: in 1940 he was made the ‘Führer’s Representative for the Safeguarding of Questions Concerning *Weltanschauung*’ and convinced Hitler to allow preparations for a Party university. Finally, he became ‘Imperial Minister of the Occupied East Zones’. In 1946 he was justly hanged. As for the significance of *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* to National Socialism: in light of Rosenberg’s functions, ideological differences with Hitler’s *Weltanschauung* or with other streams within the NSDAP are of no consequence. According to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* – which was first published in 1930 – is the most important source for researching the National Socialist conceptions of world, nation and person. If Rosenberg (1) holds faith, in contrast to knowledge of the difference between this world and the beyond, to be decisive in interpreting reality, and (2) the object of this belief is God on the one hand and evil on the other, then a central element of his interpretation of existence has a religious quality. In addition, if Rosenberg upholds a ‘positive Christianity’ in the sense of point 24 of the NSDAP programme and fills his understanding of God and evil with the content of the Nordic-Aryan race, then his *Mythos* has the character of a political religion. The *quaestio iuris* of this contribution, therefore, asks whether Rosenberg defined the qualities of the Nordic-Aryan race and the so-called Jewish ‘counter-race’<sup>11</sup> using some central categories of religion. The greatest obstacle preventing National Socialism from being understood as a political religion is the widespread assumption that the National Socialists’ racism was of an exclusively biologicistic character.

The investigation will be structured as follows: in order better to recognise the religious implications of National Socialist racism, we shall first portray the religious understanding as abstracted from the racism and the nationalism. Only after this artificial separation has been made will the religious implications of the race doctrine be demonstrated from the perspective of the constitution of collective identity.

### **Rosenberg’s general concept of religion and his understanding of genuine religion as abstracted from national character and race**

Spanning 712 pages, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* is divided into three books. It is equipped with both a very detailed table of contents (pp. vii–xxi)

and a brief index of subjects and names (pp. 702–12). The first book, *Das Ringen der Werte*, is structured in three parts: 'Race and race-soul', 'Love and honour', and 'Mystic and deed'. The second book bears the title *Das Wesen der germanischen Kunst*. Extremely helpful in facilitating a reconstruction of the speculative content of the *Mythus*, it has four sections: 'The racial ideal of beauty', 'Will and drive', 'Style of personality and style of functionality', and 'The aesthetic will'. The third book, *Das Kommende Reich*, has seven parts: 'Myth and type', 'The state and the sexes', 'Nation and state', 'Nordic-German law', 'German National Church and German National School', 'A new system of states', and – summarising the entire work once again – 'The unity of being'. Each individual part is then structured into either six or eight sections and is described precisely in the table of contents. Trained as an architect, Rosenberg was neither a philosopher nor a scientist – this judgement can be confirmed – but an extremely diligent autodidact. His greatest influence was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* was a popular book that enjoyed a broad distribution and recognition. In my view, both his unceasing praise of Kant<sup>12</sup> and his positive valuation of Jesus – which will be treated here later – in the *Mythus* can be traced back to the authority of Chamberlain.<sup>13</sup> Rosenberg also believes that he has correctly interpreted Schopenhauer, a thinker to whom he devotes intense attention in the *Mythus*.<sup>14</sup>

Yet his master thinker is the mystic, Meister Eckhart. Whether or not Rosenberg has correctly interpreted his mystagogues – Eckhart, Schopenhauer, Kant and Christ, as well as all persons he cites, acknowledges or condemns – is irrelevant for the moment. In the context of an immanent analysis, it is much more important to capture Rosenberg's self-understanding – which is the prerequisite of all evaluations anyway.

For the overwhelming part, the literature on Rosenberg is of a biographical or historical nature.<sup>15</sup> One scholar, however, the historian of religion Hans-P. Hasenfratz, has published a noteworthy essay entitled 'Die Religion Alfred Rosenbergs'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Hasenfratz uses a concept of religion with which we cannot agree. Hasenfratz assumes religion, philosophy, science and ideology to be systems of orientation. Science is said to be 'empirical' and 'non-valuing', philosophy 'non-empirical' and 'non-valuing', ideology 'valuing' but 'empirical'. Religion is distinct from these by virtue of its 'non-empirical, valuing character'. This concept of religion is too indefinite and far too much can be subsumed here under the heading of religion. Besides that, values in fact constitute empirical political materials and their elements; Rosenberg's values, for example, held sway over many people and therefore enjoyed an empirical status. Thus, it is necessary to test whether Rosenberg possessed a strictly non-empirical, valuing concept of religion or whether his definition of religion is anchored in the German European tradition. To repeat: the following portrayal divides religious and political statements in a way that does not correspond to Rosenberg's self-understanding and that was not systematically portrayed in the work – a work that is no

less torturous to read than it is laborious to describe. Pressured by Martin Rosenberg, he summarised his *Mythus* in 1938 and defined *Weltanschauung* and religion in his introduction. According to Rosenberg, religion is an aspect of *Weltanschauung*: 'A *Weltanschauung* comprehends religion, science and art. From these primordial activities of the human being, all other branches of action arise'.<sup>17</sup>

The critical question, one that is both traditional and modern, shall be asked immediately here: namely, what does Rosenberg think of religion or science? Rosenberg values science and religion in positive terms, if they are properly distinguished from one another: 'Science involves schemes, religion the will, art symbols. Each sphere has its own laws. . . . Nonetheless, true science will never be capable of dethroning authentic religion'.<sup>18</sup>

According to Rosenberg, 'faith' and 'knowledge' should 'not be opposed to one another at all'. This sounds very post-modern. Further, 'true religion' can neither be proved nor refuted by natural science.<sup>19</sup> Kant performed the service of having 'finally accomplished the separation of the authorities of religion and science'.<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg is critical of the 'flight of the nineteenth century into Darwinism and positivism'.<sup>21</sup> If, as Rosenberg believes, 'there is no unconditional science, but only science with preconditions',<sup>22</sup> then it must be asked whether authentic religion is one of the preconditions of the political. According to Rosenberg, 'communities are preserved as real, as an authentic depiction of an internal element, only through voluntary faith'.<sup>23</sup> But what ought to be believed in, according to Rosenberg? And what does he understand by religion?

Religion means: the psychic bond of a human being or nation to a divine thing that stands above this life. Religion, therefore, is a component of one's general world-view. With faith in God or the divinity and in providence, a confession is entailed. This confession is an essential component of religion.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Rosenberg defines religion as a tension between immanence and transcendence. 'World' is not merely life; the divine – the divinity, providence, hence God – is also part of the world, one that stands above life. Religion is also defined in a traditional way, insofar as the 'bond to God' follows from 'faith'. Not to be overlooked – and something to which we will return – is the bond of a collectivity, of the nation, to a supernatural power. Corresponding to the 'psychic bond of a human being' to God is the belief in the immortality of the soul as an essential characteristic of religion. This is emphasised repeatedly in the *Mythus*.<sup>25</sup> And in its recapitulation, the so-called 'Weltanschauliche Theses', immortality is portrayed in the following way:

Just as nature has given every creature those capacities that are necessary to attain a goal that is possible for it, so do we also believe that the belief in immortality of some kind represents a human capacity to attain a goal that has only been intuited.<sup>26</sup>

According to Rosenberg, faith in the 'eternal personality'<sup>27</sup> as a 'unit having no end'<sup>28</sup> does not contradict the theory of knowledge. '[T]he idea of the immortal personality is a psychic poem – a flight of religious imagination that poses no contradiction to even the strictest theory of knowledge'.<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg's affirmative use of the adjective 'metaphysical' speaks for the difference assumed between being and the ground of being – although neither the term 'metaphysics' nor the philosophical aim of metaphysics are taken up here.<sup>30</sup> Yet he postulates a connection between the 'metaphysical being that dwells within us'<sup>31</sup> and both the 'desire' to leave the 'chains of the earth for an unknown eternal'<sup>32</sup> and the striving for the 'infinite'.<sup>33</sup>

Although Rosenberg thinks within the tension of this world and the beyond, he emphatically rejects the claim that the human being should live 'in the orbit of an absolute, distant, governing God'.<sup>34</sup> This leads to the following confession:

Today, the church's Yahweh is as dead as Wotan was 1,500 years ago. In attaining philosophical consciousness, however, the Nordic spirit then succeeded in Immanuel Kant, whose crucial achievement was finally to separate the authorities of religion and of science. Religion pertains solely to the 'kingdom of heaven in us', genuine science solely to mechanics, physics, chemistry, biology.<sup>35</sup>

Although Rosenberg rejects Judaeo-Christian monotheism,<sup>36</sup> he is not a neo-pagan.<sup>37</sup> Rosenberg does not believe in the pure transcendence of God. He does not anticipate the kingdom of God only in the future – it is not strictly transcendent but dwells within the human being already; thus, it is immanentised. For Rosenberg, the source and measure of this understanding of religion is the mysticism of Meister Eckhart:

It is 600 years ago since the greatest apostle of the Nordic West gave us the gift of our religion, set a rich life upon detoxifying our being and becoming, upon overcoming the Syrian dogma that makes slaves of both body and soul and on awakening God in our own breasts – the 'kingdom of God within us'.<sup>38</sup>

For Rosenberg, therefore, God within and the kingdom of heaven within belong together. Rosenberg does not believe in the sheer transcendence of God. Thus, the specificum of this religion rests with its immanentisation of God and His kingdom. According to Rosenberg, Meister Eckhart's mysticism is true religion because the true character of the soul is supposedly found there. Rosenberg devotes an entire chapter, interspersed with long citations, to the Dominican from Thuringen.<sup>39</sup> Meister Eckhart, thus Rosenberg: 'discovers a purely psychic power and feels that his soul represents a power-centre to which absolutely nothing can be compared'.<sup>40</sup> For Rosenberg,



God is not dead, but lives within the soul. Meister Eckhart is said to have taught that ‘the soul is based upon becoming one with God’.<sup>41</sup> The Catholic and Protestant theory of grace is rejected in favour of the argument that ‘Jesus, unquestioningly, prized his identity with God as the salvation and goal’.<sup>42</sup>

Mysticism is not ‘surrender of oneself to another’, for this perspective arises from the ‘seemingly ineradicable attitude that I and God are of different natures’.<sup>43</sup> This heightening of the immanentisation of God in the soul is repeated. Recalling that Jesus spoke ‘from the kingdom of heaven within us’, Rosenberg rejects the ‘scholastic doctrine’ of *‘annalogia entis’*.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, the mere likeness of God and human being does not suffice for him; the relationship between human being and God is one of identity. Faith in the ‘soul’s identity with God’<sup>45</sup> is the alpha and omega of the purely religious element of Rosenberg’s religion – a religion which is in itself political. And as we shall see, evil is not lacking in it either.

Rosenberg is convinced that there is a ‘primordial metaphysical law of all being and becoming’,<sup>46</sup> namely: the ‘polarity of both all phenomena and of all ideas’.<sup>47</sup> This law also reveals itself ‘in religious terms: as divine and satanic’.<sup>48</sup> This is why Rosenberg rejects religions that attempt to ‘explain away the Satanic itself’.<sup>49</sup> In this respect, his model is the ancient Persian religion.<sup>50</sup> Here, an ‘enemy’,<sup>51</sup> ‘evil’,<sup>52</sup> opposes the eternal ‘God of light’<sup>53</sup> in the struggle for ‘rule of the world’. The polar nature of the divine and satanic powers is evinced in an historical struggle: ‘the great cosmic drama is played out in a struggle between light and darkness that endures for many ages of the world’.<sup>54</sup> But in Rosenberg’s historical consciousness, the struggle between the powers of light and of darkness does not endure eternally. The ‘world saviour’ comes and the ‘drama must, of course, reach its climax with victory’.<sup>55</sup> The polarity between divine and satanic phenomena thereby ends; Rosenberg also believes in a salvation that will occur in the future.

How is this understanding of religion, which is intentionally detached here from race and nation, to be classified in terms of the history and science of religion? This question can be left for the time being.<sup>56</sup> It is striking that, despite the title, Rosenberg attempts to explain what he understands by ‘myth’ only once. This is introduced in a section describing the outstanding significance of dreams.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, Rosenberg poses the question, ‘what is a myth?’<sup>58</sup> Yet his extremely thin definition states only that myth is an ‘intangible summation of all directions of the ego, the nation, a community in general’.<sup>59</sup> And with the ‘summation of all directions’ of a ‘nation’, we have reached the theme of collective identity.

### **The religious implication of collective identity: the ‘identity with God’ of the Aryan-Nordic ‘soul’ vs. the ‘satanic nature’ of the Jewish ‘counter-race’**

Rosenberg hopes for a ‘German religious movement that will develop into a national church’.<sup>60</sup> Although he is convinced that a ‘new religion’ is necessary,<sup>61</sup>

he believes that 'a genuine genius, one who reveals the myth and educates us in its type, has not yet been granted us'.<sup>62</sup> Yet he sees himself to have the 'duty to render preparatory work' and to be capable 'of sounding out likely representations'.<sup>63</sup> The perspective of the politology of religion used in the following section will help us reduce the daunting complexity of the entire work to the answering of the following questions: first, whether the *Mythus* makes an attempt to define collective identity, and second, whether the configuration of God-Satan is contained in the definition.

Rosenberg describes the intention of his work to the effect that 'it involves the chiselling out of spiritual types – that is, the becoming self-conscious of seeking human beings – and an awakening of a feeling for value and a steeling of the character's resistance to all hostile temptations'.<sup>64</sup> Hereby, he seeks 'to show the preconditions of a universal rebirth itself'.<sup>65</sup> A 'genuine rebirth' is a 'central experience' – namely, of the 'soul'.<sup>66</sup> But with that, the theme of his religion has been named. That it attempts primarily to establish a collective identity was stated already in the introduction.

At the beginning of the *Mythus*, it is stated that the desire for a 'Nordic-German rebirth' is a 'dream worthy of being taught and lived'. Thus are the two complexes that are relevant to our topic of the consciousness of society already connected. 'And this experience and this life, this alone' – thus he continues – 'is a distant echo of an intuited eternity, the secret mission to this world into which we were placed in order to become what we are'.<sup>67</sup> The notions that interest us here are the following: (1) The rebirth of the German is experienced with the agreement of a supernatural, eternal world – thus, within the tension between this world and the next; and (2) The process involves becoming that which one already is in oneself.

What must now be depicted is how, concretely, the goal and origin of the process are explained. In describing the myth's function at the end of the work, Rosenberg explains:

this old-new myth drives and enriches millions of human souls already. With a thousand thoughts, it says today that we would not have been fulfilled in 1800, but that, with heightened consciousness and flooding will, we will want to become ourselves – 'one with ourselves', as Meister Eckehart strove to become – for the first time as an '*entire nation*'.<sup>68</sup>

The religious implication is clearly specified: myth as mysticism. Just as the content of mysticism is the self and its soul, the nation, according to Rosenberg, will 'be one with itself'. The self of the nation is not understood in a pluralistic sense; unity with itself pertains to the nation as a whole. In the formulation, 'one with oneself', the consciousness of society could not be more consistently described, nor could the political goal of the identity of the nation be more consistently promoted. In addition, the affirmative use of the substantive along with the prefix 'self' attests to the significance

of sameness as an element of identity. The aforementioned ‘becoming self-conscious’,<sup>69</sup> ‘self-consciousness’,<sup>70</sup> ‘self-determination’,<sup>71</sup> and ‘self-feeling’<sup>72</sup> are prerequisites for ‘self-realisation’,<sup>73</sup> ‘self-development’,<sup>74</sup> and ‘self-fulfilment’.<sup>75</sup> If it is substantialised, then the conception of identity described here is radical. Further: if the supposed substance has a religious content, then it is political religion.

According to Rosenberg, there is a mutual influence between ‘personality and race’.<sup>76</sup> All activity by the Germans ought to be ‘in the service’ of the ‘race-bound national character’.<sup>77</sup> Definitive of the relationship between soul, national character and race are the following components of the ‘life-regulative structure’: (1) race-soul, (2) national character, (3) personality, (4) cultural circle. ‘We envisage here not a step-ladder running from top to bottom, but a pulsating circulation’.<sup>78</sup>

Rosenberg’s race doctrine is contained in the following sentence:

The race-soul is not tangible and is nonetheless portrayed in the blood-bound national character, crowned by and bundled allegorically in the great personalities, which generate – through their creative influence – a cultural circle that is borne in turn by the race and race-soul.

The intangible – hence immaterial – race-soul is concretely ‘represented’ in the ‘blood-bound national character’ or it is ‘bundled together’ in the creative influence of the ‘great personality’. Thus does the ‘circulation’ of race and race-soul begin: ‘the “exclusionary wealth” of the national character’, Rosenberg continues, ‘is hereby led back organically to its primordial ground in the blood-soul’.<sup>79</sup> If blood and soul are the ‘primordial grounds’ that bring into being national character and personality, then identity – namely, to be ‘one with oneself’ – is conceived in terms of the category of substance. Now, finally, Rosenberg’s concept of race ought to be specified and it should be tested as to whether God and soul are significant to his race doctrine.

Rosenberg conceives of race in terms of a mutual dependency of within and without, whereby race is – merely – the outside of soul:

But soul means race seen from the inside. And conversely, race is the outside of a soul. To awaken the race-soul to life means to recognise its climax and to allocate its organic position . . . in other values: in state, art and religion.<sup>80</sup>

Although we learn little about the blood in the *Mythus*, Rosenberg holds forth on nation, race and soul often and intensely: ‘each race has its soul, each soul its race, its own inner and outer architectonic, its characteristic form of appearance and gesture of style, a relationship between the powers of will and of reason that is entirely its own’.<sup>81</sup>

'The life of a race, of a people', is an 'activity of the soul'.<sup>82</sup> The 'concepts of nationhood and racehood' are 'the expression of a certain soulhood'.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the specific feature of Rosenberg's understanding of race is the fact that the soul is composed by race. Race is a mega-psyche. If Rosenberg were to justify the connection of soul, nation and race by using the terms of natural science or philosophy, then an extremely difficult or contradictory conception – if anything at all – would be expected. This, however, is not the case:

The life of a race, of a people, is not a philosophy that develops logically. Nor is it a process that occurs in terms of natural laws; rather, it is the formation of a mystical synthesis, of a psychic activity that neither explains in terms of conclusions of reason nor can be made understandable by demonstrations of cause and effect.<sup>84</sup>

In order to discover the consistency with which he develops his conviction that the life of a race and nation is the 'formation of a mystical synthesis', we must draw in the chapter, 'Mysticism and Deed'. Directly preceding this, 'the little psychic spark'<sup>85</sup> is transposed upon the mega-psyche. 'The Nordic West states that ego and God are psychic polarities; every unification that is accomplished is an act of creation'.<sup>86</sup> Rosenberg cites the passage in which Meister Eckhart describes how God is born in the soul.<sup>87</sup> For Rosenberg, the self-realisation of this soul is 'Nordic self-realisation'.<sup>88</sup> Nordic self-realisation consists in the movement of the soul towards God and from God: 'the genuine Nordic soul is constantly on its flight "toward God" and "from God". Its "peace in God" is at once "peace within itself"'.<sup>89</sup> The 'soul's identity with God'<sup>90</sup> applies solely to the Aryan-Nordic soul: 'in fact, the Nordic psychic genotype consisted in the consciousness, not merely of the human soul's similarity to God, but of its identity with God'.<sup>91</sup>

Not only is the soul of the Nordic race identical to God, though. Insofar as 'race and ego, blood and soul are most closely connected',<sup>92</sup> then the faith of both the nation and its favourite child – namely, the blood – are divine as well:

But today, a new faith is awakening: the myth of the blood, the belief in defending the divine nature of the human being with the blood. The belief embodied in the clearest knowledge that the Nordic blood represents that same mystery that has replaced and transcended the sacraments of old.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the German nation possesses a really existing relationship to God: one that is communicated by the divine blood and the divine soul. With divine and human nature understood as identical in terms of the mystic

model, race receives a religious content that is configured in a principled way.<sup>94</sup> The mega-psyche called race thinks and acts: 'The race-soul grasps the old questions using new forms, but the formative powers of its will and values of its soul remain the same in terms of their direction and purpose'.<sup>95</sup> Different works and deeds of the Germans at various times are productions of one and the same mega-psyche:

And we realise in turn that, as in the Prussia of Frederick the Great, the soul that Odin had once borne lived, reborn, in Hohenfriedberg and Leuthen. It was likewise reborn in the souls of Bach and Goethe. From this perspective, the following claim will seem profoundly justified: a Nordic legend, a Prussian march, a composition by Bach, a sermon by Eckehart and a Faust monologue are merely various expressions of one and the same soul, creations of the same will.<sup>96</sup>

This means that Germans living, dead and as yet unborn are created and sustained by the mega-psyche called race. They are the work of one and the same soul and joined to one another by the identical continuity of the ground. Each German participates in an identical substance. Both the present cohesion of the Germans and the future identity of the nation have a substantive basis. The perceptual model of potentiality vs. actuality has a religious content: the real possibility of actualising the potency of the mega-psyche follows from the identity of that psyche with God. Hence Rosenberg's compulsion to construct an identity for the future: 'now the German must fall back upon his magnificent mysticism, once again attain the greatness of soul of a Meister Eckhart and experience that this man and the field-grey hero under the steel helmet are one and the same'.<sup>97</sup> Within the consciousness of Meister Eckhart, the divine race-soul articulates its identity with God. Each German can remember this mysticism and, through it, experience the identity of each German soldier with Meister Eckhart. So too is Richard Wagner's art a climax of the auto-poetic expression of a mega-psyche that is identical with God:

but the essence of all art was revealed in Richard Wagner. That the Nordic soul is not contemplative, that it does not lose itself in individual psychology, but experiences cosmic-psyche laws and shapes them in a spiritual-architectonic way through its will.<sup>98</sup>

Divinisation of the race-soul and its creations is only one side of the *Mythus*, however. Why has the 'Nordic self-realisation' of the mega-psyche not yet been realised? Is Rosenberg convinced of the existence of a power that countervenes the self-referential consubstantiality of the German race-soul with God? According to Rosenberg's semantic, the 'primordial polar

phenomenon' of the Nordic race-soul is the Jewish 'counter-race'.<sup>99</sup> Rosenberg characterises the Jewish race alone as a counter-race. As an essential element of his cognitive perceptual model of collective identity, Rosenberg's anti-Semitism is articulated repeatedly throughout the entire *Mythus*.<sup>100</sup>

Here is one passage, extensively cited:

If religious and moral ideas and feelings serve to restrict purely instinctual arbitrariness and licentiousness with almost all peoples of the world, it is the opposite with the Jew. Thus do we find a picture that has remained eternally the same for the past 2,500 years. Greedy for the goods of this world, the Jew moves from city to city, from country to country and he remains wherever he finds the least resistance to parasitic business activity. If he is driven away, he returns, if one generation is struck dead, the next starts up unswervingly the same game. Half sneaky and half demonic, at once laughable and tragic, despised by all sovereigns and nonetheless regarding himself as innocent (because devoid of the capacity to be able to understand anything besides himself), Ahusva – son of the Satanic nature – moves through the history of the world. Ever assuming different names, he nonetheless remains the same.<sup>101</sup>

The Jew is characterised by the 'admission, indeed, the approval of outwitting, of theft, of manslaughter'.<sup>102</sup> The attributes of the Jewish counter-race remain eternally the same. Thus is the Jewish collectivity substantialised and satanised. The Jewish collectivity is the counter-race because only the 'Jew' is the 'son of the satanic nature'. The 'Jewish attitude toward the world' is 'satanic'.<sup>103</sup> The 'monstrous' and 'destructive power' of the 'children of Jacob' is 'inimitably portrayed' in the figure of 'Mephistopheles'.<sup>104</sup> Corresponding to the 'identity with God' of the Nordic race-soul, therefore, is the incarnation of evil that is the community of the Jews.

According to Rosenberg, 'Jesus unquestionably prized being one with God as the salvation and goal'.<sup>105</sup> And according to point 24 of the programme of the NSDAP, the 'Party as such' represents the 'standpoint of a positive Christianity' and thereby fights against the 'Jewish-materialistic spirit within and outside us'. At this point, then, we should address Rosenberg's confession of faith in 'positive Christianity'. For the mystical mythopoeist, Rosenberg, Christ was not a Jew.<sup>106</sup> Loyal to the party programme of the NSDAP, Rosenberg was an adherent of 'positive Christianity'. He set up 'positive Christianity opposite the negative'.<sup>107</sup> Since time immemorial, the two have been embroiled in a struggle.<sup>108</sup> Not only does Rosenberg affirm 'positive Christianity' in the context of the Nordic religion of the soul and of blood; but throughout the entire *Mythus* – in which he attacks Catholic and Protestant churches alike – he presents an idol of a Jesus that has been understood in a singularly 'positive' way.<sup>109</sup> For Rosenberg, Jesus was by no

means merely a small, wandering Aryan preacher from Galilee, but a 'mediator between human being and God'.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, he was an – 'embodiment of the divine in a human being living entirely in accordance with its own laws' – albeit only one such embodiment alongside such other figures as Zarathustra.<sup>111</sup> Jesus is said to be the 'rebel from Nazareth'.<sup>112</sup> Jesus is a 'hero'<sup>113</sup> and 'Lord'.<sup>114</sup>

Rosenberg's wild polemic against the Catholic Church includes a speculation as to the existence of 'original Christians'<sup>115</sup> who were counter to the tradition. Together with his somewhat milder criticism of Protestantism, this discussion ends with the claim that the entire tradition of the Catholic and Protestant churches was established by Paul and, hence, by Judaism:

Thus, the Jewish idea of the servant of God who receives grace dispensed by an arbitrary, absolutist God, went over to Rome. And Wittenburg still clings to Paul as the actual creator of this theory. That is to say that the churches are not Christian, but Pauline – because Jesus, for his part, unquestionably acclaimed identity with God as the salvation and goal.<sup>116</sup>

The line of distinction is the identity of the human being with God on the one hand and the rejection of the transcendent God on the other. What is Pauline is not Christian, is Jewish, is 'negative Christianity'.

Now, Rosenberg by no means demands the total negation of Christianity. He demanded instead – hear and marvel at it! – a new, a 'Fifth Gospel'.<sup>117</sup> Two canonised gospels – the Gospels of John and of Mark – were also to be included. 'Against the Semitic doctrine of God's servant', the Gospel of Mark is said to contain 'the genuine core of the message of our being children of God'. As for the Gospel of John, Rosenberg evaluates it as being a 'brilliant interpretation' of the 'experience of the eternal polarity between God and evil' – and this 'against the delusion of the Old Testament that Yahweh created good and evil from nothing'.<sup>118</sup> From the human kinship to God on the one hand and the existence of evil on the other, Rosenberg draws the following conclusion: 'our Pauline churches are not Christian in essence, but a creation of the work of the Jewish-Syrian apostles'.<sup>119</sup> To repeat, and thereby also to demonstrate the character of Rosenberg's political religion: due to certain 'falsifications', the churches are said not to be Christian at all.

But the 'Christian' churches are a monstrous – both a conscious and an unconscious – falsification of the simple, good news that the kingdom of heaven is within, that we are the children of God, that we should serve the good and mount a flaming defence against evil.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, it cannot be disputed that by 'kinship with God', Rosenberg understands the 'kingdom of heaven within us'. Further: with the 'defence against

evil', all Jews are declared to be fundamental enemies. It goes without saying – if only because the letters of the apostle Paul are the oldest source for the Gospel of Jesus Christ – that Rosenberg's so-called positive Christianity cannot be harmonised with the Christian religion. Nonetheless, it cannot go unmentioned that the Gospel of John does in fact establish the difference between the religion of the Jew, Jesus, and the traditional Jewish religion in terms of the *malum*. According to this source, Jesus said 'to the Jews' in verse 44: 'you are of your father, the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not live in the truth'. And in verse 47: 'whoever is of God hears God's words; this is why you do not hear, because you are not of God'.<sup>121</sup> This is provided in place of all evidence supporting the existence of an anti-Jewish tradition within the Christian churches.

## Conclusion

In his general understanding of the world and the human being, Rosenberg affirms religion. Insofar as faith, as opposed to knowledge, is to him an essential hallmark of religion, his understanding of religion is based upon the religious tradition. In addition, the object of faith is the existence of supernatural powers: God and evil. The political implication is the fact that this faith then determines the consciousness of human being, society and history. In particular, the fundamental conflict between God and evil is determinative in the attempt to constitute collective identity. The political aspect consists in the fact that Rosenberg's understanding of the nation is shaped by this fundamental content. The specificum of Rosenberg's political religion is his doctrine of race: race is the 'external side of a soul', whereas 'soul' is 'race seen from within'. According to Rosenberg, the specifically religious implication of the Nordic-Aryan race is that the Aryan is a divine-human macro-anthropos. God is really present in the German's blood and the mega-psyche of the German race is identical to God. The mega-psyche of race is the substance of the nation. The German nation is substantialised by the divinisation of the Aryan-Nordic race. Insofar as the 'kingdom of heaven dwells within' the mega-psyche, Rosenberg's racism should be characterised as an immanentisation of transcendence. That racism states – and indeed, this was probably the source of the attraction of its message – that the German nation has a divine potency that remains to be actualised. The goal is identity. The identity of the 'blood-psychic primordial ground' with God yields the conclusion of a fundamental superiority of members of the Aryan-Nordic race. Further, the fear of death might be sublimated by the belief that one participates in a substantive identity. For Rosenberg, race is a community of Germans that are dead, living and not yet born.

Just as the Aryan-Nordic soul has the 'kingdom of God' within itself, so is evil subjectivised. The collective subject, the 'Jew', is substantialised to become the Satanic counter-race. The contemporary discourse on anti-Semitism has



overlooked the crucial fact that it was not for biological reasons that the ‘Jew’ was made to function as the counter-race. The decisive characteristic of Rosenberg’s racist anti-Judaism is the consubstantiality of Satan and the human being. Beyond this, he articulates his political religion in the expectation of a ‘great, perhaps final, confrontation between two world-remote souls’ – between, namely, ‘the German genius and the Jewish demon’.<sup>122</sup> If Rosenberg is convinced that the struggle between light and darkness that has endured throughout the aeons must ‘find its climax in victory’,<sup>123</sup> then this would result in the following consequence: the condition of victory is the destruction of evil. The ‘Jewish counter-race’ alone personifies evil. The Shoah – and this has been almost completely overlooked in the contemporary discourse – was the result of the satanisation of all Jews. It has been likewise overlooked that anti-Semitism does not exist in its own right, but can be understood only as mutually dependent upon the divinisation of the German people.

Does it follow from this that any kind of connection between politics and religion should be condemned? Whatever the answer to this question with respect to the racist mysticism identifying God with human beings in a race, it is still true that the Christian religion does *not* bind promises of salvation and prophecies of destruction to communities defined by reproduction and descent. Before God and Satan, potentially, all human beings are equal. Indeed, divinisation of the human being is a deadly sin: *superbia* is the attempt to become like God. The decisive step that is required in order to command and accept the annihilation of all Jews arises both from the will to commit the deed and from the immanentisation of evil and the divine. According to the New Testament, only Christ and God will overcome evil; and human beings will not destroy evildoers. At the same time, there can be no mistake that the re-enchantment of the world through the sacralisation of the Germans and satanisation of the Jews was not only a result of the crisis of the Christian religions, but also touches on the most difficult aspects of Christian theology.<sup>124</sup> Rosenberg’s *Mythus* demands that we regard the crisis of modernity from a new perspective. The belief in eternal progress suppressed that which is called – in brief – evil. The National Socialists profited from this vacuum and endowed evil with a new collective form. Because it cannot be ruled out that many different kinds of religion could be revitalised in the twenty-first century, discussion of the relationship between politics and religion is of interest for theologians and political scientists alike.<sup>125</sup>

## Notes

- 1 This essay is an expanded version of a lecture that was given at a conference of the ‘Veldensteiner-Kreis’. It is based upon a long chapter of an investigation that has been concluded but not yet published under the working title *Nationalsozialismus als politische Religion. Die religiösen Dimensionen in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckhart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler*.

- 2 Such as, for example: the birth defect of modernity or of religion in general, the diffuse religiosity of Wilhelman Germany or the failure of theology, the suppression of evil within the project of modernity, the socio-economic and social-psychological conditions of the successful acceptance of National Socialism by the educated classes, the invention of the nation from the spirit of secularisation and the anti-Semitism connected with it, the re-enchantment of the world through sacralisation of the people, vulgar metaphysics of substance or the modern desire for the self . . . etc.
- 3 By this it is not claimed that identity and substance are reasonable categories through which to perceive of social-political existence or that they can be justified philosophically at all.
- 4 As is well known, Eric Voegelin also characterised National Socialism as a political religion at the end of his study on *Die politischen Religionen* (Vienna, 1938), a work in which Egypt, the Middle Ages and modernity are treated. Decades later, he states of it:

the interpretation is not completely false, but I would no longer apply the concept of religions, because it is too imprecise and already distorts from the start the actual problem of experience in that it mixes it together with the other problems of dogma and doctrine.

See Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographische Reflexionen* (Munich, 1994), 70.

- 5 Of course, such so-called values as the dignity of the human being or such virtues as justice, as well as the most varying paradigmata of political order, are all part of the political realm.
- 6 Unity, homogeneity, totality and coherence are added to this.
- 7 The following literature will be only mentioned here: Jan Assman, 'Politische Theologie zwischen Ägypten und Israel', Heinrich Meier (ed.), *Veröffentlichungen der Carl Friedrich von Siemens-Stiftung* (Munich, 1992); Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Die zwei Körper des Königs. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1990); Peter Koslowski, *Die religiösen Dimensionen der Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1995); Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1934); Jacob Taubes (ed.), *Religionstheorie und politische Theologie*, 3 vols (Munich, 1983); Eric Voegelin, *Die neue Wissenschaft der Politik* (Munich, 1959).
- 8 'The National Socialist German Workers' Party takes over the essential features of the basic idea of a generally national image of the world ' and 'forms from the same' a 'political confession of faith'. This confession, in turn, 'itself creates the prerequisite for the victory of this *Weltanschauung*'. See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, 1941), 424.
- 9 Compare Claus-E. Bärsch, 'Das "Dritte Reich" des Dichters Dietrich Eckhart', *Zeitmitschrift. Journal für Ästhetik*, special issue: '1938' (Düsseldorf, 1988), 57–91.
- 10 Compare Dietrich Eckhart, *Ein Vermächtnis*, Alfred Rosenberg (ed.), 3rd edn (Munich, 1935), 44.
- 11 Thus the terminology of Rosenberg in *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhundert* (henceforth cited as *Mythos*) 3rd edn (Munich, 1943), 462.
- 12 The basic fact of the Nordic-European spirit is its divorce – conscious or unconscious – of two worlds: the world of freedom and the world of nature. With Immanuel Kant, this primordial phenomenon of the methodology of thinking about our life gained consciousness and it is never again allowed to disappear from our eyes.  
(*Mythos*, 131. See also pages 121, 136, 141, 142, 200, 241, 303, 318, 323, 393, 398, 419, 517, 630, 687)

- 13 The *Grundzügen des 19. Jahrhunderts* had 13 editions up to 1919. Of this, an entire, extensive chapter is devoted to one single person, namely Jesus Christ. First part, third chapter, 'Die Erscheinung Christi', 189–251, *Grundzüge* (Munich, 1899), 545–648, as well as the works, *Worte Christi* (Munich, 1901), *Mensch und Gott* (Munich, 1921) and *Richard Wagner* (Munich, 1896).
- 14 Compare the chapter, 'Wille und Trieb' of the second book, 323–44. Further, see 243, 278, 318, 393, 408, 417, 441, 682, 687ff.
- 15 For biographies of Alfred Rosenberg, see Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London, 1972); also Andreas Mohlau, *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Ideologie des Nationalsozialismus. Eine politische Biographie* (Koblenz, 1993). Reinhard Baumgärtner handles Rosenberg in *Weltanschauungskampf im 3. Reich* (Frankfurt, 1977). See also Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg. Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem* (Stuttgart, 1970). Herbert Iber criticises the position of the members of the confessing church with respect to Rosenberg's anti-semitism in *Christlicher Glaube oder rassischer Mythos* (Frankfurt, 1987).
- 16 Hans-P. Hasenfratz, 'Die Religion Alfred Rosenbergs', *Numen: International Review for the History of Religion* XXXVI (Leiden, 1989), 115–24.
- 17 'Weltanschauliche Thesen', taken from *Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs*, Hans-Günther Seraphin (ed.) (Munich, 1964), 241.
- 18 Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 600.
- 19 Faith and knowledge should not be opposed at all ... , but true religion is neither proved by the discovery of nature nor toppled by it. Religion is the product of an inner experience, not the result of some kind of natural-scientific proof of God or a legend of resurrection; it has nothing at all to do with miracles or magic.

(See 'Weltanschauliche Thesen', 253)

- 20 *Mythus*, 135.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 23 'Weltanschauliche Thesen', 248.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 242.
- 25 *Mythus*, compare 268, 362, 389ff., 687, 692.
- 26 'Weltanschauliche Thesen', 244.
- 27 *Mythus*, 390.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 391.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 394.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 130, 263, 609.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 22, compare 349, 529.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 268.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 270.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 134–35.
- 36 Rosenberg rejects the Christian monotheism of the churches on the basis of the Jewish monism that it supposedly entails. Compare *ibid.*, 152ff.
- 37 On the death of Odin, compare 219.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 218.
- 39 First book, chapter 3: 'Mystic and Deed', 217–70. But Rosenberg continually invokes his mystagogue (138, 394, 458, 560, 685, 701) and writes his name as 'Eckehart'. In this, he follows the writing style of Hermann Büttner, whose publication he used for the *Mythus*. Compare *Meister Eckeharts Schriften und Predigten*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1903). Rosenberg believes that 'the idea of the psychic personality, the main idea of our history', was articulated for the first time in

German mysticism, in its 'religion and theory of life'. Further, he sees in it 'the eternal metaphysical confession of the Nordic West'. *Ibid.*, 220.

- 40 *Ibid.*, 217.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 234.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 235.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 223.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 45 *Ibid.*, xii.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 127.
- 50 Compare 129, 30ff.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 130, compare 504, 607.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 56 The Gnostic mystic structure is unmistakable. Compared to this, statements of an apocalyptic dimension are very infrequent. The religious obsession is aimed at the soul.
- 57 'There will come a time in which the peoples will honour their great dreamers as those who were the most oriented towards the facts'. *Ibid.*, 453, 454ff.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 459.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 459.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 608. He also calls the National Church the 'Greater German Church', 601, 515, or 'German People's Church', 602.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 620.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 601.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 601.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 699.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 223, 259.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 222.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 700.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 246; compare 248, 589, 685.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 691.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 684.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 694.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 684.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 697.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 694.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 387.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 217.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 248.
- 87 *Ibid.*, 225.

- 88 Ibid., 248; compare title of the column on page 248.
- 89 Ibid., 248.
- 90 Ibid., 246, compare 238, 629.
- 91 Ibid., 246.
- 92 'Without our knowing whether cause and effect are present here', *ibid.*, 258.
- 93 Ibid., 114.
- 94 Thus does Rosenberg cite Meister Eckhart and his interpretation of the 'holy unification of divine and human nature' in 'Christo', *ibid.*, 230.
- 95 Ibid., 693.
- 96 Ibid., 679, compare 684ff., 699.
- 97 Ibid., 621.
- 98 Ibid., 433.
- 99 Ibid., 462. See also 686.
- 100 Compare 2ff., 33, 64, 129, 158, 265ff., 282, 294, 363ff., 412, 460ff., 493, 528ff., 533, 566, 591, 670ff., 686ff.
- 101 Ibid., 265.
- 102 Ibid., 265.
- 103 Ibid., 63.
- 104 Ibid., 460.
- 105 Ibid., 235.
- 106 Ibid., 76; compare Chamberlain, *Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 204.
- 107 Ibid., 78.
- 108 Ibid., 78, 79.
- 109 Ibid., compare 74, 130, 132, 160f., 163f., 229f., 243f., 332, 335f., 341, 391, 396, 412f., 442, 604f., 616.
- 110 Ibid., 624.
- 111 Ibid., 442.
- 112 Ibid., 134. In this context, Rosenberg cites the following passage from the New Testament: 'I come not to bringd peace, but a sword' (Matthew 10: 34).
- 113 Ibid., 414.
- 114 'And now we are probably also permitted to say that the love of Jesus Christ was the love of a man who was conscious of the nobility of his soul and of his strong personality. Jesus sacrificed himself as Lord, not as a servant', 622.
- 115 Ibid., 114, 174ff.
- 116 Ibid., 235, compare 602.
- 117 Ibid., 603.
- 118 Ibid., 604. On the Gospel of Mark, compare Dietrich Klagges, *Das Urevangelium Jesu: Der deutsche Glaube* (Leipzig, 1929). Hitler appointed Dietrich Klagges as a senior civil servant. He later became premier of Braunschweig. Compare Holger German, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialisten Dietrich Klagges. Ein Beitrag zur Phänomenologie der NS-Ideologie* (Frankfurt, 1995).
- 119 Ibid., 605.
- 120 Ibid., 607.
- 121 Compare John 8: 21ff.
- 122 Ibid., 460.
- 123 Ibid., 130.
- 124 More on this in other places. Mentioned here are only the real presence of God in accordance with the dogma of transsubstantiation and of that of the *corpus Christi mysticum* on the one hand, and the thin thread of certainty of a purely other-worldly God on the other.
- 125 Meant literally here and derived from *polites* – active citizens of a community of free and equals.

# 13 'Political religion' – a religion?

Some remarks on the concept of religion

*Mathias Behrens*

## Introduction

Since Eric Voegelin and Raymond Aron, repeated attempts have been made to comprehend the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century – above all, National Socialism and Leninism-Stalinism – as 'political religions'. What might the word 'religion' mean in this context? What is religion? Are there various perspectives in which to understand it? If so, how do they relate to one another? This brief essay will handle these questions from the standpoint of philosophy. Accordingly, it will seek to contribute to an interdisciplinary discussion. The concept of religion offered by the philosophy of religion will thereby serve as a norm by which to evaluate the concept of 'political religion' – a concept that has been developed by historians.

As a rule,<sup>1</sup> the classical science of religion is guided by a pre-scientific understanding of religion. According to this understanding, religion – above all, the great monotheistic religions – entails something that totalitarian movements fundamentally lack: namely, the intention both to relate all acts of worship to a transcendent divine sphere and to understand reality in terms of this sphere. Insofar as they immanentise the transcendent,<sup>2</sup> therefore, do the National Socialist and Marxist world-views entail not much more than 'anti-religions' or 'pseudo-religions'? If we consider that both movements set up a part of reality – namely, nation/race or the classless society – as an absolute, the expression 'ersatz religion' seems better suited. For in this case, the anthropological givenness of the reference to God is substituted by something that – regarded ontologically – is not itself the absolute, the ultimate reality. In what follows, the absolutisation of a part of reality shall be understood as *ideology*. The concept of ideology shall be used here in this normative sense. To this extent, 'political religion' is a substitute for the 'true religion'. One might speak of 'religion' in this case in only an inauthentic sense.

To be sure, a certain basic position lies at base of this valuation: all talk of anti-religions, pseudo-religions or ersatz religions presupposes the criteria of the philosophy of religion. Such criteria permit one to determine whether a true or a false religion is present. An important criterion, for example,

would be the assumption that human reason is capable of distinguishing the absolute itself from a partial aspect of reality that is regarded as an absolute.<sup>3</sup>

The normative religious concept in philosophy implies certain metaphysical assumptions that are not readily accepted by all sciences. It was primarily historians who created the concept of 'political religion', but historians' insights can be attained without a reflective metaphysical background. Corresponding to the difference of methods is the possibility of making scientific statements about religion from a variety of methodological starting points. Besides philosophy and theology, the disciplines of religious studies, history, sociology and psychology can also investigate the phenomenon of 'religion'. These all do so from a particular perspective established from the outside, as it were – without involving an existential commitment – and using their respective methods. (Admittedly, they also make no claim to be able to grasp the full essence of the phenomenon.) What is required is a concept of religion that can be used to grasp the historical events of Communism, Fascism and National Socialism within the broader scientific discussion. In order to define such a concept, it would appear helpful to define it provisionally, without referring to a particular philosophy of religion or theology. Philosophy and theology, therefore, will be subjected to an *epoché*. So too will religious studies, which might otherwise prove to be a 'disguised theology'. Of course, methodological disregard of a concrete, substantive idea as to what religion actually is leads to a problem: not only does it render a precise placing of the concept more difficult, but the concept remains utterly undefined. This is why many scientists of religion<sup>4</sup> seek to dispense entirely with a concept of religion and to relate the various religions in a comparative way – according to a Wittgensteinian understanding of family similarities. Only thus, they believe, can we avoid concealing the differences among the religions under a foreign understanding of essences; and only thus can we avoid making improper comparisons. For Hans G. Kippenberg, the search for a concept of religion is merely a 'theological skirmish'.<sup>5</sup> Yet the following ought to be asked here: according to what criteria is that which falls within the realm of religion to be identified in the first place? A provisional conceptual understanding of religion is necessary for the scientific work and the interpretation of the phenomena. This working understanding remains to be defined more precisely throughout the course of the investigation. Philosophically, it must also be asked – *contra* Wittgenstein – whether the similarities among the religions do not indicate that they share something identical, something that might be described using the term 'essence'. In my opinion, this entire sphere of problems reveals that the demand for an *epoché* has a limited methodological justification and must be retracted in a second step undertaken from the perspective of the philosophy of religion.

What is involved for us here is the determination of a scientifically operational concept that is suited to developing theories and refrains from seeking an answer to the question regarding the actual essence. Such a

reduced concept of religion is functional: not because religion is investigated in terms of its function – as is often done by the sociology of religion – but because the initial definition of religion performs a strictly heuristic and classificatory task.<sup>6</sup> Nor does this reduction pose a problem from the philosophical standpoint: restricted aspects of reality – in this case, the historical phenomena – can be investigated from a particular scientific perspective so long as this perspective is presented only as an approximation of the whole rather than as a comprehension of it. This self-limitation also corresponds to the restricted concept of truth of the social sciences. For, historical science – along with the other social sciences – does not claim to 'comprehend the totality of history, but only partial elements [of it]'.<sup>7</sup> This claim holds even if the historian, as far as the justification of his method is concerned, reflects upon meta-historical (metaphysical) knowledge. The question as to the truth of a faith-claim raised in history is bracketed out; only the mundane elements, the given in the historical phenomena, should be described.<sup>8</sup> In methodological terms, therefore, it makes sense to begin the analysis with a general, formal concept of religion. It must again be emphasised that this first step does not entail the question that is raised by the philosophy of religion (and theology): that of the essence of the (true) religion. Such questions and methodological starting points are submitted to a preliminary *epoché* in order to attain insights that are scientifically testable within a limited sphere.<sup>9</sup>

Due to its greater breadth, the concept of religion that is to be developed at this point marks a reduction of the philosophical concept of religion that will be developed later on. The reduced concept will lay bare the lowest common denominator of the given phenomenon. This lowest common denominator does not merely refer to the *function* of a religion, but also provides a *substantive* definition that is suited to attaining historical insights. From the philosophical – as well as the Christian – perspective, this extension of the concept of religion produces an emptying of it. This occurs because one can understand by it phenomena whose content excludes that which is in fact the essence of religion.<sup>10</sup> We are led, so to speak, to assert the existence of other religions alongside the 'genuine' religions. This is why the methodological *epoché* should be emphasised: in order to demonstrate that this first step does not yet state the essence of religion, which is understood to be the human being's all-encompassing, venerating reference to an other-worldly God (the sacred).

Thus, the broadening of the concept might serve to attain a concept of religion that is useful for the historical sciences and phenomenology of religion in a methodologically delimited way. Yet even if it does, new problems arise: how should we then distinguish religions from ideologies, world-views and philosophies? What kind of substantive or functional independence does a reduced concept of religion still possess?

If this reduced concept of religion should prove helpful in the interpretation and classification of research, the historian interested in the phenomenology



of religion is then faced with the task of asking to what extent this concept can in fact capture an historical phenomenon. Within the sphere of historical research in the phenomenology of religion, the following questions also arise: could it be that ‘political religion’ can be regarded as religion only in accordance with a theory-forming concept? Might the political religions not be comparable to religions in the narrower sense – religions in whose historical context they arose – in a substantive respect as well? And what influence do religions have on the genesis of ‘political religions’?

## **The reduced concept of religion**

### *The ground of being set as an absolute*

How must the concept of religion be defined or developed on this first methodological plane characterised by an *epoché* of the methods of theology and the philosophy of religion? According to the conception that stems from religious studies, religion is characterised by the human being’s reference to a reality that transcends him – one he calls God. This position proves to be ill suited to the task of classifying totalitarian regimes under the concept of ‘political religion’. The concept must have a greater extension. Extension of it is possible *if one attributes a religious element to every setting as an absolute of a reality that creates meaning and is of ultimate significance in a person’s thinking, feeling, willing, acting and being*. Thus, one does not assume a given religion, which might then prompt an individual to religious practice. Instead, one begins from the opposite side: with the phenomenon that a human being experiences and confesses something as his ultimate reality, the universal ground of his existence. Formally, therefore, religion might be defined in this context as follows – with H. R. Schlette, for example:

religion shows itself ... as a way of human existing in terms of a relation to a ground of meaning that cannot be got beyond and is in this sense ‘ultimate’. As the quintessential foundation of the granting of meaning, this ground of meaning pertains to the interpretation both of being as a whole and of the realms of being.<sup>11</sup>

One does not ask of an historical constellation, therefore, whether that which it holds to be an absolute is in fact transcendent reality; one restricts oneself instead to demonstrating that a human being acknowledges something as an absolute.<sup>12</sup> We do not seek here definitively to settle the question as to whether a human being is capable of living without absolutising anything at all. Yet, in terms of levels of engagement and concrete consequences, there still seems to be a difference for the practice of life when comparing Marxism and agnosticism, for example. Whether a concrete theory and practice with respect to the ground of meaning is followed or whether the question of meaning is left open as uninteresting or unanswerable

is not a matter of indifference. Even with the reduced concept, the latter attitude or *Weltanschauung* does not meet the criteria of a 'religion'. This estimation can be modified if – as the hallmark of the concept of 'religion' – not the 'holding to be absolute', but the reference to the 'sacral' is foregrounded. This is what the religious studies that draw upon the work of Rudolf Otto do. Here, a reference to the sacral that is at least implicit or unconscious might also be attributable to things that are recognised as finite. In this sense, Mircea Eliade holds that there 'is no such thing as a profane existence in a pure state' because the human being will 'never entirely succeed in setting aside religious conduct'.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, we maintain in our context that we can speak of religion if the human being holds something to be the ultimate ground of meaning and directs his activities towards this goal. With reference to Marxism, for example, Schlette speaks of an 'engaged immanentism'.<sup>14</sup>

In my opinion, what has been said to this point does not entail 'religion in the full sense' – not even on the level of a concept that is operable for the social sciences and humanities. What is entailed to this point is simply a subjective self-realisation that might be described as 'religiosity'. Certainly, the human being already refers here to a particular content that is assumed to be objective and to differ from the subject; and certainly, this content constitutes the religious consciousness. Yet if such an idea or 'belief' in something as an absolute becomes creative of community and effective in history, then not only does it gain a religious element, but one might also describe the historical phenomenon as a religion; for religion is always understood socially and is institutionalised to varying degrees.<sup>15</sup> The faith of an individual is not recognised as being religion in the genuine sense. The dimensions of community and institution lead to the development of cult, religious symbol and sacral language. 'Religion' must be investigated with regard to its theoretical claim and its concrete, empirical givenness. It is in this that the distinction between religion on the one hand and philosophy and ideology on the other lies.

With its general formality, this reduced concept of religion aims more at a substantive than at a functional definition. It is now also capable of classifying historical phenomena. Such historical phenomena are now characterised thus: eschewing any reference to a reality beyond contingent reality, they represent something within the immanence as an absolute, as the human being's genuine ground of meaning. The movements and political systems that arose from Marxism clearly manifest this trait of absolutising an immanent thing – history, class or party.<sup>16</sup> Due to its anti-intellectual and emotive character,<sup>17</sup> National Socialism did not interpret history and being as comprehensively as Leninism and Stalinism as formed by Marxism did. Nonetheless, even if the immanentisation was not undertaken with the same stringency as with Marxism here, both National Socialism and what might be regarded as its ideology evince a wealth of phenomena and truth-claims that do not see the ground of meaning in the

Absolutely-Other.<sup>18</sup> These phenomena and truth-claims can also be illuminated and understood with the help of our reduced conception of religion.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Political religion***

As a theory-forming concept, the reduced concept of religion now permits us to ask what the historians' concept of 'political religion' in fact means. Very few scientists of religion use a concept of religion that might also be applied to the totalitarian regimes or ideologies. As exceptions could be named those who have already been invoked concerning the operationalisability of the concept in attaining historical knowledge: Heinz Robert Schlette and Robert D. Baird. Both explicitly mention Marxism and National Socialism as religions.<sup>20</sup> In what does a political religion consist? A political religion has one definitive element: its connection of the establishment of a finite reality as an absolute – as an ultimate ground of meaning that one believes to recognise (theory) and for which one demands total submission (practice with a programme of action) – with a political community. Further: this connection must occur in such a way that the religion cannot exist without this political ground, one that is at least partly identified with the absolute itself.<sup>21</sup> Regarded from the religious standpoint, a political religion in this sense must be judged as being a naturalist, materialist or positivist religion. The absolutised social relation that is understood to be the ground of meaning remains a part of finite reality; no transcending of the 'polis' occurs. In fact, Marxism conceives of itself as historical materialism and National Socialism sees itself as biological race theory<sup>22</sup> (whereby the 'blood' is significant<sup>23</sup> because it justifies German superiority). This is why an interpretation of the historians' concept of 'political religion' in connection with the concept of 'totalitarianism' suggests itself.<sup>24</sup>

This definition of 'political religion' is distinct from Emile Durkheim's position, which is adopted strictly from the standpoint of the sociology of religion.<sup>25</sup> For Durkheim, *every* society is internally religious. He investigates the influence of religious phenomena upon the development of society. According to Durkheim, the specific element of religion should be sought, not in the human being's relation to a supernatural realm or to God, but in the question as to the social relevance of religious phenomena. According to his understanding, every form of religion ultimately serves to sanctify the life of the society and to unite its members.<sup>26</sup> It is the collectivity that brings forth religion and morality.<sup>27</sup> By contrast to Durkheim, the clarification of the concept offered here does not see every political system to be subject to a political *religion* or religious functionality. In this case, religion would be an accidental attribute of every polis. To the extent that a 'political religion' is present, religion constitutes a new type of community. In Durkheim's thought, by contrast, every society entails religious elements and religious functions; thus there can be no 'political religion'.

The conception of 'political religion' that has been presented here might also be called 'secular religion'<sup>28</sup> with Monnerot or 'political-social religion' with Banning.<sup>29</sup> 'Political religion' should be distinguished from the concept of 'civil religion' to the extent that it does not imply, as the latter does, that religious elements and forms appear in almost all types of states or political communities or that religion is instrumentalised by politics. 'Political religion' involves only those phenomena for which the distinction between politics and religion becomes infirm and the political religion understands itself as the opponent of existing religions. The political religion seeks at once to be a universal explanation of the world and a universal state. Its actions and theoretical claims are fundamental such that they are supposed to apply to all dimensions of the human being, to pervade his entire existence. (To which groups of people the claim extends – nation, humanity – has not yet been stated here.) Political religions can be both universal religions and national religions. Compared to the Christian religion, the leader, party or historical law of the political religion replaces not the Church, but God himself. The person is claimed directly, without any mediating instance. The truth-claim of the political religion is presented in an exclusive sense (monopoly on truth). This leads to the development of a friend-enemy mentality.

According to the self-understanding of the political religions, the follower need not make a leap of faith; the scientific claim convinces the individual instead. Political-religious theory manifests a scientific atheism that regards world and history as knowable in a positivistic sense.

In addition to its substantive, ideological element of the interpretation of being and its unlimited claim upon the human being, further attributes of political religions permit us to speak of religion, or at least of religious elements. In the totalitarian regimes, which we classify as political religions, the profane political life-world is sacralised. A myth and cultic life<sup>30</sup> (rite, liturgy, sacral language, music) arise; these are intended to help instil the activist ideological morality and to evoke an intensity of experience corresponding to the totalitarian claim. Above all, persons, places and symbols are interpreted in sacral terms. The following must of course be asked: to what extent does this sacralisation serve a purely functional strategy of manipulation and the assertion of power<sup>31</sup> rather than arising from the nature of political religion itself? In the former case, 'religion' would have to be understood entirely in terms of its function of integrating the political community into a unit; the question as to whether the truth-content presented to the believers is in fact true moves into the background. Conceivably, the power-possessors would seek solely to satisfy the basic religious needs of those suppressed in order to make them more compliant. In this case, therefore, we ought to speak of a sacral veiling technique (*sakralen Verschleierungstechnik*) rather than of a political religion. On the level of concrete historical phenomena, admittedly, these levels will not be able to be distinguished with complete clarity. As a criterion by which to make the

distinction, it might be helpful to ask whether the rulers and the ruled were in fact believers. Monnerot, for example, assesses Hitler's adherents as follows:

By no means were they as hard as iron in their belief. The content [of the faith] was the stuff on which they intoxicated themselves; and once these men attained a certain psychic warmth, they abandoned themselves to certain phantasms of unmatched agitatory power.<sup>32</sup>

The manipulatory instruments are said to have given rise to the phenomenon of the obedient fellow traveller. Victor Klemperer, by contrast, attests in his *Lingua Tertii Imperii* to the presence of a genuine faith in the Führer:

I have heard this confession of faith in Hitler made from both national classes – from the intellectual class and the popular one in the narrow sense – and in both phases – at the beginning and at the very end. And I have been able to subject myself to no doubt that in both cases, the confession came not merely from the lips, but from the believing heart.<sup>33</sup>

A further criterion causing a political religion to seem to be a *religion* is fulfilled if the political religion provides a doctrine of salvation that entails the entire history of a people.<sup>34</sup> Here, salvation is presented as the ultimate goal of history and also as one that is attainable in history. The political religions share their refusal to acknowledge 'historical contingency' or even the experience of contingency as such.<sup>35</sup> The salvation demanded occurs either on the basis of a given definition of history or through a decision of the human will. Because both ultimate reality and salvation are conceived in immanent terms, this salvation is to be accomplished through human deeds.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the human being brings the world into being himself and salvation is a self-salvation that is achieved without the help of divine grace. The origin of the philosophical idea of the 'super-man' (Nietzsche) must also be interpreted in this context.

### **What is religion? – suggestion for a provisional understanding**

On the basis of the methodological considerations that were sketched in the above introduction, the insights of the philosophy of religion (and theology) have been subjected to an *epoché* in the development of ideas to this point. This step was suggested because it is predominantly historians, politologists and sociologists who use the historical concept of 'political religion'; and they use it primarily in order better to understand the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. In these sciences, no particular fundamental position of the philosophy of religion (let alone of theology) is to be presupposed. Yet, in my opinion, this alone puts us in the position of being able to

recognise the *nature* of religion and therefore of being able to categorise an historical phenomenon – that is, to judge whether religion in the more restricted sense is present or not. In the present day, the *epoché* is necessary because the sciences are plural and disparate; it enables a communicability of statements about phenomena, the ultimate evaluation of which falls within the realm of philosophy (or of theology). But within this *epoché*, we can develop a concept of religion that is suited to forming a theory – one that is capable of classifying as religions even such phenomena as those that represent no actual religion from the standpoint of the philosophy of religion. If the *epoché* is removed, however, the following must be asked anew: what is religion, philosophically considered? In what follows, only a few hints can be provided.

Deliberately, we do not claim here to portray the various possible means by which to define the concept of religion from the standpoint of the philosophy of religion.<sup>37</sup> We will attempt instead to grasp the meaning and essence of religion using philosophical methods, so that the concept gained can be used from the theological perspective as well.<sup>38</sup> With Bernhard Welte, we shall understand the philosophy of religion as follows: 'the philosophy of religion is philosophical thought that has religion as its object and therefore attempts, through this thought, to illuminate religion's nature and mode of being'.<sup>39</sup> With respect to the concept of religion that was developed above, we must once again restrict the broadened definition through a more precise definition of the intention. In order to be able to speak of a religious phenomenon with the concept attained under the *epoché*, it sufficed that an ultimate ground of being of all thinking and acting was held to be absolute. The religious question of whether this ground of being is in fact the ultimate ground of meaning – hence, the Absolute Itself – was left open. The philosophy of religion approaches the concept from the standpoint of metaphysics and phenomenology and regards religion as a given rather than as something that has been constituted. Building further on the first step, the philosophy of religion can offer the following provisional understanding of religion: *religion is the attunement of the human being – as both individual and communal being, in thought, feeling, willing, acting (and being) – to God.*<sup>40</sup> *In religion, God is acknowledged and revered as the universal cause – or at least implicitly intended as such by the religious act.*<sup>41</sup> By contrast to all finite being, God is transcendent and foundational. As the groundless primordial ground, he exists in relation to finite being in a way that is both in and above it. He is the Absolutely Other as Non-Other. It is important also to emphasise the *implicit* intention here. Without it, all those religions that have no metaphysical concept of God's transcendence – yet clearly relate to transcendence, even if they (the natural religions, for example) worship individual elements of nature as divinities – would not be captured by the philosophical concept. This understanding of religion is explicitly theocentric. Religion understood as the *worship of God* is based upon a perception that the

transcendent ground of reality is sacral mystery. Consequently, prayer is part of the nature of religion.<sup>42</sup> We speak of an ‘attunement to God’ because religion is present only if the human being faces this ultimate ground of being in a consciously lived relationship of genuine opposition.<sup>43</sup> Because the reference to transcendence concerns and claims the entire human being, another component of religion is its tendency to form communities, to institutionalise and to develop rites. This component acknowledges both the necessary social reference and the incorporation of the human senses.

The reduction of religion to coping with contingency – as is frequently done by the sociology of religion – can be philosophically transcended in an integrative way. Only the Absolute itself can cope with contingency. In this sense, religion does in fact ultimately serve the function of coping with contingency. Insofar as this function is not directly intended, however, religion entails the acknowledgement and worship of God for his own sake.

With its reference to God, self, society and world, religion enlists the entire human being – not only his thought, but his entire conduct of life as well. Relating to the person in a total way, the reality of God defines his entire being. This is why religion is part of human nature. In principle, every human being can be religious; yet the practice of a religion is itself not determined by nature. Religion arises from an experience – the highest and deepest one – that must be formed by the human being in relative freedom. As the origin and goal of the religious act, God withdraws himself in an absolute way from the human formation of religion. Consequently, the *how* of the worship of God or attunement to God can develop in various ways. The question as to the degree of freedom that is present with a revealed religion will not be discussed here.

According to this suggestion for a conceptual understanding of religion, the human desire to be saved from suffering and death is also a part of the nature of religion. God is the salvation of the human being; the ultimate meaning is experienced as salvation. Only a reality that transcends finite being is capable of overcoming human suffering and death. In the context of a personal understanding of God, salvation is interpreted as the grace of an exercise of freedom. In this view, religion is possible because God binds the human being to himself. Considered from the side of the human being, therefore, religion gains a responsorial character. The relationship of God and human being can be interpreted in a personal-dialogical way.

The definition provided above does not claim that the nature of religion can be defined in terms that are strictly aprioric. The concept remains open towards a possible revelation of God. This is why the object can be approached using both metaphysical and phenomenological methods. This general talk of God still leaves it open as to whether God is a personal or non-personal entity. In order to avoid making a premature and unjustified decision, one might speak at this point of ‘the holy’ rather than of ‘God’.

By this, of course, it has not yet been determined that good reasons to assume a personal absolute cannot be raised.

Religion must be understood as a possibility through which the human being can attune himself to transcendence in accordance with his experience of transcendence and his reference to self, society and world. The religious attunement towards God is philosophically justified by the recognition of certain ontic and ontological differences enabling a relationship between finite and infinite being. A further path of access to God is the experience of the uncertainty of human existence. Attempting to conceive himself solely through himself, the human being – out of his own nothingness – then discovers God as both the origin and the goal. That said, neither the philosophical knowledge of God nor the philosophical justification of the significance of religion necessarily leads to the claim that religion has been sublimated into knowledge (or philosophy). The claim laid by religion upon the human being is more comprehensive than the one placed upon him by philosophy. Beyond this, due to the compatibility of revelation with the *logos*, faith-contents – of the Christian religion, for example – are not unreasonable; yet neither can those faith-contents be derived logically from pure reason.

### **Ersatz religion, pseudo-religion, anti-religion**

Our brief presentation of the philosophical concept of religion makes it clear that, from the philosophical standpoint, the historical movements that were called 'political religions' in the second section above cannot be regarded as genuine religions. The tendency to immanentisation – towards regarding part of finite reality (or finitude itself) as an absolute, that is – does not correspond to the nature of religion because the attunement to God is either lacking or replaced by a different orientation. This is why Erich Heck states:

With the current take-over of the word 'religion' by the general science of religion, the theologian will have to protect himself from conceiving the concept as broadly as possible or from incorporating non-theistic 'religions' into it as well. And finally, he will have to protect himself from including world-views to which have been attributed – as a terminological nonsense attributable to an ultimately valid understanding of meaning, of an 'idea' – the designations of quasi-religion or pseudo-religion.<sup>44</sup>

This assessment must be accepted in my opinion, insofar as a concept of religion having too great an extension indeed cannot capture the essence of religion. That said, the view that talk of pseudo-religion is terminological nonsense cannot be accepted. Historical knowledge has provided sufficient material by which to establish that movements, ideologies and world-views



that claim to have replaced religion do in fact exist.<sup>45</sup> In thought, language and action, such movements, ideologies and world-views entail a wealth of religious elements and in part articulate themselves in an expressly anti-religious or anti-ecclesiastical way. Such descriptions as ersatz religion, pseudo-religion and anti-religion – and duly restricted in a methodological sense, even the concept ‘political religion’ – are by no means unjustified, therefore.<sup>46</sup> Although authentic religions are not present here, the religious and religious-like elements of the phenomena justify such descriptions.<sup>47</sup> An ersatz religion attempts to satisfy or fulfil those human needs and dimensions that are otherwise satisfied and fulfilled by religion. And after 1989, certainly, it is possible to defend the general statement that, the implementation of religious elements notwithstanding, an ersatz religion cannot conceal its own weaknesses and inadequacy in the long term. This statement has been empirically supported many times over. Among other reasons for this, the most important one is that the existential practice of an ersatz religion is tantamount to a stunted exercise of individual freedom. To bracket out transcendence, which is the ground of freedom, leads to an unfreedom against which the human being will defend himself sooner or later.<sup>48</sup>

Arising within this same horizon of problems is the question as to the dependence of the *so-called*<sup>49</sup> political religions upon the religions in whose context they arose. In the cases of Marxism and National Socialism, we must of course consider primarily Christianity.<sup>50</sup> Can we regard the political religions as the products of a secularisation of Christian contents? Secularisation shall serve here as a concept by which to reflect the continuities and discontinuities between Christianity and modernity. Secularisation is therefore understood to be a ‘time-diagnostic category’ (Hermann Lübbe). From the theological perspective, it is not the value-free category of interpretation that it is for the sciences of history or sociology,<sup>51</sup> but a normative concept describing a phenomenal context that must be interpreted as decay, not progress.<sup>52</sup> Eric Voegelin, for example, reaches the following conclusion with respect to the eschatological ideas: ‘The ideas of perfection of the Gnostic mass movements are derived from the Christian ones’.<sup>53</sup> According to Voegelin, Marxism and National Socialism are Gnostic mass movements<sup>54</sup> because both involve ‘abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine-transcendent being, and replacing it with a world-immanent order of being that can be realised within the power-sphere of human action’.<sup>55</sup> Ontological analysis shows that this claim is empty: ‘the constitution of being remains what it is, beyond the thinker’s desire for power ... The result, therefore, is not the rule over being, but the satisfaction of a fantasy’.<sup>56</sup> What is involved here is an ersatz or pseudo-religion.

Imitation of Christian language and the Christian cult in the political religions provides a further example. At this point, I would like to confine myself to mentioning the lectures of Claus Vondung and Hansjakob Becker that appear in this volume. These essays introduce a wealth of examples

concerning National Socialism. Within the sphere of Stalinism, I might recall the 'veneration of the saint' of Lenin<sup>57</sup> and the 'icon cult' with regard to Stalin himself. The category of 'secularisation' cannot be understood as a concept of the philosophy of history that endows the dissolution of Christian concepts into theoretical systems propagating this-worldly perfection with a fateful or necessary character. No exoneration for the executors of the totalitarian systems can be derived from the explanatory context of 'secularisation'.<sup>58</sup> This statement obtains even if such systems were made possible by (among other things, certainly – the influence cannot be interpreted in a monocausal way) the rejection of belief in God. Hermann Lübbe posits that certain elements of secularisation that could be interpreted as achievements of modernity were ultimately attainable only by religion.<sup>59</sup> In the context of the secularisation debate, his argument deserves attention.

From the perspective of theology and the philosophy of religion, therefore, the 'political religions' would appear to be religions in only a non-genuine sense. Not only that, one might understand them instead using the normative concept of 'ideology'. According to the concept of religion attained through the *epoché*, 'political religions' might be described as religion insofar as they establish the political (or the community) as an absolute. Yet if one regards strictly this abstract aspect and disregards the material reliance on existing religious forms and ideas, it is possible to call precisely this absolutisation of a limited segment of all reality not *religion*, but *ideology*. One component of 'totalitarian ideology' understood in this sense is its 'claim to absoluteness' in the legitimation of power.<sup>60</sup> If the material reliance is incorporated as well, then one reaches the judgement that political religions are ideologies that perform, or seek to perform, the function of an ersatz religion. Further: on the basis of their rejection of existing religions, they must be described as anti-religions. Thus, 'political religion' as ersatz-, pseudo- or anti-religion is a special form of totalitarian ideology.<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Compare for example the definition of Gustav Mensching: 'Religion is the experiential encounter of the human being with the holy and a responsive conduct of the human being defined by the holy' (from Gustav Mensching, *Die Religion. Erscheinungsformen, Strukturtypen und Lebensgesetze* (Stuttgart, 1959), 376). See also Friedrich Heiler, 'Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion', Christel Matthias Schröder (ed.), *Die Religionen der Menschheit*, vol. I (Stuttgart, 1979), 562f; Falk Wagner, *Was ist Religion? Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Gütersloh, 1986), 307ff.
- 2 Compare Joachim Wach, *Vergleichende Religionsforschung* (Stuttgart, 1962), 56: 'For this reason we are permitted to say that every experience that refers to something finite cannot be a religious experience, but only a pseudo-religious one'. *Ibid.*, 61: 'A *pseudo-religion* can bear features of genuine religion; with it, however, the human refers not to the ultimate reality, but to some kind of finite one'. Compare Arthur Rich, 'Die kryptoreligiösen Motive in den Frühschriften von Karl Marx', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 7 (2) (1951), 192–209. Rich speaks of

the crypto-religious elements of a pseudo-religion. Compare also Juan J. Linz 'Der religiöse Gebrauch der Politik und/oder der politische Gebrauch der Religion. Ersatz-Ideologie gegen Ersatz-Religion', Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen. Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*, vol. I (Paderborn, 1996), 130ff. Although Linz retains the designation 'political religion', he still judges that political religions are 'deeply anti-religious', actually 'non-religions'. Manfred Ach also speaks of 'Hitler's religion', but means by it a 'pseudo-religion' that is distinguished by a secular character combined with 'soteriological dimensions'. See here Manfred Ach, Clemens Pentrop, *Hitlers 'Religion'. Pseudoreligiöse Elemente im nationalsozialistischen Sprachgebrauch*, 4th edn (Munich, 1991), 7.

- 3 From the side of Christian theology, one can ask of the phenomena to what extent they at least implicitly acknowledge the God, Jesus Christ, as the ground of meaning and goal of all reality. This would be done in order to determine the possible participation in the *vera religio* or the degree of difference from it.
- 4 Compare, for example, Hans G. Kippenberg, 'Diskursive Religionswissenschaft. Gedanken zu einer Religionswissenschaft, die weder auf einer allgemein gültigen Definition von Religion noch auf einer Überlegenheit von Wissenschaft basiert', B. Gladigow, H. G. Kippenberg (eds), *Neue Ansätze in der Religionswissenschaft* (Munich, 1983), 9–28.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 6 Compare here Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague, 1971), 14ff, 126f.
- 7 Laetitia Boehm, 'Artikel: Geschichtswissenschaft', *Staatslexikon* 2, 7th edn (Freiburg, 1986), 937.
- 8 Of course, the claim of religion to objectivity in historical portrayal and investigation is not bracketed out along with these.
- 9 On this point, Burkhard Gladigow is to be agreed with: religious studies cannot be allowed to fall into a 'relationship of competition with "religion" and theology'. See Gladigow, 'Religionsgeschichte des Gegenstandes – Gegenstände der Religionsgeschichte', H. Zinser (ed.), *Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (Berlin, 1988), 6–37, at 6. Here, in my opinion, an important distinction can be made: the theologian conducts his science in faith and interprets religion in terms of practice, while the scientist of religion seeks to understand the given phenomena independently from his own confession of faith. The science of religion should not be 'ultimately theology', as Fridrich Heiler believes (compare the same, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart, 1979), 17). For in this case, one could not understand the particularity of the historical phenomena. Richter, however, judges more harshly still, contending that religion cannot be adequately understood from the outside at all. See L. Richter, 'Religion, IV. Begriff und Wesen der Religion, A. Religionsphilosophisch', *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 5, 3rd edn (Tübingen, 1961), 968–76. Rudolf Otto already spoke of religion as being a category 'that is completely *sui generis*'. See here *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1971), 35th edn (Munich, 1963), 7. Jörg Splett takes the idea further in a balancing way, stating that

pure objectivity is not attainable, for the external perspective determines religion to be something other than itself. An internal perspective, by contrast, includes the determining element along with it and concretely looks from inside one religion to the others as from the outside.

See 'Religion', *Staatslexikon* 4, 7th edn (1988), 794. Hereby, it should not be said that a valuation is impossible, but only that it must also reflect this given.

- In my opinion, this is why Gladigov cannot be agreed with when he states that every definition of the concept of religion is tantamount to a 'religious judgement' and is 'not a scientific statement' (compare Gladigov, *op. cit.*, 11). The question to be posed to Gladigov is: how can the field of investigation of religious studies be limited at all if we are not in the position to state what religion is? Detlef Pollack rightly writes: 'only if religion can be identified with certainty and set apart from other spheres of objects can it be guaranteed that it possesses a reality of its own, one independent of other objective spheres'. See here Pollack, 'Was ist Religion? Probleme der Definition', *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 3 (1995), 163. Compare also Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague, 1971), 16; Baird reaches a similar judgement.
- 10 Compare, for example, the assessment of Detlef Pollack, *op. cit.*, 170.
  - 11 Heinz Robert Schlette, 'Artikel: Religion', Josef Höfer, Karl Rahner (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 8 (Freiburg, 1999), 1165. See also Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague, 1971), 18: 'Religion is ultimate concern. ... By "ultimate" I am referring to a concern which is more important than anything else in the universe of the person involved.' Baird refers with this definition to Paul Tillich.
  - 12 In this sense, Baird also applies his functional concept of religion as ultimate concern: 'Ultimate concern, used as a functional definition, contains no norm by which to distinguish valid from invalid ultimate concerns. What it offers is a criterion by which to identify religion, not one by which to evaluate it.'
  - 13 Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (1957) (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 24.
  - 14 Heinz Robert Schlette, *op. cit.*, 1166.
  - 15 Compare, for example, Kurt Goldammer, *Die Formenwelt des Religiösen. Grundriß der systematischen Religionswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1960), 22.
  - 16 Compare Nikolai Berdyaev, *Wahrheit und Lüge des Kommunismus* (Darmstadt, 1953), 16–27, 69–74.
  - 17 Victor Klemperer speaks of the 'preference of all things emotional and instinctual by the LTI [Language of the Third Reich]'. (From Klemperer, *LTI (Lingua Tertii Imperii). Notizbuch eines Philologen*, 15th edn (Leipzig, 1996), 253. Klemperer emphasises here, however, that even the emotional sphere has been degraded. Feeling is implemented only as a means of manipulation.
  - 18 Compare the assessment of Heinz Robert Schlette:

National Socialism as a '*Weltanschauung*' admits a reference to 'religion' through its verbal demand of a certain kind of relationship to transcendence. In this, it is distinct from the adherents of Marxism-Leninism and other 'communists', who never attempted to absorb any kind of form of traditional religiosity into the party doctrine.

(From Schlette, *Einführung in das Studium der Religionen* (Freiburg, 1971), 172)

- 19 Compare Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 1971), 175: 'The National Socialist ideology, which seeks to create an inner-worldly community ... places world-immanent entities in the place of God as *realissimum*: the blood, the nation as substantive bearers of the blood, the empire in which the pure-blooded nation is articulated'.
- 20 Compare Heinz Robert Schlette, *Einführung in das Studium der Religionen* (Freiburg, 1971), 170–74. See also Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague, 1971), 130: '... nationalism or Marxism. If

these are systems incorporating ultimate concerns . . . , then they are religious, not quasi-religious'. Paul Tillich should also be invoked as a witness. Insofar as he holds Marxism and National Socialism to be, not pseudo-religions, certainly, but quasi-religions, he differentiates as follows: "pseudo" refers to an intended, pretended similarity, "quasi" by contrast, to an unintended similarity that is in fact present on the basis of certain common features'. See here Paul Tillich, 'Das Christentum und die Begegnung der Weltreligionen', *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (Stuttgart, 1964), 53. See also U. Berner, who expands the object of religious studies to include all cultural phenomena that provide a universal interpretation of human existence (Berner, 'Gegenstand und Aufgabe der Religionswissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 35 (1983), 97–116. Hermann Lübke also holds it to be possible to subsume the 'secular high ideologies as special cases under the functional concept of religion'. This is because both ideologies and religions perform the same task in a society. That said, Lübke distances himself from a purely functional understanding of religion (see Lübke, *Religion nach der Aufklärung* (Graz u.a. 1986), 59ff.

- 21 Compare on the attempt to define a concept: Juan J. Linz, 'Der religiöse Gebrauch der Politik und/oder der politische Gebrauch der Religion. Ersatz-Ideologie gegen Ersatz-Religion', Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*, vol. I (Paderborn, 1996), 130:

The political system represents a complex and many-sided phenomenon, a faith-system with reference to authority, society and history. It delivers a 'Weltanschauung' that makes the claim to a truth that cannot be reconciled to other conceptions, including the existing religious traditions. . . . What characterises political religion in my opinion is the fact that the development of the 'religious' manifestations begins in the political sphere, that it is inner-worldly and does not refer to transcendental realities.

According to my suggestion of a concept definition, the religious does not begin solely with the political, but it is ultimately identified with it. Linz, to be sure, also assumes this in other places (see *ibid.*, 132).

- 22 'Thus did biology become the foundation not only of the theory of the human being, but also of the culture, state and religion'. From Romano Guardini, *Der Heilbringer in Mythos, Offenbarung und Politik. Eine theologisch-politische Besinnung* (1946) (Mainz, 1979), 62.
- 23 Compare Klaus Vondung, *op. cit.*, 176, 183.
- 24 It is an essential attribute of political religion to bring forth a totalitarian state (compare Jules Monnerot, *Soziologie des Kommunismus* (Cologne, 1952). On the basis of its religious claim, totalitarianism seeks to exploit the human being completely (the entire personality, complete with understanding, will and emotions) for the state. On this, Paul Tillich:

the theoretically demanded . . . concentration of all spheres of life within the unrestricted authority of the national state can succeed only on the basis of a Weltanschauung that has the power to capture the entire human being and drive him to unconditional submission. But such a Weltanschauung has religious character; its expression is a myth.

The citation is from Tillich, 'Die religiöse Deutung der Gegenwart. Schriften zur Zeitkritik', Paul Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. X, R. Albrecht (ed.) (Stuttgart, 1968), 130. Friedrich Pohlmann holds the characterisation of the totalitarian state as a state that comprehends and regulates all spheres of life to be too imprecise to be used to conceive this new kind of phenomena in the

- twentieth century. The violence that the totalitarian regimes have brought forth can be understood only in terms of the 'lawlessness that develops in these dictatorships'. See Pohlmann, *Marxismus – Leninismus – Kommunismus – Faschismus. Aufsätze zur Ideologie und Herrschaftsstruktur der totalitären Diktaturen* (Pfaffenweiler, 1995), 17. Pohlmann expressly acknowledges the normative character of the concept of totalitarianism. For him, science and the democratic understanding of the state necessarily belong together. In the analysis of historical givens, this basic understanding is not submitted to any *epoché* (see Pohlmann, *op. cit.*, 114f.). Lawlessness as the characteristic feature of a totalitarian regime had already been emphasised by Edgar Alexander: 'Thus does the Hitler regime of hate, the "Third Reich", become an empire without God and without love, and thereby also an empire without true law'. See Alexander, *Der Mythos Hitler* (Zurich, 1937), 227. Klaus Vondung describes the totalitarian manipulation of the human being in National Socialism as 'emotional rape' (see Vondung, *op. cit.*, 193).
- 25 Compare Emile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt, 1981).
- 26 Compare *ibid.*, 75: 'A religion is a solidaristic system of convictions and practices that refer to the sacred – that is, tabooed and forbidden things, convictions and practices that unite all those who belong to a single moral community.'
- 27 Compare Emile Durkheim, *Soziologie und Philosophie* (Frankfurt, 1967), 105–14.
- 28 Jules Monnerot, *op. cit.*, 20.
- 29 Willem Banning, *Der Kommunismus als politisch-soziale Weltreligion* (Berlin, 1953), 7.
- 30 Compare Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 1971), 8ff., 140ff. From the presence of the cult, Vondung concludes that National Socialism had religious dimensions.
- 31 Vondung speaks of 'cult as instrument of manipulation' (*ibid.*, 196).
- 32 Jules Monnerot, *op. cit.*, 305ff.
- 33 Victor Klemperer, *LTI. Notizen eines Philologen*, 15th edn (Leipzig, 1996), 117; compare *ibid.*, 111–17.
- 34 With respect to the National Socialists, Edgar Alexander writes: 'The leadership of Hitler justifies itself and lives profoundly from the idea of a immentised salvation'. From Alexander, *Der Mythos Hitler* (Zurich, 1937), 226. Klaus Vondung also assesses in this sense:

motivated by the corresponding stimulants of experience, the political religion emerges similar to a supernatural one, complete with the claim to interpret reality as a whole and to save the human being. An inner-worldly salvation that is supposed to be attained through absolute rulership of the world is intended.

(Vondung, *op. cit.*, 183, also 209)

- 35 Compare Hermann Lübke, *Religion nach der Aufklärung* (Graz, 1986), 69ff.
- 36 Here is an important starting point for the question as to whether the political religions can be construed as forms of Gnostic thought. Compare Eric Voegelin, 'Religionsersatz. Die gnostischen Massenbewegungen unserer Zeit' (1960), Manfred Hättich (ed.), *Akademie für politische Bildung (Tutzing), Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 3rd issue (7/85), 1–26, especially 4ff. It would also be interesting to investigate whether the degree of expectation of the desired fulfilment of history influences the intensity of the concrete, political realisation. Is the threshold of the abuse of power lower when one believes redemption to be near?

- 37 Compare here A. Halder, K. Kienzler, J. Möller (eds), *Religionsphilosophie heute. Chancen und Bedeutung in Philosophie und Theologie. Experiment Religionsphilosophie*, vol. III (Düsseldorf, 1988).
- 38 The following suggestion for a provisional understanding of religion is oriented by the great monotheistic religions – above all, by Christianity. Here, it must be emphasised that the following conceptual definition does not hold in every respect for the great Far Eastern religions. Some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism do not refer to a divine sphere, but represent unbecoming as the path of salvation. That we suggest a concept of religion that does not comprehend all forms of religious reality is justified in our context by the fact that the ‘political religions’ arose in the Western context.
- 39 Bernhard Welte, *Religionsphilosophie* (Freiburg, 1978), 21; compare also Johannes Hessen, *Religionsphilosophie, 2. Bd, System der Religionsphilosophie*, 2nd edn (Munich, 1955), 14–16.
- 40 ‘Religio proprie importat ordinem ad Deum’. Thomas Aquinas, *Sth II–II*, q. 81
- 41 On the definition of a religious-philosophical concept of religion, compare also Johannes Hessen, op. cit., 22–27: ‘Religion is the life-relation of the human being to the holy’ (ibid., 27).
- 42 Compare Joseph Möller, ‘Weiterführender Versuch Religionsphilosophie’, A. Halder, K. Kienzler, J. Möller (eds.), op. cit., 340–43.
- 43 Nonetheless, we do not intend by the term ‘religion’ a human reference to a trans-subjective stock of internal psychic phenomenon – to an archetype of the collective unconscious, for example, and thus to purely inner-worldly causality . . . – but rather the relationship of created being to uncreated being, to the quintessence of ‘Being’.
- (See Eric Heck, *Der Begriff religio bei Thomas von Aquin. Seine Bedeutung für unser heutiges Verständnis von Religion* (Munich, 1971), 245)
- 44 Erich Heck, *Der Begriff religio bei Thomas von Aquin. Seine Bedeutung für unser heutiges Verständnis von Religion* (Munich, 1971), 249ff.
- 45 Compare Willem Banning, *Der Kommunismus als politisch-soziale Weltreligion* (Berlin, 1953), 7. Communism

is regarded by the mass of its adherents as a complete, satisfying and all-encompassing view of life and the world, one to which one entrusts oneself in full submission. This means that Communism performs for its adherents the same function that religion performs for believers.

Hermann Lübke writes that a ‘relationship of exclusion’ exists between Marxist systems and the religions. See Lübke, *Religion nach der Aufklärung* (Graz, 1986), 56.

- 46 The assessment of Carl Christian Bry cannot be agreed to: within disguised religion ‘there lives a conviction that refers to the conviction of every religion and is nonetheless diametrically opposed to it’. See Bry, *Verkappte Religionen*, 3rd edn (Lochham-Munich, 1964), 62.
- 47 From the perspective of the Catholic philosophy of religion and theology, the expression ‘quasi-religion’ does not recommend itself because it is not capable of clearly explicating the critical difference regarding the nature of religion.
- 48 ‘Because both Fascism and National Socialism were bound to something temporal, this is why their time was so brief’. See Paul Tillich, *An meine deutschen Freunde. Die politischen Reden Paul Tillichs während des Zweiten Weltkriegs über die ‘Stimme Amerikas’* (Stuttgart, 1973), 244ff. Jules Monnerot also confirms this connection:

With communism, the secular religion, the future assumes the function of the beyond. This was also the case with the raw and undeveloped religion of National Socialism . . . .These secular religions . . . seek the beyond in this world . . . .But very soon, the mysterium becomes the absurdity that one seeks transcendence in immanence.

(Monnerot, op. cit., 287)

Or: the 'mistake of all secular religions' consists in the 'absence of transcendence', in a 'kind of positivism' (ibid., 305).

Schlette disputes these views. To him, the expression 'ersatz religion' expresses the phenomenon insufficiently because there is in his opinion one basic energy in the human being that can be turned to various ends: 'are there specific religious energies, feelings, intentions in the human being – or is there not rather only the one, fundamental basic force that directs itself sometimes at a religious, sometimes at a non-religious object?' See here Schlette, *Einführung in das Studium der Religionen* (Freiburg, 1971), 165. Instead of the religious goal, therefore, a political goal can stand in the centre. Schlette further assumes that faith-contents other than religious ones can entirely fulfil the human being and must not lead to an impoverishment – that is, to un-freedom – so long as they refer to a transcendent God. With his concept of religion, he seeks to invoke a critical anthropology that is distinct from the classical anthropology of the religions. Schlette holds the expansion of the concept – which now extends to all phenomena that represent a total submission of the human being – to be a possible way by which to justify a new humanism of freedom, one that might hinder intolerant interaction (see Schlette, 174). Yet how can one arrive at this conclusion when one has just presented Marxism and National Socialism as examples that can also be subsumed under the expanded concept? Do these examples not manifest precisely the opposite conclusion? That is: can an imprecise understanding of the essence of totalitarian systems not fail clearly to condemn them?

- 49 At this point of the investigation, one can speak only of 'so-called' political religions.
- 50 Certainly, National Socialism is also connected to the Germanic religions and legends.
- 51 Compare Peter L. Berger, *Zur Dialektik von Religion und Gesellschaft. Element einer soziologischen Theorie* (Frankfurt, 1973), 102ff.:

The concept, 'secularisation' refers to empirically accessible processes of great significance in modern Western history. Whether these processes are to be lamented or welcomed is of course completely irrelevant to the historian or sociologist . . . .We understand by it a process by which parts of the society and segments of the culture are released from the rule of religious institutions and symbols.

The theologian, of course, cannot restrain himself from making a judgement about this historical process.

- 52 This interpretation is directed against Blumenberg, for example. Blumenberg rejects the concept of secularisation for modernity, because modernity has led to self-determination of a human being that can conceive of itself out of itself. This self-consciousness cannot be understood as a product of the decay of Christian doctrine. See here Hans Blumenberg, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehaftung. Erweiterte und überarbeitete Neuausgabe von Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt, 1983). On the whole matter, see also Karl Löwith, *Sämtliche Schriften 2: Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Zur Kritik der*



*Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart, 1983), 205–22, 452–59. In this context the judgement of Friedrich Pohlmann should also be cited:

The pseudo-scientific foundation of these ideologies, their premises of the malleability of the world and their call to the masses are specifically modern, whereas their constructions of salvation represent variations of old religious patterns. What is involved here is to a certain extent militant, anthropocentric religions, and it is perhaps this mix of very old motifs with modern ones that is the cause of these ideologies' power of attraction.

See here Pohlmann, *Marxismus – Leninismus – Kommunismus – Faschismus. Aufsätze zur Ideologie und Herrschaftsstruktur der totalitären Diktaturen* (Pfafenweiler, 1995), 19. Here, the important theological question as to whether the expression 'secularisation' is in fact appropriate to conceiving the specifically Christian understanding of the world is omitted. See here Friedrich Gogarten, *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit. Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem* (Stuttgart, 1953); Johannes B. Metz, 'Weltverständnis im Glauben. Christliche Orientierung in der Weltlichkeit der Welt heute', *Geist und Leben* 35 (1962), 165–84.

- 53 Eric Voegelin, 'Religionsersatz. Die gnostischen Massenbewegungen unserer Zeit (1960)', Manfred Hättich (ed.), *Akademie für politische Bildung (Tutzing), Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 3rd issue (7/85), 6. Also,

[t]he symbolism of the Gnostic mass movements of our era betray the derivative character of their connection with Christianity and its faith experience. Yet the problem of the fall from a spiritual height that brings the factor of insecurity to ultimate clarity into the more massive certainty of inner-worldly fulfillment of meaning appears to be a general human problem. (Ibid., 26)

On the reception of Voegelin's position, see Gregor Sebba, 'History, Modernity and Gnosticism', Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (eds), *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness and Politics* (Stuttgart, 1981), 190–241. See also W. Banning, op. cit., 11. Friedrich Pohlmann represents a similar view: 'The origin of totalitarianism is a product of the social and spiritual development of Europe; in particular, its fundamental prerequisite is the European process of secularization and democratization' (the same, op. cit., 121ff.).

- 54 To be sure, not all Gnostic movements are necessarily totalitarian.

55 Eric Voegelin, op. cit., 14.

56 Ibid., 20.

57 Compare the description by John Steinbeck:

at bright noon and almost every afternoon, a slowly advancing row of people marches through the mausoleum to look the dead face of Lenin in its glass shrine – thousands of people, and they go by the shrine and look for a moment at Lenin's vaulted forehead, sharp nose and pointy chin. A religious act is present here, although they do not want to have it called religious.

(Cited in W. Banning, op. cit., 14).

58 Compare Hermann Lübke, *Säkularisierung. Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs* (Freiburg, 1965), 109–33.

59 Compare Hermann Lübke, *Religion nach der Aufklärung* (Graz, 1986).

60 Hans-Joachim Lieber, *Ideologie. Eine historisch-sytematische Einführung* (Paderborn, 1985), 110.

61 Compare Friedrich Pohlmann's definition:

Totalitarian ideologies are dogmatic systems for the universal explanation of reality that are self-enclosed and that rigorously exclude other models of interpretation. The entire past, present and future social reality is 'derived' from a few basic axioms ... whereby the status of 'scientifically established truth' is attributed to these basic axioms (compare here H. Arendt).

(From Pohlmann, op. cit., 132)

# 14 Ideology, sects, state and totalitarianism

## A general theory<sup>1</sup>

*Peter Bernholz*

### Introduction

In a recent article Graf Ballestrin (1992) has rightly stressed that after the fall of most communist regimes we can see that the much criticized theory of totalitarianism has been, on the whole, more successful in explaining events than the alternatives offered by many of its critics. He shows that we can even demonstrate this by discussing five characteristics used by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956) to define totalitarianism: a dominant totalitarian ideology, a monopoly party, a secret police applying terror, a monopoly of information and a centrally planned economy. Still, in spite of the merits of this analysis it cannot be denied that there are severe weaknesses in the theories developed, for example, by Friedrich and Brzezinski or by Hannah Arendt (1951), as is rightly stressed by such authors as Schlangen (1970) and Linz (1975), to mention only two of many important contributions. These theories are too static to account for the causes of the rise of totalitarian regimes, their development and their breakdown or change into different political systems.

Since the publication of the two works mentioned, the theory of totalitarianism has moved further ahead to answer some of these problems (see e.g. Linz 1975; Wuthe 1981; Bracher 1987). But in the view of the present author it still lacks a unified and consistent structure capable of explaining a wide range of historical phenomena and developments which seem to be related to totalitarianism, but which have been excluded by definition from or not been covered by the theoretical analysis.

It has to be admitted that such a more comprehensive approach faces great difficulties. All definitions of political systems that can be proposed necessarily refer to ideal types in the sense of Max Weber. In reality, the differences between extreme cases of 'different' political regimes may be blurred or negligible. Phrased differently, there may be a continuum of political regimes in political space (see Figure 14.1), of whose dimensions we still have only limited knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, political regimes move in time through political space. They change on their path and it may be difficult to determine at which point they have changed into another political regime of the ideal types defined by political scientists.

It follows from these methodological remarks that isolated concepts and definitions do not help much in explaining phenomena. In this sense, the title of Walter Schlangen's (1970) article, 'Der Totalitarismus Begriff. Grundzüge seiner Entstehung, Wandlung und Kritik (The Concept of Totalitarianism: Essentials of its Origin, Change and Critique)' is certainly misleading. Concepts and definitions become meaningful only within a theoretical framework in which they are connected by causal or functional relationships.

In the following paper we will try to develop such a theoretical system. It is meant to be capable of explaining which factors may or may not lead, under different conditions, to totalitarian regimes, and which factors change those regimes in time, bring about their transformation into other regimes or cause their breakdown. In doing so we will try to generalize the theory in such a way that it covers a much broader class of cases as totalitarian regimes and relates them to other political systems. It is obvious that such a theory needs forces that drive non-totalitarian systems towards totalitarianism and are also able to change and abolish this regime itself. These forces have also to be able to overcome obstacles preventing such results, and conditions have to be stated under which they are likely to succeed. Also, the resulting consequences have to be analysed for the case in which the relevant driving forces are not successful.

We believe that the following driving forces are adequate to explain the real phenomena mentioned above: the motivation of the true believers to reach the goals of an ideology introduced or revived by charismatic leader(s), the self-interest of believers and non-believers to increase their power and wealth and the secular power of the state. Let us see where and how far this approach helps to understand empirical events. In testing its usefulness, as many historical events as possible should be taken into account.

### **Ideology, secular power, crises and the rise of totalitarianism**

We assert that ideologies containing a *Weltanschauung* (world-view) with supreme values which, according to this creed, have to be lexicographically preferred to all other human aims, are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the development of totalitarian regimes. It is thus submitted that no totalitarian regime has existed without some ideology playing a decisive role. Note that respective to our theory, religions are also considered to be ideologies.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that most, but not all scholars who have worked on totalitarianism share the view that ideology is a necessary ingredient of totalitarianism (Schlangen 1970). Drath (1963, p. xv) even calls the 'goal to install a new societal system of values which is founded deeply in metaphysics' the primary principle of totalitarianism. We agree with this statement. In fact, the imposition, if necessary by force, of the supreme

values of the ideology supposed to dominate all other values is a driving force not only for establishing but also for stabilizing a totalitarian regime, as will be shown below.

But ideology per se is not sufficient to bring about such a regime (compare the left-hand side of Figure 14.2). Three other factors have to be added to make the emergence of a totalitarian regime probable. First, an organization supporting the ideology has to be established with a leader or leadership having the monopoly to interpret its content. Second, the secular power of a state has to be 'conquered' and spiritual and secular leadership to be integrated in the hands of the same person or group. Third, such a takeover of secular power is only probable if the society in the respective state is undergoing a deep crisis. Finally, a mature ideocracy, for example a theocracy, may develop even then under certain conditions, as shown below.

Let us sketch the causal relationships leading to totalitarian regimes according to our theory in more detail (compare Bernholz 1993 for a comprehensive analysis with much empirical evidence). An ideology with supreme values is necessary for the development of a totalitarian regime because such values, when truly believed by the adherents of the creed, justify any behaviour and command any action which could help to spread and to maintain the *Weltanschauung* and its prescriptions. For since the supreme values contain the absolute truth and have to be lexicographically preferred to everything, enemies and even neutral non-believers of these truths have to be converted, to be forced into emigration, to be excluded from the community of true believers or even to be eliminated. For otherwise they pose a permanent danger to believers because they might contaminate them with their wrong (sinful) ideas.

Depending on the substantive content of the supreme values, even aggression or imperialism may be necessary. If the creed postulates that its truths have to spread all over the world, that its leaders or the selected people, class or race should dominate the world, or that outside people or their land, possessions, etc., are needed to reach the aims postulated by the supreme values, then proselytizing activities may not be sufficient. For resistance to these demands has to be expected, so that 'holy' terror, war and persecution may be necessary.

To reach such aims, however, the believers in the ideology need a leadership and an organization, so that they can be directed towards the accomplishment of these goals. The ideological community has to be turned into an ideological movement (a party, church, dominating priesthood, etc.). Also, the supreme values often contain gaps and are somewhat vague, so that an interpretation, especially in view of the intermediate targets to be reached, becomes necessary. But since different interpretations are possible, an ideological movement must establish a monopoly of its leader or leadership concerning the right to interpret the creed. Otherwise the movement will splinter into several branches; a schism will develop and thus strongly reduce its chances to accomplish its ends.

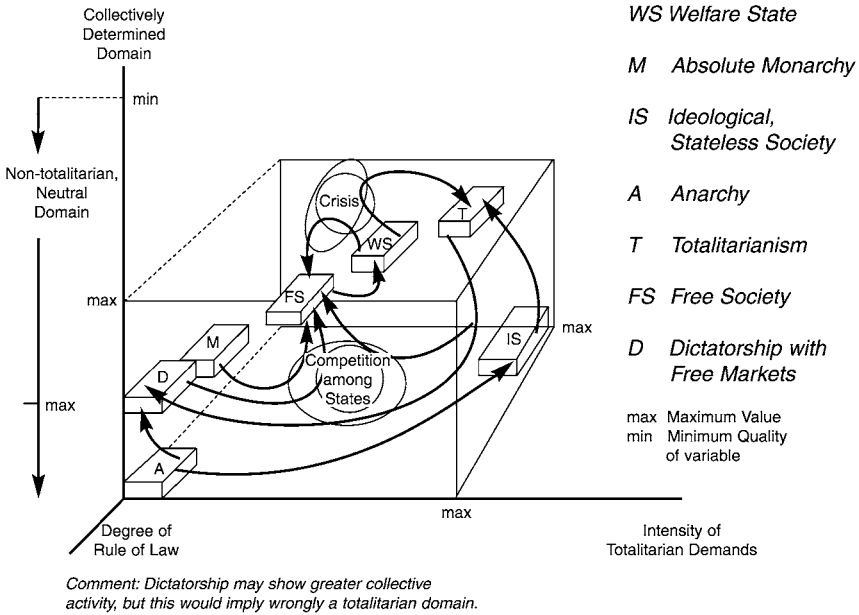


Figure 14.1 Change of political-economic regime.

To reach the goals postulated by the supreme values, especially if they require expansion, it is often necessary to grasp the secular power of the state. This is obvious if people, land and property are needed and if the people concerned resist the demands by the ideological movement, as has to be expected. Similarly, if the target population resists conversion, conversion by pressure or force becomes necessary. Finally, even the defence against suppression by governmental authorities believing in other creeds or in the danger of the ideological movement, makes the winning of secular power necessary.

To conquer secular power by peaceful or by revolutionary means, again an organization and a leadership of the ideological community, i.e. an ideological movement, is indispensable. Thus for a peaceful transition to power in an existing democracy, sufficient electoral support has to be won. Thus missionary work and election campaigns have to be organized and financed, hostile organizations and ideologies have to be fought and to be infiltrated, their membership to be intimidated by active terrorist sub-groups, coalition governments to be formed, and the coalition partners to be dominated. After gaining government power, the whole structure of the state has to be transformed according to the goals of the ideology, hostile parties and organizations have to be subdued to make the control of government permanent, and the police and armed forces have to be brought

under control. All this can only be accomplished by a movement supported by a well functioning organization led by a determined and dedicated leadership.

The task of taking control of government may be even more difficult in an authoritarian regime. Here it is not sufficient to win enough votes in an election or even to convert the majority of the people. The armed forces and the police have to be infiltrated and a substantial part of them, especially of the officer corps, to be won for the goals of the ideological movement before there can be hope of a successful coup. This may be the more difficult, the more the existing regime has used its own supporting, if not totalitarian ideology. Note, however, that if the position of the ideological movement becomes stronger and stronger, it need not necessarily convert ever more members of the armed forces or of the officer corps to its creed. For many people who now believe that the movement is on its way up, may expect their own promotion, higher incomes or more power if they join the winning forces in time. Much of this is also true in democracies. Moreover, there may be also a belief that the new system would bring about a turn for the better in the general economic and political plight of the country and thus also of the personal situation of people concerned.

With this remark we come to the importance, perhaps even necessity of crises as perceived by the population for the success of an ideological movement. Its task of grasping secular power is usually formidable. If the economy is flourishing, if no wars and civil wars are raging, if people are satisfied with the economic and political situation, why should the people be inclined to change their world view according to the supreme values of a new or revised ideology? A few may be so saturated and disenchanted with such a society lacking higher values that they are receptive to the new ideas asking for sacrifices. But the broad majority of the population would only be afraid of an unnecessary disturbance of their convenient and easy-going lifestyle. The difficulties are even greater if well established ideologies exist, which are saturated, non-expansionary and do not demand much from their adherents.

The situation is quite different in times of extreme crisis. During or after a devastating war or civil war, during severe economic distress, such as a strong depression with widespread unemployment, a hyperinflation or bad harvests leading to famine especially in former times, people look desperately for solutions to their often dismal plights. Thus, given such conditions, an ideological movement has a great chance of success if it is able to communicate to broad masses of the population 'better' recipes to solve the perceived problems than its ideological competitors, i.e. solutions which are contained in its *Weltanschauung* and are consistent with its supreme values. Given the relatively poor information of the majority of the population concerning the mostly complex problems (especially in modern societies) which have to be solved, such recipes have to be simple

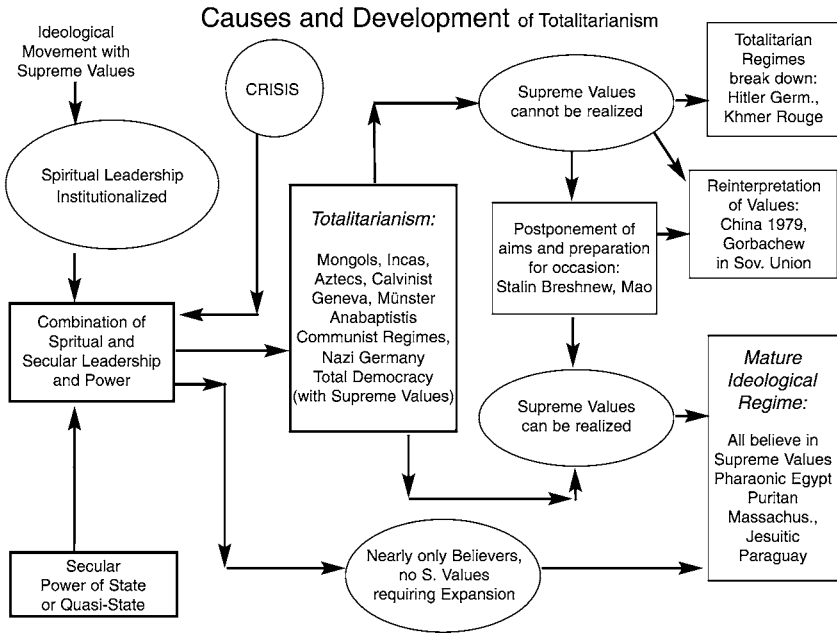


Figure 14.2 Causes and development of totalitarianism.

enough and possibly also to propose the removal of scapegoats who have to be found among the people supposedly hostile to the creed.

The combination of the spiritual power of an ideological movement with the secular power of the state may also take a different route. Secular leaders may perceive the strong influence wielded by the movement over its followers and thus realize that its support can help them to gain the upper hand over their political rivals in succeeding to or in maintaining government power. They may thus join the creed whether they believe in the ideology or not, and try to get control of its spiritual leadership. In the latter case, ideology and ideological movement would only serve personal aims. But such a perversion of the goals of the original charismatic founders to serve only as an instrument could also occur from within the movement, especially if it succeeded in gaining secular power only after a long period, sometimes after generations. For in this case, the spiritual leaders of the movement might no longer be true believers and use it as an instrument for their own personal purposes.

Let us sum up. First, an ideology with a *Weltanschauung* containing supreme values is founded or revived by a charismatic leader or leadership with a small group of possibly also charismatic followers (apostles, old guard). To reach a greater mass of potential believers, the world-view and aims have to appeal to many people and seemingly to solve the problems perceived by them. Otherwise the ideology would not be widely accepted in



its competition with other creeds. The ideology is driven ahead by the urgent need felt by believers to realize its supreme values, which are superordinated to all other aims and contain important promises for a better life in this or in the world to come. If its goals can only be reached by turning all people into believers, or by using their services or goods, then the ideology has to strive for secular power to force its will on resisting parts of the population. To succeed in this endeavour, a strong leadership, having the monopoly right to interpret the creed, and an organization are necessary. Also, the chances of obtaining control of a government only become favourable if an economic or political crisis deeply dissatisfies broad segments of the population, who now look to new solutions for their plight. The drive to joining spiritual and secular power may also be helped if secular political leaders perceive the potential of the ideological movement for gaining and maintaining government power, and thus join it for their own personal ends. After spiritual and secular powers have been combined, an ideocracy will be established. This may be a mature ideocracy, like a theocracy, or a totalitarian regime. We shall return to an analysis of these systems in the next section.

What happens to ideological movements that do not succeed in obtaining secular power? First, some may turn to armed resistance, intimidation of the population or to terrorism, especially if they are suppressed or persecuted by government(s). They may do so either just to preserve their existence or in the hope of conquering government power by such actions later on. In some cases, a kind of civil war may develop. If the ruling authorities are themselves connected with another ideology, the fight against new ideological movements may take the form of a necessary suppression of heretics or pagans.

Second, especially if armed resistance, intimidation and terrorism prove unsuccessful and/or if the societal environment is more beneficent, the ideological movement may change or reinterpret some of its values to be tolerated. At the same time, it may separate itself as much as possible from the surrounding society to preserve the purity of its creed from infiltrations of other values. With such a development taking place, the respective ideological movement will support the goals of toleration, freedom and rule of law to be able to defend its identity (Bernholz 1994).

Third, the ideological community may decide to emigrate to more favourable environments if they see no end to suppression and persecution in their homeland. Note that all these developments are also driven by the aim of believers to attain as many of the supreme values of their creed as possible, given different environmental restrictions.

### **Ideocracy and totalitarian regime**

After spiritual and secular power have been united by one leadership, an ideocracy will be established and its permanency secured as far as possible.

The leadership, driven by the supreme values of the ideology, will use, if necessary, secular besides spiritual power to implement the implied goals. One example of an ideocracy is a theocracy.<sup>4</sup> Note that an ideocracy has necessarily a constitution (Bernholz 1991). The rules implied by the supreme values have to be followed and are in principle unalterable even by the leadership. Only their interpretation may change, but that is true for any body of law.

An ideocracy need not but can be a totalitarian regime. Here we will thus differentiate between totalitarianism and mature ideocracies as subspecies. What are then mature ideocracies? In a mature ideocracy the goals of the ideological movement have been broadly reached, whereas this is not true for a totalitarian regime. Good examples of mature ideocracies are the Puritan state in Massachusetts and the Jesuit state in Paraguay, both founded at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Further examples may be Tibet under the Dalai Lama and Pharaonic Egypt, though in those cases I have not looked closely enough at the evidence.

Some may doubt whether Puritan Massachusetts and Jesuit Paraguay really fit into our category, since they were dominions of the English and Spanish crowns, respectively. But the domination by England and by Spain was mainly nominal. The two colonies were actually self-ruling, could mobilize armed forces and had thus combined spiritual and secular forces. Both were founded with the explicit intention of preserving the purity of creed and to admit and tolerate only true believers.

The Puritans 'had undertaken to establish a society where the will of God would be in every detail a kingdom of God on earth' (Morgan 1958, p. 68). From the beginning, except for the necessary craftsmen and some others, only believers were admitted as immigrants to Massachusetts. And later 'heretics' of differing Protestant beliefs like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were exiled to Massachusetts under threat of the death penalty should they return. All of private and public life was regulated according to the commands of God. Sins had to be punished. 'And punish they did, with the eager cooperation of the whole community, who knew that sin unpunished might expose them all to the wrath of God' (p. 71). Within these limits, a democracy to which all free men belonged developed. But only those could be free men who were members of the Puritan Church.

The 'state' of the Jesuits was organized to convert and to civilize the Indians of the region who were, until then, earning their living by hunting and foraging. The Jesuit fathers also wanted to save them from the *encomienda*, a kind of serfdom, where they were badly treated and exploited by their Spanish masters. The Indians were settled in villages called *reducciones*, reductions, which are referred to sometimes also as *missiones*. They were mainly occupied with agriculture and with raising cattle. Some were busy as craftsmen and artisans. Their everyday life, including religious duties, was strictly regulated. One can, in fact, speak of a kind of planned economy.

Scarcely any whites were admitted by the fathers to prevent their obnoxious influence on their flock. But the form of government was strictly oligarchic since it was totally in the hands of the two Jesuit fathers in each mission, who again had strictly to follow the orders of their superiors. The local chiefs were only employed in executing the decisions taken by the fathers and to monitor the people. But it was a benevolent oligarchy since it was, in fact, a theocratic regime dominated by Catholic Christian values. In time the Jesuits built up an efficient army, which several times rescued the Spanish viceroy. This army had become necessary because of attacks by still uncivilized Indians, but much more because of the raids by 'Paulistas' from Sao Paulo in Brazil looking for slaves and booty (Ezran 1989).

Why then and under which conditions do ideological movements not turn into totalitarian regimes when they have combined spiritual and secular power? The answer to these questions can be found if the interplay of two relevant factors is taken into account; namely the substantive content of the supreme values and the obstacles to their implementation. For assume that the combination of spiritual and secular power takes place under conditions such that no obstacles remain to the immediate implementation of these values during and from this very moment, then the new ideocratic regime needs no application of force to subjugate, force into migration or eliminate unwilling people or to obtain the people and goods necessary for the implementation of its belief system.

As examples, consider the Puritans of Massachusetts and the Jesuit settlements of Paraguay. The Puritans admitted, apart from some craftsmen, only believers to the first emigration from England. Later, (Protestant) dissenters like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were forced into exile (Morgan 1958, chs IX and X). Thus, from the very beginning, the contents of the supreme values were implemented, since nearly all the population shared or, at least, acquiesced to the tenets of this democratic theocracy.

In the oligarchic theocracy of the Jesuits things were similar, since only Indians converted to Catholicism were admitted as permanent members of the reductions. It is true that some exceptions existed for white traders and for gauchos. But the latter lived outside of the settlements and the former were only allowed to stay for a few days (Ezran 1989, pp. 129–33). Moreover, both groups were at least Catholics. Indians who fled the reductions and possibly reverted to paganism or caused unrest, both rare events, were caught and whipped. Women were shaven, rebellious shamans sometimes hanged if no other means helped (pp. 82 and 132). But on the whole, this use of force was rare, since only believers constituted the population. Thus little use of secular force and no terror was necessary to reach the supreme values of the creed.

To complete our analysis of the conditions under which totalitarianism does not occur after spiritual and secular power have been combined, we have

finally to categorize possible ideologies according to the substantive contents of their supreme values. For this purpose the following categories are proposed:

- 1 *Universal ideologies.* As such we understand ideologies whose substantive aims call for the conversion of all people on earth.
- 2 *Universal dominance ideologies.* The supreme values of these ideologies do not demand the conversion of all people, but the dominance over all people on earth by an elite population defined by the creed. An example would be the aim of world domination by the Aryan race.
- 3 *Expansionary ideologies.* These are ideologies aiming for an expansion of their territory or of the number of their believers or of the goods they need to reach their supreme values. They do not, however, strive for universal conversion or dominance. A nationalism trying to bring together into one state all the people in neighbouring states speaking the same language would be an example.
- 4 *Restrictive ideologies.* These ideologies, once they have reached secular power, do not have any aims left for conversion of foreigners, to dominate foreign countries or to expand.

Now it is obvious that universal ideologies, universal dominance ideologies and expansionary ideologies are strongly tempted to use not only peaceful conversion, but also the secular power gained in trying to reach their aims. As a consequence, the leaders will try to harness the whole population and all economic means for this purpose, whether by persuasion, force or terror. Also all means, even terror and undeclared war, are justified against resisting foreign nations by the supreme values. It follows that the probability of a totalitarian regime becomes very high for these three categories of ideology whenever spiritual and secular power are combined.

Things are different for restrictive ideologies. If no expansionary aims have to be followed after grasping secular power, the chances are great that a peaceful, mature ideocracy will be established. For example, a nationalistic ideology gaining power over a territory comprising all people speaking the same language, and only those, will probably turn into such a regime.

However, the above analysis also makes clear that another condition for totalitarianism not to emerge consists in the initial conditions in the country in which spiritual and secular power have been combined. If, at that moment, a part of the population consists of non-believers resisting the ideology, or cannot even be converted (Jews under the Nazis, capitalists under the communists), measures have to be taken domestically to reach the supreme values, even if the ideology is restrictive. Note that for Puritan Massachusetts and for Jesuit Paraguay, these conditions were fulfilled: the ideologies did not demand expansion apart from peacefully converting wild Indians in South America, and from the very beginning of

the combination of spiritual and secular power, scarcely any non-believers and inconvertibles were present in the controlled territory.

### **On the theory of totalitarian regimes**

It follows from the foregoing analysis that we cannot agree with Andreski (1965) on his definition of totalitarianism 'to designate a political regime whereby the government controls the totality of social life' (p. 311). It is true that the concept 'totalitarianism' was invented and used by early critics of Italian fascism like Amendola and Basso (Petersen 1978) and then taken up by the Fascist movement itself. Thus Mussolini (1929) stated:

For the Fascist everything is within the state and there exists nothing human or spiritual, or even has value, outside the state. In this sense Fascism is totalitarian and the Fascist state interprets, develops and multiplies the whole life of the people as a synthesis and unity of each value.  
(pp. 847–48)

We are, however, not concerned with the history of ideas, but rather trying to develop a general theory within which the concept of 'totalitarianism' has to be a meaningful element. But it has just been shown under which conditions mature ideocracies can develop which can regulate, like the Jesuit state in Paraguay, nearly all aspects of life. Thus they would have to be called, in this case, 'totalitarian' according to the above definition. But it is obvious that they lack decisive ingredients ascribed to modern totalitarian regimes. Let us only mention among them 'permanent revolution' (S. Neumann 1956), 'terror' (Arendt 1951; S. Neumann 1956), 'mass society' (Arendt 1951), and 'inclination to war' (Turati 1928). It follows that we cannot call all possible states with an unlimited domain of government activity totalitarian regimes. Such a procedure would, moreover, force us to include total democracy with unlimited jurisdiction, in which majorities, among totalitarian regimes, could take all decisions even if they lacked a general ideology informing their policies. But the latter characteristic is mentioned by nearly all analysts of modern totalitarianism as one of its decisive elements (Arendt 1951; Friedrich 1953, Beckerath 1927).

It thus seems to be clear that another definition of totalitarianism is needed for a consistent general theory. Also, since totalitarian regimes are guided by an ideological belief system, they must be, like mature ideocracies, a special form of ideocratic regime. In fact, from our earlier analysis, the following definition suggests itself:

A totalitarian regime is an ideocracy which has not yet reached the aims implied by its supreme values and which tries to pursue them with the spiritual and secular power available after it has gained domination of a state.

This definition fits well with the driving forces identified in the first section above: The true believers strive to reach the goals of the ideology and the self-interest of believers and non-believers, especially of the leaders, motivates them to increase their power and wealth by using the goals of domestic and foreign expansion implied by the ideology. Finally, all means are justified to accomplish the ideological aims because they are used in the 'service' of the supreme values, which are absolutely true and have thus to be preferred to all other aims. Any sacrifice of goods and even of lives is hence not only allowed but even demanded in order to reach these higher purposes.

This theoretical approach enables us, moreover, to derive as *consequences* the *characteristics* of totalitarian regimes observed by many analysts. Since a totalitarian regime has not yet reached its aims, it is in a permanent state of revolution (S. Neumann 1956) and may turn to terror (Arendt 1951) or war (Turati 1928) to move towards their realization. Also, for the same purpose, a removal of enemies and of hostile organizations or a take-over of the latter by believers may be necessary. Institutions to supervise and to control like a secret police (Arendt 1951; Friedrich 1953) or an inquisition are needed to locate and to persecute, exile or imprison adversaries who are usually defined as either non-believers, as opponents or as being not convertible to the ideology (Arendt 1951). Finally, propaganda (Arendt 1951; Friedrich 1953; S. Neumann 1956) to spread the creed and a dualism between state organs and the ideological organization (Arendt 1951; F. L. Neumann 1942) has to be expected. For since an ideological organization is necessary to gain secular power, it is probable that dualism will arise after gaining government power. Also, to make propaganda more effective against rival ideologies, a monopoly of information (Friedrich 1953) may be established as soon as government powers have been conquered.

This discussion should demonstrate that the traits used to describe totalitarian regimes, e.g. by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965/1956) could be derived within our dynamic theory as consequences that follow under certain conditions if an ideocracy has been established. They will only appear if the ends implied by the supreme values of its ideology are not yet realized when spiritual and secular power have been combined and/or if the respective ideology is not restricted.

After having defined the concept of totalitarian regime and its position within the interrelations of our dynamic theory of ideological movements and of ideocracies, we are now able to take a critical look at some implications of other definitions. First, according to our analysis, there is no need to limit 'totalitarianism' to regimes applying or trying to apply central planning of the economy (Friedrich 1953). For if the goals of an ideology do not include such policies, it can still develop into a totalitarian regime because of other unrealized goals implied. Also, an atomization of individuals (F.L. Neumann 1942; Arendt 1951) is not necessary, since groups and organizations with aims not conflicting with the ideological goals may be tolerated.

As a consequence of the removal of such limitations of the concept of totalitarianism conflicting with our theory, this theory can be applied and used to explain quite a number of additional historical cases (Figure 14.2, centre), to which we turn in the following section.

### **Historical cases of totalitarian regimes**

Modern totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, and China under Mao have been widely analysed. Thus there is no need to discuss them again (but compare Bernholz 1993). Here we want to highlight earlier historical cases that, according to our theory, were also totalitarian regimes, namely the Mongolian, Aztec and Inca empires, Geneva under Calvin and Münster during the Anabaptist regime.

#### ***The Mongols under Genghis Khan and his immediate successors***

In his article ‘Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245–1255’, Eric Voegelin (1941) analyses several letters mainly addressed to popes and French kings by the Mongolian emperors. He proves that these letters, in fact, contained orders to submit to Mongolian rule, since the Mongolian emperors believed themselves to be destined by God to establish his order all over the world. Let us quote Voegelin:

The thesis [in the documents] that Genghis Khan is the only and supreme Lord of the Earth may be considered as part of a dogmatic system explaining the true nature of government in the cosmos . . . But since . . . at least the earthly part of it, is a world in the making, the formula proves to be a claim to rulership for Genghis Khan and to submission by all other earthly powers . . . . Bringing down revealed essence to earth, incorporating essence into history, is the far-reaching comprehensive intention of the Order. It is brimming with dynamic energy and pregnant with the fanatical acts born of the desire to transform the world of man into a likeness of God’s rule in Heaven.

(p. 405)

In such cases of a regrettable lack of understanding for the perfectly peaceful and law abiding intentions of the Mongol Imperial Government who did nothing but carry out an order of God, punitive expeditions had to be undertaken – like that of 1241, carried into Eastern and Central Europe, which had been the proximate cause for the papal mission of 1245 (p. 406).

De Rachewiltz (1973) extends and confirms Voegelin’s analysis by studying earlier sources, and especially the ‘Secret History of the Mongols’. He concludes that

Since the crime of turning a deaf ear to the Mongol court's order of submission was not . . . merely an offence against the emperor, but an overt offence against Heaven's Decree, punishment of the offender, had, of course, to be proportionate. Hence the frightful massacres and destruction, and the complete lack of pity towards the civilian population, which was often annihilated. Here again we find an exact parallel in the practice of the crusading armies.

(p. 25)

It should be clear from these citations that the Mongols followed a universal dominance ideology. The supreme values contained in it ordered them to extend their empire and its order given by God to the whole world. It justified cruelties and massacres against all who did not voluntarily submit to God's and thus to their emperor's demands.

### *Aztecs and Incas*

Let us turn next to the Aztecs (Mexica) and the Incas. Both rose from unimportant beginnings to become masters of huge empires within a few decades. During the pre-imperial epochs a 'process of centralization of power and incipient social stratification' took place, which

was a successful adaptive response to the environmental-demographic political pressures made manifest in the threats posed by the larger and stronger societies surrounding the early Mexica and Inca. The continuing operation of these same pressures eventually triggered the two parallel transformational crises – the Mexica's overthrow of the Tepanecs and the Inca's defeat of the Chanca. In both cases victory brought power to a small corps of military leaders who set about restructuring their societies by intensifying existing developmental trends. Each transformational crisis was followed by a series of reforms enacted by the new leadership . . .

However, . . . the most critical measures were religious reforms.

(Conrad and Demarest 1984, pp. 179f.)

Manipulations of the upper pantheon began in pre-imperial times with the crystallization of patron deities, the Mexica's Huitzilopochtli and the Incas' Inti, out of fluid, manifold sky gods. . . .

Huitzilopochtli and Inti ultimately became imperial patrons, intensifying the 'solarization' of Aztec and Inca religion. This emphasis on solar aspects of the divine complexes is hardly surprising.

(Conrad and Demarest 1984, pp. 180f.)



*The empire of the Mexicas*

The elevation of Huitzilopochtli to become dominant god in the Mexican pantheon would not have been sufficient to create expansionary ideologies. But an imperial cosmology was developed by a handful of men, especially Itzcoatl, Montezuma I and above all Tlacaelel, a high priest and chief adviser (Conrad and Demarest 1984, ch. 2). Huitzilopochtli now became identified with the warrior sun and the imperial cosmology held that the Mexica must relentlessly take captives in warfare and sacrifice them; the spiritual strength of the sacrificed enemy warriors would strengthen the sun and stave off its inevitable destruction by the forces of darkness. Thus, it was specifically the Mexica's sacred duty to pursue a course of endless warfare, conquest, and sacrifice to preserve the universe from daily threat of annihilation. The new vision of the cosmos accelerated the pace and scale of human sacrifices beyond all previous measure, associating these ancient rites specifically with the Mexica state and the expansion of the Triple Alliance (Conrad and Demarest 1984, p. 38).

The new ideology set the Mexica apart from their neighbours and predecessors and irrevocably altered the course of Aztec history. ... Through an accelerated process, mass human sacrifice would reach unimaginable proportions by the late fifteenth century, with single ceremonies sometimes involving the massacre of literally thousands and even ten thousands of captives. These rituals and the cosmology that demanded them would launch the Mexican armies on a divine quest, a quest that would result in the sprawling Aztec Empire.

(p. 42)

Let us also note that the new dogma was propagated by art, literature and education (pp. 42ff.) through a comprehensive propaganda programme.

*The empire of the Incas*

The expansionary ideology of the Incas was based on quite different religious beliefs.

In imperial times Inca state religion assigned special importance to three sub-complexes of the sky god: a universal creator with a variety of titles, the best known being Viracocha; the sun god Inti; and Illapa, the thunder or weather deity.

Underlying the upper pantheon, and inextricably linked to it, were two more fundamental religious concepts: ancestor worship and *huaca*.

The word is a generic term for any person, place or thing with sacred or supernatural associations; it conveys a sense of embodied holiness.

(Conrad and Demarest 1984, ch. 3)

Above the level of the family, the fundamental unit of Inca social organization was the *ayllu*, which 'was a kin group tracing its descent from a common ancestor ... The *ayllu* was also the basic landholding group' (p. 97). 'The ancestors defined the *ayllu* and legitimated its land tenure and protected its members. Therefore, it is no surprise that the *ayllu*'s prosperity depended on proper care of its mummies, fetishes, and other *huacas*' (p.105).

In 1438 a major crisis threatened the small Inca state around Cuzco, when the Chanca invaded its territory and besieged the city. The ruling Viracocha Inca fled with his designated heir, Inca Urcon. The defence was left to another son, Cusi Inca Yupanqui, who succeeded with supernatural help of the sky god and of allies secured by offering them rewards, in driving away the Chanca invaders and routing them in subsequent battles. Thereafter he replaced his father and brother as ruler and assumed the name Pachakuti, 'He who remakes the World'. Cusi Inca and his leading followers instituted some important governmental and ideological reforms and embarked upon the remarkable sequence of conquests that established the Inca empire.

The reforms were built on the existing religion sketched above. According to Inca oral history, Cusi Inca Yupanqui, when awaiting the final Chanca onslaught, beheld in a dream or vision

a supernatural figure of terrifying aspect. ... This apparition identified itself as the Incas' sky god ... calling him 'my son'. It then proceeded to reassure him if he kept to the true religion, he was destined to be a great ruler and to conquer many nations.

(Conrad and Demarest 1984, p. 111)

It follows that at least from this time the Inca rulers were considered to be direct descendents of the sky god and its aspect as sun god, Inti. Connected with this, the royal ancestor cult was now greatly expanded. When an Inca emperor died, the rule of the empire passed to one of his sons. But the

deceased emperor's palaces ..., servants, chattels, and other possessions continued to be treated as his property and were entrusted to his *panaqa*, a corporate social group containing all of his descendants in the male line except his successor [i.e. a kind of *ayllu*]. These secondary heirs did not actually own the items named above. Instead, ownership remained vested in the dead king ...

The primary purpose of the *panaqa* was to serve as the dead king's court, maintain his mummy, and perpetuate his cult.

(p. 113)

These innovations had far-reaching consequences, since the new king had to acquire new property and wealth for himself.

He had two principal means of doing so. First, he could demand additional periods of service from his existing subjects, increasing their tax burden [in the form of obligatory labour services]. Second, he could conquer new territories, . . . and impose taxes on their inhabitants.

However, the emperor could not levy taxes at will in his provinces, whether new or old. His own demands, like those of the state as a whole, were regulated by principals of reciprocity. He had to sustain and entertain citizens while they worked for him. Therefore, the emperor's fundamental economic need was for agricultural land whose produce could be used to fulfil his reciprocal obligations to the taxpayers.

(p. 121)

The rights of dead rulers placed considerable amounts of land and labour outside a new emperor's control and left him facing the question of how to create his own agricultural states and have them farmed. There was one obvious solution to this problem: he could conquer new territory and exploit their wealth.

(p. 122)

It follows that the religious reforms created the driving force behind the expansion of the Inca empire. But to reach this goal, the citizens had also to be convinced of its value. This was reached by an incessant propaganda and, especially at the beginning, by material benefits to be gained. The propaganda reminded people that their king was a god whose interest coincided with their own and that their welfare depended on the prosperity of their past and present rulers. 'Finally, in every stratum of society the brave soldier's rewards continued long after his death. The Inca believed that those who fought with courage and skill would eventually occupy "the principal place in heaven"' (p. 124).

We conclude that the Incas had created an expansionary ideology that brought them to establish a totalitarian empire, in this case with a state controlled economy (Baudin 1956). Note also that a formal training programme for sons of the nobility and the sons of the native provincial aristocracy was instituted in Cuzco, where the state religion and the official (rewritten) Inca history were taught.

### ***The rule of the Anabaptists in Münster***

The next case to be mentioned as a totalitarian regime is the rule of the Anabaptists in Münster (Westphalia) in 1534–35. In this city, a kind of stalemate had developed between the mainly Lutheran city council and the Anabaptists, since the Lutherans needed the help of the latter to prevent the Catholic bishop from dominating Münster again and recatholicizing it. Thus religious freedom was granted to the Anabaptists in Münster, though

they were outlawed and persecuted in the Holy Roman empire to which the city belonged. Thus more and more Anabaptists moved to Münster, among them the Dutchman, Jan Matthijs, the new leader of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the bishop soon recruited an army to retake the city. Afraid of both the Anabaptists and the bishop, many Lutherans left Münster. As a consequence, at the regular annual election of the Münster Council on February 23, 1534, only Anabaptists were elected, with the visionary Knipperdolling as leading *Bürgermeister*. Soon, however, practical power was no longer exercised by the legitimate city government but by the charismatic apostolic messenger, Jan Matthijs (Stayer 1976, ch. 11; Von Dülmen 1974; Goertz 1980).

The Münster Anabaptists were a part of the Melchiorites, the sect founded by Melchior Hoffman.

According to Melchiorite teaching, baptism would be resumed in a time of grace at the end of all persecution, and in a particular New Jerusalem. Earlier, this had meant Strassburg, the most tolerant city in the Germanies from the Anabaptist point of view. Now Münster assumed a parallel role, or was said to have replaced Strassburg as the New Jerusalem.

(Stayer 1976, p. 230).

Melchiorite Christianity awaited the temporal reign of the returned Christ in the immediate future and built heavily on the prophesies of Daniel and other prophets. Originally their doctrine called for the peaceful endurance of persecution during the time they waited for the coming of Christ. But the events in Münster, and especially the Siege by the Bishop, led them to turn to a more aggressive interpretation of the Scriptures. Also, the escape of the Anabaptists from military defeat on 10 February 1534 was soon interpreted as a miraculous event.

Bernhard Rothmann, an Anabaptist preacher in Münster, who had done much to bring them to power, 'articulated the crusading consciousness of the Kingdom in a number of pamphlets devoted to a sort of propagandistic theology' (Stayer 1976, p. 239). He pointed out that the saints had to take arms to carry out the vengeance on the ungodly as a necessary prelude to Christ's Second Coming:

it has pleased [the Lord] that we and all true Christians should not now limit ourselves to fending off the power of the godless through the Sword. He also wants to give the Sword into the hands of his people to take revenge on everything that is unjust and bad throughout the whole world.

(Rothmann 1970, p. 212)

We conclude that the Münster Anabaptist movement, in spite of their weak secular forces had created a universal dominance ideology, since they believed in God's help. With this, a totalitarian regime was inescapable as soon as they had (quite legally) grasped power. Already four days later the unbaptized population was either forced to accept baptism or driven out of the city. Unlike earlier emigrants, they were not allowed to take their belongings with them.

Prophet Matthijs' de facto rule, however, lasted only one month. In April 1534, he was killed during a sortie to which he was probably driven by one of his visions. Jan of Leyden, who became his successor as chief prophet, used this occasion to give the holy city of Münster formally a holy constitution. Instead of the city council chosen by men, the prophet as God's representative selected twelve god-fearing men as elders. Jan of Leyden himself became the official spokesman during the administration of the Twelve Elders who wielded the Sword of Justice from April/May to September 1534. Now the scripture as law replaced officially the secular law of the city. Spiritual and secular power had been formally combined.

Under the Elders, claims to universal dominion developed. Coins were minted 'to claim universal dominion for the Münster Anabaptists'. They bore the slogan, 'One king established over all', followed by the other Anabaptist universals, 'One God, one faith, one baptism' (Stayer 1976, p. 238). This was done though the use of coins as money was forbidden. The expression 'king' refers to Jan van Leyden, who was raised to kingship in September 1534. This followed God's command to Jan and a sign from God he had prayed for, namely the proclamation that Jan should be made king by another prophet, John Dusentschar from Warendorf.

Let us complete the description of this Münster episode by describing some of the measures taken by the totalitarian regime. We have already mentioned forced baptism and exile at the beginning of the regime. Later all citizens were forced to surrender their money and to accept polygamy. Persons 'blaspheming' against Anabaptist prophets and ministers were executed. A former nunnery served as a jail for the few who had neither accepted expulsion nor rebaptism. In time, the use of terror increased. Those who resisted the confiscation of money and precious metals or the introduction of polygamy were executed. When a group of people rebelled against polygamy under ex-alderman Mollenhecke, 47 of the original conspirators were executed and buried in mass graves. After the fall of Münster, the King himself admitted to having seven or eight people beheaded, whereas his chief administrator and executioner Knipperdolling acknowledged having decapitated 11 or 12 persons (Stayer 1976, p. 256).

### *Calvin's regime in Geneva*

As a final historical case of a totalitarian regime, we shall discuss Geneva during Calvin's lifetime. Here the citizens assembled in public on 21 May

1536 and decided, by raising their hands, that they would live in the future solely according to the Bible and the word of God. This happened after the Protestant revolution had taken place and after the Catholic Church had been suppressed with the help of terror and force. The actual implementation of the supreme values was left to Jean Calvin; especially from 1541 on, when he was recalled from a few years' exile by the city council (compare the well written account by Zweig, 1936/1983). Calvin had already written earlier:

The power with which the preachers should be endowed will here be clearly described. Since they are called as administrators and propagators of the word of God, they have to dare everything and to coerce all the great and mighty of this world, to bow to God and to serve him alone. They have to give orders to all, from the lowliest to the most elevated. They have to introduce the statute of God, to destroy the kingdom of Satan, to spare the lambs and to exterminate the wolves. They have to exhort and to instruct the obedient, to accuse the reluctant and opposing. They can bind and absolve, cast lightning and thunder, but all this according to the word of God.

(Calvin 1887)

In agreement with these ideas, Calvin undertook a comprehensive theocratic restructuring of political and social life. A Consistory was formed, made up of 6 Preachers and 12 Elders, who had to be proposed by the Preachers and to be confirmed by the congregation. The Consistory had the right to issue laws and to judge people not attending church service, who violated the strict moral code or adhered to or propagated heterodox religious opinions even of a Protestant nature. Condemned, they were transferred to the worldly authority for punishment. Even the mildest opposition against Calvin's views was suppressed. All actions, words and even expressions were strictly supervised. From 1542 to 1546 alone, 58 persons were executed, some of them burnt at the stake; 76 were banned. Theatre and dancing were forbidden, children were only allowed biblical first names when they were baptized. 'Luxury' clothing was not permitted and even popular Swiss-German costumes forbidden. Bachelors and spinsters had to live with families, writings not approved by the Consistory were banned. All these measures led to the resistance of a freedom party, the Libertins, who comprised many of the most reputed citizens of Geneva. Calvin suppressed it with a regime of terror, assisted by the many Calvinist refugees who had been made citizens following his proposal. Several people not able to flee were executed.

In this way, Calvin had by 1555 gained absolute domination of Geneva, which he turned into a 'Protestant Rome'. In 1554 the famous Theological Academy was founded to educate Calvinist ministers to propagate the true Christian faith to France, England, Scotland and the Netherlands. A kind of secret police was formed which even extended its activities to foreign countries.

***Conclusions for the theory of totalitarianism***

In all the historical cases discussed, the introduction or the decisive change of an ideology was a necessary factor for the development of a totalitarian regime. Also in all these cases, secular and spiritual power were combined and used to stabilize and to extend the totalitarian rule and to enforce the supreme values contained in the ideology. Moreover, crises played a role in the early development of the Aztec, Inca and Münster Anabaptist ideology, and its interpretation and in the consolidation of spiritual and secular power.

Whether crises played a central role in the Mongolian and Calvinist Geneva cases has yet to be studied carefully. But Geneva banned Calvin and Farel, the preacher who had called Calvin, in April 1538. Recalled in 1541, Calvin had to struggle against the aristocracy and the 'mob' to succeed in introducing his new system. Both facts seem to point to a possible crisis. Concerning the Mongols, it is known that during the time Genghis Khan slowly rose to power, they were under threat of being subdued by the Tartars, whose power had strongly increased at the end of the twelfth century. Only by combining his forces with those of another non-Mongolian nomad tribe could the Tartars be defeated. In fact, Genghis Khan had to acknowledge that tribe's prince for some time as his feudal lord before he was finally able to defeat him (Hambly 1966). Thus, in the Mongolian case, too, a crisis seems to have been present.

Let us stress, moreover, that the Mongols had an ideology of universal dominance, whereas the Mexica and Inca ideologies were expansionist. The Münster Anabaptist ideology also called for universal domination, however ridiculous this may seem, given their very limited forces. We may even attribute a universal ideology to Calvinist Geneva, and in both of these two latter cases the goals of the ideology were certainly not reached domestically at the moment when spiritual and secular power were joined. Thus all these five cases totalitarian regimes were established, since the preconditions for a mature ideocracy were not given. In conclusion, the empirical evidence shows that our general theory is capable of explaining the development towards totalitarian regimes as well as their important characteristics. The latter may, however, be different to a certain degree for each case because of the different substantive contents of the supreme goals of different ideologies.

The analysis of the historical examples should also have shown that totalitarianism regimes are not confined to modern experiences as asserted, e.g., by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965, p. 27) or implied by those who think like Linz (1975, pp. 193ff.) that a single mass party is a necessary building block of such regimes. For, as we have seen, a party can be substituted by priesthood or by an ideologically indoctrinated warrior class or aristocracy. We thus agree with Andreski (1965, p. 319): 'The empire of the Incas ... although it was the most totalitarian state of the past, ... rested on technological foundations which were more primitive than those of any state of Asia or Europe'.

On the other hand, the evidence for Geneva and the Mongols shows that the requirement of a planned economy as a characteristic of a totalitarian regime (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965, p. 27) has been rightly dropped by Juan Linz (1975, p. 191). Thus it is well known that Max Weber thought that Calvinist ideology strongly favoured the development of capitalism. We can also agree with Linz and others that mass participation is important (1975, p. 194), that expansionism is dependent on the content of ideologies (pp. 194f.) and that terror is in contrast to Arendt's (1951) view, not a necessary but a highly probable event in totalitarian regimes (Linz 1975, pp. 195, 211). But we have to stress that our theory, which is not refuted by the empirical evidence discussed, demonstrates that these and other characteristics are a consequence of the driving forces of totalitarian movements and regimes: namely the supreme values of the ideology, crises and the combination of spiritual and secular power under one leadership.

### **Stability, development and demise of totalitarian regimes**

Let us now turn to the question as to which developments have to be expected for totalitarian regimes in the long run once they have been established. In studying this question, we have to take into account that each ideology provides a more or less coherent and comprehensive *Weltanschauung*, or view of the world; and that this *Weltanschauung* may come into conflict with the true empirical nature of the world.

Thus it should be obvious that universal or universal dominance ideologies face nearly unsolvable problems in implementing their goals. Only if they should gain secular power in a state belonging to one of the great powers, or in very many states, does a certain chance exist to conquer the world. But even then, as the examples of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union show, the probability of such an event remains rather low.

The situation is similar for expansionary ideologies if their goals are not sufficiently limited. Rather unlimited expansionary goals were typical of Mexican and Inca ideologies and led their empires into deep trouble during the final decades of their existence:

The problems that beset the Mexica and Inca in the early sixteenth century were unforeseen long-term consequences of the reforms instituted by the first imperial regimes. ... As the Aztec and Inca armies found themselves fighting farther and farther from their capitals, logistic difficulties arose. Overextended vulnerable lines of supply and unfamiliar terrain ... swelled the costs of long-distance campaigns while decreasing the rewards. In the mountainous Tarascan homeland of western Mexico and the Amazonian jungle east of the Andes, the imperial armies suffered appalling losses and came away with nothing.  
(Conrad and Demarest 1984, p. 183)



Thus both empires were already severely weakened when they were conquered by the Spanish.

But what happens to totalitarian regimes if the goals implied by their supreme values cannot be realized? In this case, four different paths may be taken (see right-hand side of Figure 14.2). First, the totalitarian regimes may be defeated on the battlefield. In fact, this alternative is not so improbable. For an ideology often engenders by its very nature in leaders and followers, especially of the first generation, the belief that supernatural powers, fate, or the forces of history are on their side and will guarantee victory over all enemies. Thus the leaders may take incredible risks in their foreign and military policies. Nazi Germany, the Khmer Rouge and the Münster Anabaptists provide examples of such defeats for totalitarian regimes.

The second alternative is to postpone the realization of the ideological goals to a more distant future and to prepare militarily and by diplomacy for more auspicious days. This route will be taken probably by leaders of the second and following generations, who have distanced themselves from the ideology and thus take a more realistic outlook. They may be encouraged to pursue such policies not only because they want to stay in power but also by the ideological belief that the opponents of the true creed must run into ever more severe difficulties and crises with the passing of time. The Soviet Union under Stalin and Brezhnev may serve as an example of such a reinterpretation of ideology implying a postponement of goals.

The third alternative, which can only be taken after a long passage of time or in a crisis, consists in a substantive reinterpretation of the supreme values of the ideology. This may happen, for example, when it is realized by the leadership that the states(s) controlled by them is (are) too weak to ever have a chance of universal domination. Or leaders of a great power belonging to the second or to a later generation, may perceive that they cannot defeat their opponents militarily or with the help of their ideology at the present, and that the balance of military power is shifting against them because of an inferior performance of their economy. Note that the latter is probable if the supreme values of the ideology call for much state intervention, a centrally planned or directed economy and/or the abolishment of private property, for price and profit controls, prohibition of usury, etc. In this case, leaders may want to engineer reforms from above, which is, however, not possible without a reinterpretation of the contents of the ideology. Examples are the reforms begun by Gorbachev, and those in China since 1979. It should be mentioned, however, that the reform steps taken might not be adequate and thus lead to failure.

Finally, we should mention a fourth alternative, which refers to a rather slow historical process. If the totalitarian regime is surrounded by economically more successful regimes (with free markets, rule of law and strong property rights), and if the regime cannot shield its inhabitants from the information coming from the outside world, then an erosion of the ideological

values will take place. It seems obvious that this is especially likely for totalitarian regimes which have already postponed their goals into the distant future. Such a development (corresponding to the fourth alternative) may also help to initiate the third alternative.

But what happens if the aims implied by the ideology can and are realized after some time? It should be clear that in this case a situation would be reached which is similar to that analysed in the third section. For then no expansionary goals remain which have still to be reached domestically as well as internationally. Thus the totalitarian regime turns into a rather stable, peaceful and mature ideocracy, if allowed by the outside world.

## **Conclusion**

We have shown that the theory of totalitarianism presented can explain how and under which conditions totalitarian regimes arise, and what driving forces are responsible for their establishment, their internal development and their characteristics, but also for their eventual demise. This theory has also allowed us to show how mature ideocracies may develop out of totalitarian regimes or instead of them. It has enabled us, moreover, to explain a number of historical cases that seemed for most researchers to lie outside the field of totalitarian phenomena.

In the end we return to the question of what happens to ideological movements that do not succeed in gaining secular power, or lose it. The answer is not difficult. If they are not totally suppressed, they may either still try to secure secular power by turning to terrorism or guerrilla warfare. Or they have to adapt to the surrounding states and societies. In this case, they will become strong proponents of ideological tolerance (Bernholz 1994) and try to isolate themselves as much as possible from influences of their environment to preserve the purity of their creed. Even then an adaptation of some elements of their ideology that are strongly frowned on by society, may be necessary. An example would be the polygamy of the Mormons.

Terrorist or guerrilla activities after defeat can be observed, for example, for the Khmer Rouge, but also for some branches of the Anabaptists after the Münster kingdom had been routed. On the other hand, Menno Simons, founder of the Mennonites, firmly (re)established the peaceful traditions of the Anabaptists (Stayer 1976, chs 12 and 13).

## **Notes**

- 1 Original English text by Peter Bernholz.
- 2 Juan Linz (1975) provides a drawing of a political space with three dimensions to locate ideal types of authoritarian regimes. He also uses arrows to indicate their possible movements in time (figure 1, p. 278).
- 3 Eric Voegelin (see e.g. 1952) tries to demonstrate that only gnostic religions lead to totalitarian movements. Though Voegelin presents a wealth of evidence for his position, I do not think that it is fully convincing. Even religions believing

that 'my kingship is not of this world' can turn to create totalitarian movements and persecute or fight, for example, heretics and pagans with the purpose of saving the souls of believers who might be contaminated by them and thus be condemned to eternal damnation (see Bernholz 1993; 1994).

Let me stress, however, that my inclusion of religions among ideologies possibly leading to totalitarianism does not mean that I deny the final truths advocated by religions. But the development of some of their characteristics by later interpreters and leaders involve them in such aberrant behaviour.

- 4 This concept was first coined by Flavius Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 2, 165) around AD 94 to contrast the organization of Jewish society with the political systems conceptualized by classical Greek theory. Compare the contributions in Taubes (1987).

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## 15 'Political religion'

### The potentials and limitations of a concept

*Hans Maier*

Bolshevism, Fascism and National Socialism: until recently, these seemed to be exclusively political phenomena. And thus, it went entirely without saying that that predominantly historians, sociologists, political scientists and jurists studied them. Files were edited, theories developed, conferences held – an image of the period from 1917 to 1945 (and later to 1989) arose without the religious perspective having played any special role. Certainly, there was contemporary ecclesiastical history; and ecclesiastical and religious relations were also researched in the context of researching Fascism, National Socialism and later, Communism. Yet although this was an important voice in the concert of the research, it was only a secondary one. The fate of the churches in the National Socialist and Communist states was a special subject to be researched along with such other spheres as economy, culture, school, and family. The topic of 'religion' did not bear upon the methodological approach to the National Socialist era here; it remained marginal, not central.

This has changed, since the 1970s at the latest. For by this time, the Holocaust had moved into the foreground of the research of contemporary history. And along with it came something that already literally referred to the religious sphere: the historical meaning of 'holocaust' is a (Jewish) burnt offering. Since then, religion, cult, festival, celebration, faith and religious faith have been examined with particular attention and investigated with new interest; likewise with the truth-claims of modern ideologies, their hold upon the 'total human being' and their exclusive character. This applies to the research on Fascism and National Socialism, which had never lost sight of this phenomenon, but also to the research on Soviet Communism. Thus was Solzhenitsyn's reckoning with the ideology and practice of Communism – from *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to *The Gulag Archipelago* to *The Red Wheel* – accompanied by a continual confrontation with religious questions and, in particular, with those concerning the past and present of Russian Orthodoxy. The Gulag Archipelago, the Soviet system of concentration and destruction camps, the mass destruction of the Ukrainian kulaks, the murder of millions through freezing, starvation, and ceaseless back-breaking labour: in Solzhenitsyn's opinion, such things

cannot be explained solely in terms of political calculus or *raisons d'état*. Purgation becomes much more a process of the annihilation of human beings here, of conscious and desired annihilation.

Daniel Suter<sup>1</sup> has investigated the images that were repeatedly used during the purgation trials in post-war Soviet Union and the Communist Eastern Bloc: images of 'extermination', 'smashing' and 'obliteration'. Physical destruction is also thought have eradicated the name and memory of the political enemy. But just as regularly are images of the eternal eclipse, of darkness and oblivion followed by images of the sun and of light. Thus one citation from a report on the Moscow Trial during the Great Purges of 1938:

But above us, above our happy land, our sun with its bright streams will shine as clearly and joyfully as ever. As always, we, our people – led by our beloved leader and teacher, the great Stalin – will tread the path that has been cleansed of the last dirt and refuse of the past, onward and ever onward toward Communism.<sup>2</sup>

From the eternal eclipse from which the enemy emerges and into which it is continually thrown back, the accusers oppose the bright future of the loyal and right-believers; under the leadership of the 'Good Shepherd' – this description also turns up – these will approach paradise step by step.

Likewise with the Chinese Revolution under Mao Tse-tung: it involved not simply a different political order – something like restoring the Middle Empire to its former glory. Much more did the leader of the new China understand himself as an instrument of a secular, historical upheaval: one that was to overcome the prior rule of the clan powers, of local and regional protective gods and bring forth a classless society and paradisiacal final state. After the Long March, Mao was represented in pictures, poems and prayer-like invocations as the new Messiah under whose leadership the 'dark powers' were to be destroyed and 'heaven and earth' to be set 'into motion'. For anyone who opposed the new super-emperor, the show-trial was created. In the best-case scenario, one would have been forced to confess in state of disgrace and promise improvement.

The similarity of such testimony to religious types of speaking and thinking is obvious. Likewise, the words of the accused resonate with examinations of conscience, with confessions of sins, with repentance and remorse. Outside observers may well feel themselves reminded of scenes from the life of the Church – of the trials of assumption into the community of the faithful, of catechesis and testing of the faith, of initiation into the mysteries of the Church as well as the exclusion of unrepentant Church members and the excommunication of renegades and heretics. Memories of dark chapters of history, of inquisition and trials of heretics, of coercion to accept the faith and of the wars of religion are aroused.

I would like to take my starting point here. In the brevity imposed by condensed form, I will attempt to present to you the concept of political religions as a method by which to compare dictatorships. And at the same time, I would like to inquire into the limitations of this conception. First, I will speak of religious elements in Communism, Fascism and National Socialism (I). Second, I will describe how the concept of political religions has developed since the 1920s as a means to interpret these phenomena (II). And in conclusion, I will ask whether this linguistic usage is legitimate. Are we permitted to explain or describe political phenomena using religious categories? Do we not then miss the meaning of the political? Or conversely: do we not thereby distort religion (III)?

## I

It hardly requires proof that religious-like phenomena emerge not only with Russian Communism, but with Italian Fascism and German National Socialism as well. Munich, the sphere of our own experience – with its march on the ninth of November, its eternal fire at the Feldherrnhalle – provides examples and evidence of a quasi-religious public cult that at least played and experimented with religious forms; so too does the Nuremberg of the Reich Party Convention and the Berlin of the sport hall rallies.

‘In the choice of its formal elements’, Hans-Günter Hockerts has written

the repertory of the brown cult made use of very different traditions. Mass march and commemorative parade, choir and music, call and vow, flags, torches, burning goblets – whatever promised effect, it incorporated. Thus did a ritual mixture connecting the borrowing from the Christian liturgy with military and folkloric traditions arise. Added to this was the assumption of forms from the Youth Movement, from operatic dramaturgy (Richard Wagner) and from ancient mythology. The National Socialist cult followed especially closely the tradition of the national commemorative days and holidays that had arisen under the sign of the ‘nationalisation of the masses’ (George L. Mosse). Such days – the *Sedanstag* for example – glorified struggle, war and heroic death. Yet it also fell back on the – in many ways pompous – celebratory culture of the worker movement and the propaganda arsenal of the political left. The transformation of the 1st of May into a holiday of ‘national work’ provides the clearest example of this.<sup>3</sup>

On 9 November 1923, a volley of shots fired by the Bavarian state police ended the so-called Hitler Putsch at the Feldherrnhalle. Three policemen and 14 putschists were killed. In panicked flight, the line of Hitler’s followers broke ranks. Two more putschists lost their lives in the occupation – led by Ernst Röhm – of the military district command located at the corner of Schönfeldstrasse and Ludwigstrasse at what is now the Bavarian State Archive.

Hitler made the death of these sixteen into a mystery. He stylised the 9th of November such that it became the most solemn day of the brown cult and that the Feldherrnhalle became its holiest site ... In the beginning, one could still hear from him such circumstantial justifications as the one stating that the putsch was a necessary condition for the legality of the party that followed, and that this in turn was a prerequisite for the success of 1933. From 1935 onward, however, the pompous celebrations completely blot out such justifications.

After this time, the 'sacrificial death' of the 16 'blood-witnesses of the movement' moved like a 'passion play' (Hans-Jochen Gamm) into the centre of 'National Socialist salvation history' (Klaus Vondung). On no other holiday do the features of a 'political religion' emerge so clearly. The ninth of November became the crux of a dramaturgy of resurrection and salvation and its stuff was German history.

The ritual originated between 1933 and 1935. In November 1933, on the side of the Feldherrnhalle facing the Residenz (where the march had been stopped in 1923), a memorial was erected. Crowned by swastika and Imperial Eagle, a heavy bronze tablet bore the names of the sixteen who had fallen in their 'faith in the resurrection of their people'. Here, a double-post of the SS held a constant vigil. 'All passers-by felt the pressure of the expectation to raise their arm for the Hitler greeting'.<sup>4</sup> Those who did not want to could go through the Viscardigasse, the little street that was called Drueckeberger-Gässchen in the National Socialist era. Hermann Lenz has described this very vividly in his book, *Neue Zeit* (1975).

In the era that followed, a veritable political liturgy surrounding the ninth of November emerged: Ludwigstrasse, illuminated by the pylons of fire through which Hitler drove at midnight, the Feldherrnhalle, adorned by blood-red cloth and the dead lying in state in coffins, the march of the 'old fighters' behind the 'blood flag', the veneration of the dead with the call of the name of the fallen, Hitler's laying of the wreath at the memorial, the Feldherrnhalle transformed into an 'altar'. After 1935, the march was expanded. Now Königsplatz was its centre and the ceremony of the 'Last Call' was developed. The dead held the Eternal Vigil in the temple that had been built in their honour. Hitler entered the temple to decorate his dead comrades with the wreath of immortality.

Let us now take a brief look at Russia. Here, the Bolshevik politics concerning religion took aim at the Orthodox Church early on; the first violent reaction of which we know was the exhuming of graves and shrines and the destruction of relics. The destruction and scattering of the dead remains was supposed to prove the untenability of religion. Since time immemorial, veneration of the un-decomposed bodies of saints had had a great significance in Russia. It was now sought to expose and destroy this old belief as being a particularly perverse component of a religion that was nonsensical anyway. The godless movement issued corresponding propaganda.



A German-language radio transmission of the Moscow labour union station at Christmas 1930 presented a 'tour through the anti-religious museum'. The following was described in it:

Now, we came to the department, 'The Church in the Soviet Union'. In the corner of one chamber could be found relics, remains of the dead. This word became among us the symbol for the most revolting and nastiest lies that the worthy Church Fathers used in their meanest lowest exploitation of humanity. We viewed these relics with revolt . . . . On the square in front of the museum, I exhaled . . . as though I had distanced myself from the kingdom of darkness. The loud noise of Moscow, the turbulent *Tverskaya*, energetic people, these are the realities in which we live, in which we stride forward without saints, without relics and without incense.<sup>5</sup>

There is no lack of irony in the fact that the Bolsheviks, as they set out to eternalise the memory of the Revolution, returned to the forms of the reliquary cults by embalming Lenin and setting him out in a mausoleum on Red Square to be venerated – even now, by the way.

On the part of religious historians, this obvious contradiction has been mentioned directly: namely, that they fought using Enlightenment arguments against religion, but in the end enlisted what had been fought against as their own propaganda – Lenin, the Founder, 'living on undecomposed'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1918, Sinoviev described Lenin as the 'apostle of world communism' and his writings as a 'gospel' for all true revolutionaries. In daily life, too, symbols of the religion that had been resisted continued to be used in new forms – in the reshaping of the icon corner into a 'peace corner', for example, or in the churches that were turned into atheist memorial centres.

With Maoism, the veneration of religious leaders intensified into forms of secular divinisation. Here, elements not only of religion and cult, but of sacred doctrine and systematic catechesis as well seem to be bundled together. Not only did a veritable sun cult arise around Mao, not only was he glorified in choruses, festivals and processions in the East – as well as in the cultural revolutions in the West! His writings were also venerated early on and in time attained canonical validity. The *Red Book*, compiled for Chinese soldiers from words of the 'Great Chairman' in 1964, became a formal catechism of Maoist ideas. Between 1966 and 1968, no less than 740 million copies were printed (the four-volume *Selected Works* of Mao reached 150 million copies, the poems 96 million!)

## II

I now come to the second section. Here, I would like to describe to you how the religious phenomena mentioned – I have selected only a few here – occasioned

the thinking contemporaries of Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler to construe the new despotisms as an ersatz of religion or ersatz religions, to describe them as 'secular' or 'political' religions. From this perspective, Bolshevism, Fascism and National Socialism appear as forms of faith – of a quasi-religious subjection to a higher, even absolute authority.

Franz Werfel marks the beginning in lectures he held in Germany in 1932. Here, he sketches the picture of a typical 'man on the street', a contemporary who has been shaken by the world war and is despairing of reason and science. The man has two sons. These cannot live with a passive ego, one that is merely – as Werfel says – 'nothingness on vacation'. They strive to escape their egos, seek to attach themselves to a higher order:

a supreme order, an authority to which they can passionately submit themselves and for which they will, should the occasion arise, sacrifice their lives ... Our era offers the young people two radical forms of faith. You will already suspect that one son of our man on the street is a communist and the other a National Socialist. Naturalistic nihilism is divided into two branches, so to speak. The youth steps away from the helpless ego. Communism and National Socialism are both primitive levels of transcending the ego. They are ersatz religions, or, if you will, an ersatz for religion.<sup>7</sup>

And then later:

We have stated that both of the great contemporary movements, communism and nationalism, are anti-religious; yet they are also ersatz-religious types of faith and are by no means only political ideals. As genuine progeny of the nihilistic epoch, they have not fallen far from the tree. Like their father, they know no connection to transcendence; like him, they hang in the void. They are no longer content with this void, however, but commit excesses in it in order to overcome it.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Werfel – and it is astonishing to find that an expressionistic lyricist and novelist offered such a precise description of collective psychic phenomena. Alongside the short stories and essays of Kafka, Broch and Musil, Werfel's essays from the 1930s are the first precise descriptions of what was to come.

In 1938, Eric Voegelin developed the concept of 'political religions' – again, in Vienna! – in a book bearing the same name. One year later, the concept surfaced with Raymond Aron in Paris: 'religion politique', later 'religion séculière'. In Voegelin's *Politischen Religionen*, Communism, Fascism and National Socialism were set into a universal-historical context for what may well have been the first time. For him, these movements are the products of secularisation processes occurring in the typical 'belated nations' of Europe – in nations, that is, that are no longer within the Christian traditions

as the Anglo-Saxon ones are, but attempt to gain political coherence through the mass appeal of ideologies of class or race, economy or blood instead. The efforts to endow the political order with a quasi-religious dimension (in whatever perverted form) link the modern despotisms to the models of a unified politico-religious culture that Voegelin traces back historically to ancient Greece and ancient Egypt. According to his thesis, the modern dictatorships are based upon a this-worldly religiosity, elevating the collectivities of race, class or state to the 'realissimum' and thereby 'divinising' them. The divine is sought and found in 'partial contents of the world' and is closely linked to a specific 'salvation myth'.

Whereas Voegelin's position is rooted in a Christian anthropology that is further developed and systematised in later writings, Raymond Aron's concept stands within the tradition of the liberal critique of totalitarianism. By contrast to Voegelin, Aron applies the concept of religion with a predominantly Enlightenment intention and is critical of religion: totalitarian systems are 'religious' to the extent that they strive to reverse the modern [and Christian!] separation of the two powers of religion and politics. In a way resembling the universal distribution of religion in earlier societies, the ideologies of today become 'omnipresent' in modern 'totalitarian societies'. Now, political action is no longer determined by the law of the constitutional state either, but is justified by the invocation of 'absolute values' instead.

That modern political movements can be described and analysed with the help of religious categories is a result of the research in the philosophy of religion and phenomenology of religion since the First World War. Summarily, the works of Rudolf Otto, Heinrich Scholz, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, Friedrich Heiler, Romano Guardini and Roger Caillois will be brought to mind here. A new, comprehensive concept of religion emerges, one that transcends the individualistic impasse of the nineteenth century: along with its social dimension, religion also regains those features of the numinous – fascination, terror, provocation – that had been lost with the perspective on religion 'within the limits of pure reason'. The dreadful and uncanny, the *tremendum et fascinosum* are rediscovered as elements of religious experience.<sup>9</sup>

### III

But now the question: are we allowed to do this at all? Are we allowed to describe political phenomena using religious categories? Do we know what we are doing here? Is religion not thereby drawn into a dubious sphere, into a realm of ambiguities and ambivalence? Do the borders between religion and questionable – in some cases even criminal – action not ultimately get blurred? Would we therefore not do better – if we still want to use religious terminology – to speak of anti-religion, pseudo-religion, substitute for religion, ersatz religions? To such questions, I would like to submit some entirely provisional concluding considerations and reflections.

- 1 It is of course correct and true that Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler were not religious founders. Their relationships to religion were variously foreign, hostile or cool. Lenin hated and felt contempt for the so-called God-seekers, the religious socialists that did in fact exist at the beginning of the Russian Revolution (Lunacharsky, the first minister of culture, had originally been one of them). He attempted to eliminate them because he regarded every religious idea, 'every idea of a God' as an 'unspeakable repulsion' (letter to Maxim Gorki, 14 September 1913). Mussolini, who had written an anti-church drama of the type of the Machiavellian *Mandragola* in his youth as a socialist, remained a pragmatist and positivist where religion was concerned his entire life. Together with Maurras, he might well have said, 'Je suis catholique, mais je suis athée.' As such, he regarded the church as an organisation, a public power – but by no means as an institution of faith and religiosity. It may have been similar with Hitler. Respect for the institution of the Church, its organisational coherence, its pedagogical formative power and 'power over souls' is combined with an intense rejection of the 'clerics' and an image of history that sees in the Judaeo-Christian traditions almost the dynamite of the West. In his eyes, Christianity is a ferment of dissolution, a precursor to Bolshevism. He felt only derision and scorn for the zeal of a Rosenberg to found a new religion, for the ritualism of a Himmler, for all those in the party who wanted to develop the National Socialist world-view into a religious cult.
- 2 This does not prevent us from ascertaining that there were undoubtedly religiously motivated people who felt a genuine subjective religious faith among the followers of Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler. It may be that they saw in these dictators religious figures that were to be admired, venerated, even worshipped – there are many witnesses to this – or that the theories that had originated from the new centres of power, from the parties and movements, were interpreted as religious messages. There can be no doubt that many of the activists, helpers and fellow travellers of the totalitarian parties understood their service in them, not as anti-religious, but as thoroughly religious. They were initiates of a new church – adepts of a new, correct belief. Their zeal, their readiness to serve and passion that went far beyond political considerations and rationalities can be explained in these terms. Without this religious – or, at any rate, religious-like – zeal, much of what has characterised the history of modern despotisms cannot be explained: the high degree of loyalty and obedience (which cannot be explained solely in terms of terror and fear) of many, the imperviousness to criticism and doubt, the feeling of fulfilling a mission, the loyalty of discipleship and readiness to suffer.
- 3 Of what type was this religiosity? Some distinctions should be made here. First, features of a religious dynamic emerge more at the beginning than in the course of modern revolutions: this already holds for the early

stages of the French Revolution, which was beyond a doubt accompanied by religious enthusiasm. In the Russia of 1917 and 1918 too, hopes for the end of the war, for peace, for acquisition of land and social betterment were frequently expressed in religious words, images and symbols. Thus did Alexander Block – in his poem ‘The Twelve’ – see Jesus stride towards the 12 red guards in Petrograd at night: ‘bullet-proof, immune to treason, veiled in snow . . ., bathed in light like a star’. In its beginnings, at least, even the short-lived Third Reich experienced the religious undercurrents of a Führer cult with messianic features; Helmuth Kiesel has demonstrated this on the evidence of the SA novels and consecration plays written between 1930 and 1934.<sup>10</sup> And to what extent not only Lenin and Stalin, but also Mao, Castro, Kim Il-Sun and other Communist leaders were declared saviour-like figures in poems, epics and dramas has been established by Gerd Koenen and Michael Roherwasser,<sup>11</sup> who have collected a wealth of telling (often frightening) testimony.<sup>12</sup>

If we take a closer look, then we of course discover that such portrayals come more from outside – from the admirers and those affected – than from within, from the centre of power. Such portrayals are primarily praises to the ruler issuing from the mouths of the subjects and not necessarily the self-portrayals of the rulers themselves. To be sure, leaders of the totalitarian regimes always used currents of religious fervour and veneration as means to achieve their goals and enlisted them in order to broaden their own, purely political, basis of legitimacy. Yet it was necessary to eliminate as far as possible legitimations of a religious nature by outsiders: legitimations that could not be controlled and would perhaps prove in the case of a crisis to present dangerous competition! In this sense, Hermann Lübke has rightly ascribed ‘complete legitimacy self-sufficiency’ to the modern totalitarianisms. They sought to have no church beyond themselves, they sought to unite state and Church – see above.

- 4 It has repeatedly been objected that, with the modern ‘political religions’, the concept of ‘political religion’ pertains solely to inner-worldly creations, kingdoms entirely ‘of this world’. Their gods are earthly and human beings through and through and lack any reference to transcendence whatsoever. Without a doubt, this is correct. This is why religious people find it difficult to describe the modern totalitarianisms as religions – as political religions; they would rather speak of pseudo-religions or of anti-religions. This is very understandable. I have a great deal sympathy with this attitude. Nonetheless, one objection persists. With reference to Fascism, Juan Linz has formulated it thus:

one can define fascism as anti-liberalism, anti-communism, anti-clericalism, anti-internationalism – it is the quintessential ‘anti’ movement. The success of fascism, however, is based not solely upon on its ‘anti’

character, but also on the fact that it sought to sell certain positive elements, and it did in part sell them very successfully to young people and intellectuals in Europe during the twenties and thirties. With the 'anti', one loses something. ... I always recall my childhood: how I was in Berlin as a refugee from the Spanish Civil War and invited to dinner by people who would have been the typical PTA members – nice, good people who wished to be friendly to a refugee like myself. We were invited to lunch, and the prayer before the meal was spoken: 'we thank our *Führer* for our daily bread'. At this, my mother said to me: 'listen to this and do not forget it!' I have not forgotten it either. But what was interesting when I heard this from these people: for us, it had a pseudo-religious significance, but to them, it had a religious significance. ... This something, of course, was built upon religious imitation ... I do not yet know where the solution lies.<sup>13</sup>

With good reason, we all might bristle at the religious claim of modern totalitarianism – it also strikes me as eerie when Roland Freisler writes to Hellmuth Graf Moltke that National Socialism possesses a kind of absolute, quasi 'divine-immediate' validity: 'Christianity and we National Socialists have one thing, and only this one thing, in common: we both demand the entire human being.'<sup>14</sup> But if we seek to recognise and understand both the structures of totalitarian regimes and the mentality of their leaders, then we must follow them – for good or ill – into the depths and heights of their self-understanding. At least this is the necessary first step of historical analysis. And this is why – corresponding to a suggestion of Philippe Burrin – the concept of 'political religion' should be tested out on Communism, Fascism and National Socialism in three respects: first, with respect to the question of truth, which the totalitarianisms (as opposed to liberalism) have thrown up anew. Second, we should test it with respect to those rituals and celebrations through which a 'faithful community' is constituted. And finally, we should test the concept with respect to the totalitarian understanding of politics, where we find at least the glimmer of a religious dimension.<sup>15</sup> This seems to me to be a realistic programme. Without overtaxing and absolutising the concept, it still draws attention to certain characteristic phenomena for which a purely political analysis can account only with difficulty.

We now have a very detailed knowledge of Communism, Fascism and National Socialism. But what should we call that which the twentieth-century despotic regimes have in common? The best-known conceptions are those of 'totalitarianism' and 'political religions'. Although both are now more indispensable than ever, they have their strengths and weaknesses, their specific limitations. Despite important preliminary investigations, a comprehensive theory of the twentieth-century despotisms still remains to be worked out. Such a theory will not pass muster without being sensitive to the deep upheavals of the period following 1917: the decay of liberal assumptions, the self-doubt of a modernity that doubts itself, the desire for

new unity and totality that paved the way for the great simplifiers. Further, such a theory will have to develop an eye for the cunning and evil of the seducers, for the failure of reason in face of the *pompa diaboli*, in face of evil 'in the form of the light, of the good deed, of the historically necessary' (D. Bonhoeffer). The concept of 'political religions' might provide an inadequate label for all this, but – as I see it – it is still indispensable, at least provisionally. It reminds us that religion does not allow itself to be driven from society at will and that wherever this is attempted, it returns in a form that is often unpredictable or perverted. To this extent, the modern totalitarianisms also offer a lesson on true and false enlightenment – a call from the poorly informed modern to one that ought to be better informed. We would do well if this lesson were understood and taken to heart, insofar as a history that has not yet been understood threatens to repeat itself as soon as a fresh occasion arises.

### Notes

- 1 Daniel Suter, *Rechtsauflösung durch Angst und Schrecken. Zur Dynamik des Terrors im totalitären System* (Berlin, 1983).
- 2 Suter, op. cit., 134.
- 3 H.-G. Hockerts, 'Mythos, Kult und Feste. München im nationalsozialistischen "Feierjahr"', *München – 'Hauptstadt der Bewegung'* (Munich City Museum, 1993), 332.
- 4 Hockerts, op. cit., 334.
- 5 Cited in A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* (Munich, 1994), 327–30 ('Die totalitären Ideologien').
- 6 Angenendt, op. cit., 329.
- 7 Franz Werfel, 'Können wir ohne Gottesglauben leben?' Franz Werfel, *Zwischen oben und unten* (Stockholm, 1946), 84ff.
- 8 Werfel, op. cit., 98.
- 9 Compare Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen* (Paderborn, 1996), 244–47.
- 10 Helmuth Kiesel, 'Politische Religionen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts', Hermann Lübke (ed.), *Heilserwartung und Terror. Politische Religionen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Düsseldorf, 1995), 59–74.
- 11 Gerd Koenen, *Die großen Gesänge: Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro. Sozialistischer Personenkult und seine Saenger von Gorki bis Brecht, von Aragon bis Neruda* (Frankfurt, 1987).
- 12 Michael Rohrwasser, *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten. Die Literatur der Exkommunisten* (Stuttgart, 1991).
- 13 Cited in H. Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus und politische Religionen* (Paderborn, 1996), 169ff.
- 14 Helmuth James von Moltke, *Briefe an Freya 1939–1945* (Munich, 1988), 608.
- 15 See relevant section above..

## 16 Recalling the ‘engaged observer’ in changed times

On Raymond Aron as a theoretician of totalitarianism and the global nuclear situation<sup>1</sup>

*Harald Seubert*

‘Une réflexion sur le XXIème siècle’<sup>2</sup> – no less and no more, according to Aron’s own statement one year before his death, was his life’s work. Flanked by other motives, this reflection surrounds primarily the two thematic areas that have provided the title of today’s contribution: the problem of the totalitarian and the question of international relations in the age of the Cold War and in the shadow of nuclear weapons. Whereas the first question issued directly from Aron’s experience in his youth,<sup>3</sup> the second resulted from the first; it was born of it insofar as the Cold War years saw Europe as a powerless continent in the shadow of the Soviet sphere of influence.<sup>4</sup> For Aron, this culminated in the problem as to whether or not, at the end of a century of ‘guerres en chaîne’,<sup>5</sup> of a thirty-year long total war whose history provided the foil of his reflections, a third – all-annihilating – exchange of blows was irrevocable according to the laws of plausibility.<sup>6</sup>

Aron explores these themes on completely different levels: the reflective oeuvre is at once an intellectual autobiography, a political treatise on a divided Europe that is at once ‘protected by the nuclear umbrella of the United States’ and threatened by nuclear apocalypse, a retrospective reconstruction of the Thirty Years War of the twentieth century, of its civilisation, its destruction and the possible lessons to be read from it. And it is equally a sociological study of Western and Eastern societies<sup>7</sup> – with ‘sociological’ understood here in the sense of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt, as open to historical multiplicity and with the typology following from this.<sup>8</sup> But in the sense of Aron – who always understood himself as a philosopher first – all these elements were to become the theme of philosophy, which he regarded as a science of the world regarded from the perspective of historical depth. As a rational critique of history having ethical implications, the task of philosophy is to recapture its era in ideas – inconclusively and incompletely, yet for all that responsibly and far-removed from all utopias.<sup>9</sup>

Taking its approach along this line of inquiry, the following analysis will: first, circumscribe Aron’s life path (first and second sections). It will then outline the basis of his analyses, his anti-utopian philosophy of history



(third section). In the section that follows, the basic features of Aron's totalitarianism theory and his understanding of political religion will be made thematic: here, it is necessary to consider both the descriptive and typological strengths and the systematic weaknesses of his concept of totalitarianism. In addition, Aron's understanding of 'ideology' – which emerges with a special intensity from his confrontation with Sartre and Althusser (fifth section) – shall be taken up. Because a reflection on modern industrial society in both blocs of systems accompanies his concept of totalitarianism, this too must be given a passing glance (sixth section). Thereupon, Aron's philosophy and his scientific politics in the nuclear age will be considered (seventh section) in order, finally, to inquire – from a bird's-eye view at the end of the century – after the enduring challenges and relevance of his work. Here too will be asked about the differences with which the contemporary world-situation presents him (eighth section).

### **Melancholy and appraising scepticism: the final years**

What remains at the end of a life that consists 'in doubt?' Committing himself with this to the faith of the philosopher, Raymond Aron – who had just turned 20 – placed his life under the consciously agnostic motto, *faire son salut laïc*.<sup>10</sup> Only in retrospect is the possibility admitted that the vacuum of transcendent belief leaves essential things unsaid; for 'science will never be able to bring forth something that would be comparable to the covenant of the Jewish people or the revelation of Christ'.<sup>11</sup>

Melancholy and subdued resignation, combined with an abiding analytic capacity to differentiate his observations, characterise Aron's late diagnosis of the present era. Thus does he plead for Europe even though he sees the old continent enter into a state of decadence in terms of both power politics and ethics.<sup>12</sup> Incapable of defending itself, propped up completely by America, the 'imperial republic'<sup>13</sup> of Europe has found a place on the world-market, 'but not within the international system'.<sup>14</sup> Thus does Aron apply to Old Europe as a whole Henry Kissinger's statement regarding the prospering Federal Republic of the economic miracle: 'an economy in search of a state'.<sup>15</sup> The one-time virtue of *virtù*, of the formative force of the art of the great statesman in search of 'grandeur', has not only been obliterated in fact, but also become impracticable and politically imprudent in light of Europe's location in the shadow of the Soviet world-empire.<sup>16</sup> Nor does the late Aron – like Karl Jaspers, for example – think of possibilities for compensation through a Western mission.<sup>17</sup> Europe's fate remains ambiguous. Only its economic success would justify expectations of stability within the decadence; yet even if efficiency is still on the side of the West, its 'fin de siècle' might last longer than stabilised totalitarianism par excellence, the 'Soviet Empire'.<sup>18</sup>

In his final years, Aron sees the liberal democracies to be eroding for other reasons still. Here is his deeply sceptical view – shared with de

Gaulle – of the old 'incertitudes allemandes', which had gained a new face with the peace movement.<sup>19</sup> The Atlantic Alliance is undermined by a German politics 'that would like to retain an American army on its territory without irritating the men in the Kremlin'.<sup>20</sup> A deep cause of this scepticism is Aron's traumatic irritation with the student unrest of 1968 – especially regarding the softness of Pompidou, who was president at the time.<sup>21</sup> Liberal societies require self-discipline – thus he insisted against all attacks, including a final one by Sartre that broke off any remnant of their former friendship; otherwise, only the choice between police state and anarchy remains.<sup>22</sup> If we wish to understand Aron's attitude correctly and not to discuss it away,<sup>23</sup> then we must see that Aron by no means first noted that the Western societies were vulnerable – 'mortal', according to Paul Valéry – in 1968.<sup>24</sup> Much more was this the basic experience of his early thirties, when he experienced the rise of Hitler in Germany. Aron became conscious of a return of the same old ghost in the explosive carnival of May 1968: this time, too, with an uncertain end. For him, therefore, the central theme of Aron's thought is also the central theme of this century. This is why the totalitarian experience and curbing of the totalitarian threat seemed to him to be of new and burning relevance in his old age.

Certainly, Aron also addressed the new crisis areas of world politics besides the East-West conflict in the 1970s: the North-South problem, the powder kegs in the Middle and Near East, the oil crisis as the great shock to an 'economy searching for an end to existence'. These, however, never surpassed the main theme in importance.<sup>25</sup>

Aron's basic attitude of scepticism tinged by resignation has become much more nuanced since the days of his youth: a sign of this is that he decisively rejected in his final book, *Years of Decision*, an isolationism like that represented by the old George F. Kennan.<sup>26</sup> In an *Encounter* article of March 1978,<sup>27</sup> Kennan – the 'moralist of one-sidedness and realist of renunciation' – had commented that he could no longer see much sense in the Atlantic Alliance uniting in order to defend the 'porno shops' of Washington DC's inner city. Aron understood this plea for a new 'disengagement' as a ghostly repetition of history too: as the return of the 'attitude of appeasement' that was omnipresent among intellectuals during his youth. It reminded him of a conversation in 1939, with a friend who had asked him why the decadent *Paris Soir* should be defended against the *Völkischer Beobachter*.<sup>28</sup>

## How he became what he was: lifelines

### 1

But how did he become what he was at the end? Our gaze must turn to Aron's stay at the University of Cologne and Leo Spitzer's institute from 1930 to the spring of 1933. From that time onward, he was to comprehend

Germany as a destiny and the German destiny as the destiny of Europe. These years were the core of the story of the development of Aron's character. Born in 1905 as the son of a well-to-do household of assimilated Jews, his father had been a professor of law in one of the higher trade schools; thus, he had been denied the heights of the academic elite.

During his stay in Germany, Aron witnesses the 'final climax of cinema and theatre of that former era'.<sup>29</sup> In the retrospect of his memoirs, these arts seemed to him to have been marked by the sign of decline at that time already. He participates in several rallies of Hitler and Goebbels and – together with his close friend, Golo Mann – experiences the book burning on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin on 10 May 1933. Sunk in a deep silence himself, he hears another close friend say: 'at least they cannot take the spring [circa 1933, H.S.] from us'.<sup>30</sup> Whereas other members of his circle of friends – Manès Sperber, for example, who was still a Communist – expected resistance, Aron was already more sober and sceptical. His aversion to ideology, especially as amalgamated with totalitarianism, took shape for the first time.<sup>31</sup> For this was when he saw that the revolution of 1933 had been accomplished 'almost unnoticed', in silent acceptance. It was through this experience that Aron first acquired his attitude of the 'engaged observer', an attitude that would later be characteristic. The experience also compelled him to draw some hard philosophical consequences: the surrender of neo-Kantian universalism as he had learned it under Léon Bruschiwig, his philosophy teacher at the Sorbonne.<sup>32</sup> Aron begins to search for a method that allows him to philosophise 'in the light of sociology' and history.<sup>33</sup> In this context, he discovers both the work of Max Weber and the phenomenology of Husserl, with which he – as Simone de Beauvoir has reported – then acquainted Sartre in heated nightly conversations.<sup>34</sup> These intellectual leanings are combined with an intensive analysis of Marxism through which Aron sought to test his own political ideas on the one hand, but sought to criticise on the other: Marxism was for him the 'barb of the Other' that spurred him on to further insights<sup>35</sup>

Yet his readings of Marx and his experience of his time also made the young Aron aware of something entirely different: the inadequacies of his commentary, which he sent from Germany into 'Europe' after 1932 and 1933.<sup>36</sup> Deficient in terms of hard, economic analysis, they were also still marked by the basic attitude of idealistic pacifism of his other teacher, Alain.

In those fatal years of upheaval when the Weimar Republic lay on its deathbed, therefore, Aron discovers Germany, his own philosophy and his politics almost simultaneously.<sup>37</sup> One consequence of this situation and his having come to terms with it was that he accepted – with a few reservations – Trotsky's analysis of Hitler's speech to the Reichstag of 17 May 1933. According to this, Hitler's politics – regardless of any affirmations of peace – implied an imperialistic understanding that was aimed just as much at the West as it was towards the East.<sup>38</sup>

It should not be forgotten here that these years were also a period of *éducation sentimentale* catalysed by conferences in the cloister, Pontigny. It was in that area of Paris that Aron met his later wife, Suzanne Gauchon – a close friend of Simone Weil – in 1932.<sup>39</sup> In Weil, he could perceive from a distance the sanctity of transcendent belief. She, as one might suspect, provided a constant, silent, arcane foil for his talk of 'political religions'.<sup>40</sup>

An *éducation sentimentale* are the German years too, for the flagrant Naziistic anti-Semitism causes Aron to become aware of his being a Jew as an element of himself. In a very restrained way, he would henceforth define himself as follows: 'Je suis un citoyen français d'origine juive mais cette origine ne touche pas à l'essentiel de moi-même.'<sup>41</sup>

Only very much later did this subdued Jewish consciousness gain explicit expression in words. This was occasioned by a press conference held by de Gaulle during Israel's Six Day War of June 1967. In this context, the president spoke of an 'elitist people, self-confident and domineering'.<sup>42</sup> In his counter-statement, Aron makes it indubitably clear that, although he would want by no means to accuse de Gaulle of anti-Semitism, he still charges him with 'declaring anti-Semitism as being socially acceptable, at least as legitimate'.<sup>43</sup> Following this conflict, the formulation, 'cette origine ne touche pas à l'essentiel de moi-même' condenses for Aron into a dialectic of self-design and Jewish birth:<sup>44</sup> 'A Jew becomes a Jew through the circumstance that his parents are Jewish, but he can freely decide whether he wants to remain it or not'.<sup>45</sup> Differently from Sartre's *Reflections on the Jewish Question* – a work he had discussed intensively with the 'petit camarad' during the time when a conversation was still possible – Aron regarded the question of Jewish origins to be one of self-relationship. By no means was it the result of an external ascription, in the sense that the Jew becomes a Jew only through the gaze of the others.<sup>46</sup>

What followed will be outlined in only broad strokes. Because the *intellectual* biography of Aron – in what it consisted for him above all – is essentially centred upon the problems of this essay, the lived life can be distilled into a few turning points. After 1934, Aron is teacher at Le Havre, in a position that had previously been occupied by the 'petit camarad', Sartre. (Sartre takes over the position that Aron had previously occupied at the Institut Français in Berlin.) Shortly thereafter, Aron returns to the Ecole Normale Supérieure, using his post as head of the Social Documentation Centre as the financial basis for his habilitation. After 1940, he belongs to the resistance movement surrounding de Gaulle in London and a relationship that remained ambivalent throughout his entire life begins – for the sceptic, Aron, does not want to accept the 'fanatisme gaullien'. He becomes chief editor of the monthly democratic journal, *France libre*. In 1944, he returns to France, permeated with the Anglo-Saxon ethos of liberal democracies and with the writings of Tocqueville, which were to set down roots in France for the first time through Aron.<sup>47</sup> Thence follow ten years that seem to Aron in retrospect 'almost as lost', an 'illusion sans lyrisme'.<sup>48</sup>

These years include his co-founding of the journal *Les temps modernes* – whose editorial circle is increasingly dominated by Sartre – followed by one year with its intellectual counterpoint, *Combat*, and membership in the RPF, a party supported by de Gaulle and about which Aron never entirely gave up his reservations.<sup>49</sup>

His period as leader writer for *Figaro* commences in 1948. It is here that the material foundations of Aron's great political diagnoses are laid. He proves to be more an Atlanticist than a Gaullist, a decided opponent of the French Indochina War and defender of the American intervention in Korea. Reacting to the political situation with seismographic precision, one motif is clearly sustained throughout all his texts: the idea that a nation's interests are intimately tied to its capacity to form alliances. Although Aron held lectures and seminars at various universities (above all, at the Ecole Normale d'Administration) during his time as a journalist, he remained a leader writer when he was called to the Sorbonne in 1955. The events of 1968 moved him to turn away from the Sorbonne, which had been degraded to the level of a mass university. He became professor in Section VI of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. This episode then ended with his call to the Collège de France in 1970.

When Aron's memoirs appeared in the summer shortly before his death in 1983, it became apparent that his self-portrait had excluded extensive portions of his private life. All the more noteworthy, then, are the few deviations from this rule. Among them is the moving report of the embolism that struck him in April 1977, through which – a particularly painful experience – he lost his capacity to read and write German perfectly. From that point on, all that followed seemed to him borrowed time.<sup>50</sup> The final work was to be a multi-layered reflection on the end of the century – at once on the years of decision and the 'most dangerous' years of the saeculum. In the title of this final contribution to his life's sustained theme, Aron made a broken allusion to Spengler:<sup>51</sup> 'réflexions sur le XXIème siècle', reflections on *the* century, whose great wars – following Nietzsche's prognosis – were conducted in the name of philosophies. This large text would remain a fragment. In October of 1983, Aron died on the steps of the Palais de Justice in Paris. A persona non grata among the left intelligentsia since 1968, he was recognised as a great liberal conservative only during the very last period of his life.<sup>52</sup>

## 2

The outlines emerge, therefore, of a biography that is both varied and rich in disappointments, one that should be understood as a 'life in ruptures'<sup>53</sup> – if it is interpreted in relation to de Gaulle on the one hand and Sartre on the other. It was perhaps through his alienation from both that Aron first came entirely to himself. Through his break with de Gaulle, he came to his soberly critical analysis of international relations, and through that with Sartre, to his particular concept of intellectual ethos. De Gaulle remained

for Aron a dubious figure, not free of obscure features. To the *historian*, Aron, de Gaulle's great political plan 'to extract himself, within the limits of the possible, from the Atlantic Alliance without shattering it and giving it up'<sup>54</sup> remains marked by a question mark from the retrospective standpoint of the memoirs. As *homo politicus*, by contrast, Aron decisively refuses to go along with de Gaulle's balancing act. He reads the formula, 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals' and the attempted rapprochement with the Soviet Union as a result of a failure of German-French cooperation. In de Gaulle's sense, this too should have occurred – if necessary at the expense of the Atlantic Alliance; but it in fact petered out at the stage of a 'cordial virtualité'.

Yet the search for equilibrium by reaching out to the East continued, accompanied by a rhetoric that spoke 'as though [France] were equally threatened by both great powers'<sup>55</sup> and as though the German-French alliance were only one of two pillars of the 'secret of de Gaulle':

[T]ogether with Germany and with other European lands of the community, France potentially gains the status of a great power. Yet, through its permanent dialogue with Moscow, it elevates itself to the status of a world-power without leaving the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>56</sup>

As a counter to this, Aron repeats the insight that is proven at each interface of post-war history: Western political capability would have to be accompanied by the capability of the Atlantic Alliance in the decades following 1945. And he intensifies this insight to state that the nation is indeed great in the network of international relations, but it is by no means the only determining influence. It was the totalitarian experience that catalysed this view. In Aron's opinion, the totalitarian element forbade a rapprochement with the Soviet Union; he, by contrast to the general, did not wish to dream the dream of the 'great Russian nation'.<sup>57</sup> He regards as a danger not so much America's position as a super-power as the temptation of 'disengagement' and possible 'instability of a continent' that might be 'torn into the planetary politics by the accidents of war'.<sup>58</sup> In doing so, his thinking is much less Franco-centric than Central European here.<sup>59</sup>

The relationship to Sartre, by contrast, took shape as a gradual break. One element of it was their diametrically opposed basic philosophical concepts – above all, their concept of freedom.<sup>60</sup> This dispute fired off again decades later in politically representative debates, culminating in May 1968 with Sartre's polemic in the *Nouvel Observateur* that left behind lasting wounds with Aron.<sup>61</sup> Then there was the handshake in the context of a shared press conference<sup>62</sup> in 1979 and Aron's evocative remembrance on their common period of study: 'Bonjour, mon petit camarad'. To this, Aron recalls that the almost-blind Sartre murmured something – perhaps 'bonjour'. Yet Sartre was only one of the three outstanding friends of his youth. Besides him, there was Eric Weil and Alexandre Kojève, all of whom had in common their desire to think conclusive and ultimate thoughts.<sup>63</sup>

Against this phalanx, Aron develops his counter-model: a hermeneutic ethic that resists – in the name of historical diversity – unifying, ultimate goals. Both in the course of one's own life and in the attainment of political decisions, Aron's ethic attempts to acknowledge incompleteness and inconclusivity.

### **Also a 'philosophy of history': on the conversation of the living with the dead**

It is by no means a coincidence that Aron's analysis of totalitarianism is based upon a theory of history set out in two studies that were part of his habilitation of 1939. The first, *La philosophie, critique de l'histoire*, reconstructs the philosophical critique of history – above all, the critiques offered by Rickert and Dilthey – since the middle of the nineteenth century. The second, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, was more systematic.<sup>64</sup> The habilitation process at the Sorbonne bore all the features of a scandal. This is not surprising, insofar as Aron sought – as he himself recalls – no less than to bring down 'the vulgar philosophy of the progress of science'.<sup>65</sup> Dilthey's problem stating that historical reason follows formal laws other than those of pure reason – which, for its part, seeks a nomothetic knowledge of nature – is also Aron's point of departure. He understands historical knowledge to be characterised by the osmotic penetration of the knower by the thing to be known. As Aron knew not the least through his reading of Heidegger, we have always been historical in our being as a person. In terms of this standpoint, he conceives of history as a medium of self-transcendence, of ignoring our physically limited nature: history permits entry into the infinite dialogue between the living and the dead. Tellingly, this idea is also of central significance in Marc Bloch's *Apologie des Historikers*.<sup>66</sup> Further yet: Aron understands history as a re-establishment of the lives of the dead through and for the living.<sup>67</sup> Just as soon as it is raised, therefore, the question of the theory of knowledge for the historical sciences points beyond itself and heads us towards the sphere of ethical problems.

To this first layer in Aron's theory of history is added a second. Drawing primarily on Max Weber, it emphasises on the one hand the oscillation of all historical knowledge between the inexhaustible diversity of possible interpretations of the past for posterity – the great work of art for the observer, the *factum brutum* for the reconstructing historian. On the other, however, it stresses the need for a coherent theory, without which we could not know that which once was. Aron shows that historical objectivity, which is absolutely necessary in all historiography and research of historiography, cannot be objectivity in the sense of being universalisable towards a goal or end of history. Even if it were to yield a cyclical model of history, such objectivity would have to proceed in a totalising way in any case.<sup>68</sup> This is why historical objectivity can be attained solely through a retrospective kind of reasoning: one that assumes limited causes and interprets the contexts and configurations of an individual event, but at the same time understands

it as a fragment and thereby also accounts for coincidence and the factor of subjectivity.<sup>69</sup> In brief, historical reconstruction must expose itself – and here is a fundamental maxim of Aron's philosophy of history – to a hopelessly tangled network of the possible and the probable, of necessity and chance. And in doing so, it must be fully aware that it cannot capture 'what has been' in itself, but only by approximation.<sup>70</sup> Yet the conversation of the living with the dead – and this is Aron's second basic insight – can succeed only if the multiplicity and diversity of human reason and its products are attended to in their concrete forms. Together with Dilthey, Aron knows that historical knowledge heads not towards the general law, but towards the individual phenomenon.<sup>71</sup>

If this conception of history is regarded synoptically, it proves to be a great liberal attempt at a critique of historical reason. It does not seek, in the Hegelian fashion, the manifestation of reason in the history that has occurred.<sup>72</sup> On the contrary: the crux of the Aronian idea that reason is first constructed in the incalculability of historical reconstructions, the diverse adaptations and transformations of the other. Beginning with these insights, Aron can describe the ethos of the *homo politicus*. In its concrete historical situation, the political being is guided by reason in the choosing of its fundamental principles. Yet, if this basic orientation were to be scrutinised afresh with each individual decision, then the person deciding is exposed to the permanent possibility of error. Aron acknowledges this doubt to be the genuinely philosophical attitude of both the politician and the historian. This same doubt also characterises his basic attitude. The almost proverbial 'scepticisme aronien' seeks to guard against 'an apotheosis' of one's own individual convictions.<sup>73</sup> Beginning with this perspective, the decided agnostic, Aron, acknowledges the 'religious dimension' of his existence and finds it in the anti-utopian insight into human finitude and imperfection – the 'crooked wood' (Kant) of personal existence. From this initial insight necessarily results a fundamental opposition to all kinds of sacralisation of human relations and institutions.<sup>74</sup>

## **Totalitarianism and political religion: a delineation**

### ***First circle of hell: 'political religions'***

#### *I*

In 1939, one year after Voegelin uses the concept, Aron begins to speak of 'political religions' too – later exclusively of 'secular religions'. And here can be found a first attempt at his later conception of 'totalitarianism'. Aron's concept of 'political religions' borders very closely upon his concept of 'ideology', which he reveals for the first time in the review of Halévy's *L'ère des tyrannies* (1939).<sup>75</sup> Aron contests Halévy's thesis that Nazism and Soviet Communism share their origins in the expansion of the state into all



spheres of public life that resulted from the war economy of 1914–18. Pointing out that this factor is no more than one condition among others, he counters that the actual cause of the ‘new tyrannies’ is of an ideological nature.<sup>76</sup>

Every *ideology*, thus Aron, offers a total interpretation of the course of history and demands that its adherents regard it as the supreme truth. An ideology becomes a *political-secular-religion* to the extent that it also considers certain permanent needs of the human heart. Following Max Weber’s theory of modernity, Aron states that these needs are left unsatisfied by the mounting disenchantment that has accompanied the technical modernisation of industrial society. Re-enchantment of the world is achieved immanently: in chiliastic, millenarian historical utopias.<sup>77</sup> Thus, an ideology gains the character of a religion when ‘the salvation of the human being’ is established ‘in this world, in a far distant future’ that must be carried along by the historical process.<sup>78</sup> To this extent, secular religions always usurp the transcendent by constructing a context of immanence. Yet a secular religion does not simply satirise the transcendent ones; it seeks instead to surpass them by presenting itself as scientific truth by means of an illusory rationality.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, a secular religion uses media of propagandistic enchantment and sensory overload. Both dimensions – the ‘scientific’ and the sensory – are intended to appeal to the intelligentsia and the masses alike. Thus, Aron’s findings might be read as a distorted image of an idea from Hegel’s *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, according to which the philosopher and multitude require a religion having both sensibility *and* sense.<sup>80</sup>

## 2

In his later writings, Aron offers a sublime description of the parallels of the National Socialist and Communist political religions. Both make promises that are as yet empty, but they cannot, like transcendent religions, refer to the tension of ‘promise’ and ‘fulfilment’. This is why the creation of a new human type becomes critical. According to Aron’s analysis, Soviet Communism of the middle Stalinist period sought to create an amalgamation of faith and fear: whoever was not convinced of the Party was compelled to see himself as totally powerless: ‘le peur est nécessaire, inevitable’.<sup>81</sup> And as Aron learns primarily from Solzhenitsyn,<sup>82</sup> the new human type can take root only if it is supported by habit – if the ‘homo sovieticus’, condemned to survival, tolerates the surveillance of all by all. Aron finds a further element only in the long-lasting political religion *kat’exochen* – which is how he increasingly regards Soviet Communism the longer he studies it: the element of ‘scholastic educational trimming’.<sup>83</sup> The air of utopian prophetism emerged on the scene already in the Lenin era, when events and conditions were declared to be something other than what they were. Through the filter of the ideology, the conquest of the state by an armed sect becomes the proletarian revolution, the nationalisation of the instruments of production

becomes the stage of comprehensive socialisation and the rule of the nomenclatura becomes the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This is done in order to adapt the doctrine to a reality that is entirely different<sup>84</sup> and thereby to save both its scientific claim and the religious force of its promise.

In Aron's opinion, however, all such 'scholastic' operations are based upon one single one: the axiom that the Party – because it is the 'avant-garde of the proletariat ... – [might], without hesitation, relinquish the freedoms demanded by the proletariat in its name and to its benefit'.<sup>85</sup> Aron finds this argumentation in Lenin's work too.

If Soviet Communism creates a new human being in the long-term, an analogous goal was to have been attained with the National Socialist mixture of 'seduction' and 'violence' (Thamer).<sup>86</sup> Here too, a total transformation was involved – albeit in a perspective that was of a historically shorter term.<sup>87</sup> For the sake of achieving such a transformation, general values were uniformly perverted into pure vitalism, sheer 'élan vital': 'mais l'homme que cette religion modèle ce n'est pas un être appelé à la vie de la raison, c'est une bête'.<sup>88</sup> Anthropological manipulation, therefore, leads to permanent unreason – and to the contortion of naivety into fanaticism and sensibility into hysteria.

### 3

For all the incisiveness of his individual analyses – in the Halévy review, for example – Aron's exposition of political religions in the early period was by no means capable of clearly defining the concept of 'totalitarianism'. In 1939, for example, he still understands Hitler and European Fascism as the actual 'totalitarianisms'. Only these, not the Soviet Union, are said to have the potential for aggressive imperialism. To Halévy, certainly, he concedes that the two governing systems have telling similarities. In both, for example, absolute power is exercised by one party and is concentrated upon a single, personal ruler. And in both, the ideological character functions as a source of legitimation for the destruction of political freedoms.<sup>89</sup> Besides the imperial gesture, however, the *actual* criterion that is required to speak of totalitarianism is the usurpatory element, the perfect elimination of old elites and replacement of them by new ones.<sup>90</sup> Tellingly, Aron sees this feature to be a factor of Nazism at end of the 1930s, but not of Stalinism.<sup>91</sup> The great substantive difference between Aron's early critical perspective on totalitarianism and his later one lies in his originally having seen the quintessence of totalitarianism to be a total movement in a state of ferment. In later years, however, he isolated the institutional aspect of this kind of movement.

#### ***Second circle of hell: established totalitarianism***

How, then, does a political religion change when it becomes a component of industrial society – can 'no longer avoid differentiation',<sup>92</sup> when the ideological faith is dead but the ideology is still supposed to penetrate into all spheres

of social life? It then comes to the point that ‘réalité and surréalité’ coexist and a *circulus vitiosus* arises, one whose structure became accessible to Aron primarily through the testimony of Sakharov.<sup>93</sup> Although the ideology helps cause the incurable inferiority of the Soviet economy on the one hand, it serves on the other to conceal it.

A more complex situation is present here than *in statu nascendi*. This insight is reflected in Aron’s assessment of the degree to which the Soviet Union of the Brezhnevian stagnation and the Andropovian interim could still be called totalitarian. For a few years, these assessments fluctuate<sup>94</sup> and he sometimes even introduces substitute concepts (primarily that of the ‘idéocratie militarisée’<sup>95</sup>). In his retrospective look back at almost 70 years of Soviet history in the *Years of Decision*, however, Aron still unambiguously holds fast to the ‘totalitarianism’ concept: ‘[the concept] describes the implementation of an ideology or state-truth that is withheld from free discussion’.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, it is still the most fitting term by which to describe the Soviet state of 1983 insofar as the iron band of total terror is still the predominant principle of the social structure.<sup>97</sup> The ideologically mandated dominance of the state by one party still yields a state monopoly over all means of violence and propaganda.<sup>98</sup> Thus does every public or economic activity<sup>99</sup> potentially become a state activity. The merging of state and ideology necessarily implies that a deficit occurring in the economic or career spheres – or the lacking performance of a duty – becomes an ideological lack that is to be punished by the police apparatus.<sup>100</sup>

Only the interplay of all these factors suffices to characterise the regime as ‘totalitarian’. And, as Aron knows in the mature phase of his theorising totalitarianism, these factors are common to National Socialism and Soviet Communism.<sup>101</sup> Yet this finding too requires differentiations and distinctions. He finds the comparative basis chosen by Hannah Arendt – the years of the Great Purges (1934–37) compared to Hitler’s Germany of 1941–45 – to have been selected too narrowly.<sup>102</sup> Further, he holds that although a one-party state tends to be totalitarian, it is not always *de facto*. In order to be totalitarian, a state requires on the one hand the stabilisation and crystallisation of its structures following the initial phase of revolutionary usurpation.<sup>103</sup> Yet on the other hand, such economic or military strategies as Lenin’s National Economic Policy (NEP) or the ‘Great Fatherland War’ might demand a partial reduction of the totalitarian character. This is why Aron regards the Soviet Union of the years 1934–38 and 1948–52 – as is known, Stalin planned a second Great Purge before his death – and National Socialist Germany of the war years 1941–44, as exemplars of the totalitarian system in its purest form.<sup>104</sup>

Of course, this assessment can be justified only through a historical testing of both Aron’s sociological – thus, ideal-typical – descriptive attempts and his intuition. Aron himself mentions this as a desideratum, even though he does not even begin to make good on it.<sup>105</sup> His relevant writings have an entirely different character. Always manifesting a bipolar or even many-voiced

polemic, they seek a confrontation between totalitarianism and democracy or between liberal conservative intellectuals in an open society and mandarins intoxicated with the opium of a historically utopian causality – one of the 'holy families' of Marxism.<sup>106</sup> And certainly, we must also consider Aron's own description of the concept of totalitarianism: the late Aron sees the concept of 'totalitarianism' to have only a descriptive value, not a genuinely theoretical one.<sup>107</sup>

In accordance with his differentiated and nuanced theory of history, the bundle of characteristics he cites – agreeing extensively with Brzezinski's and Friedrich's 1957 study of totalitarianism<sup>108</sup> – provides only a first, surface approach to the problem of totalitarianism. On a second, deeper level, the question of a more substantive essential relation among totalitarian systems arises. Aron sees this relation to exist in the connection of *ideology* and *terror*. Formulated differently, he sees it to exist in the simultaneity of a fanaticism 'of the most extreme degree' and an 'instrumental rationality' in grand style.<sup>109</sup>

With his clear accentuation of both 'ideology and terror', he touches again upon the totalitarianism concept of Hannah Arendt. As is well known, Arendt also regarded the totalitarian regimes as a novelty in comparison to the historical arbitrariness of tyrants and despots. Not only is 'the space of freedom that is hedged by the laws', the public sphere of political action, 'transformed into a desert',<sup>110</sup> but a totalitarian system simply does not reckon with acting persons: 'the principle of action is replaced by the preparing of the sacrifices that the process of nature or history will demand'.<sup>111</sup> This is the implication of the diagnosis that is expressed as in a projective vision in Büchner's *Danton*: in this era, history will be processed into living human flesh.<sup>112</sup> In his long critical essay on Arendt, certainly, Aron objects that the attempt to understand the totalitarian requires knowledge of its underlying principle; if Arendt has assumed any such principle at all, then it is that of the futility of all acts of resistance, even of flight, and the impossibility of all political action. As her interpretive key, she selected the experience of the victims of violence in the 'Schinder huts'<sup>113</sup> and the torture chambers of the Gestapo and NKVD. As his critique indicates, Aron moves in a different direction: seeking the essence of the amalgamation of terror and ideology, he finds it in the ideologies of the extreme. At once *le danger par excellence* and *le mal par excellence*,<sup>114</sup> such ideologies possess the character of political religion. Cloaked in promises of being able to extract ultimate meaning from the manifold chaos of history, from the totality of the knowable, and to surmount human finitude through a Promethean mastery of oneself and of history, this claim to absolute truth gains a social and political body with totalitarianism.

### ***Back to the first circle of hell: an assessment***

After having observed some of the essential filiations of Aron's concept of political or secular religions, it would appear to be time to attempt to assess

it. Indisputably, the concept has a descriptive and differentiating force for a concept of totalitarianism that proceeds descriptively. Yet in terms of systematic strength, the concept raises more questions than it is capable of answering. In my view, an indicator of this discrepancy is that he added scarcely anything else to the systematic profile after the late 1930s, whereas his descriptive phrasing of the concept remained a life-long undertaking.

Whenever asked, Aron rightly rejected any affinities between his talk of political religions and that of Eric Voegelin.<sup>115</sup> For one, he made no attempt to illuminate the new political religions in light of a universal history of the politico-religious unit, which Voegelin traces back to the Egyptian dynasties and ancient Greece.<sup>116</sup> And for another, as an agnostic, Aron refuses to draft a foil that relies upon Christian anthropology. When he opposes religious transcendence to totalitarian immanence, his attempt is utterly rudimentary and unsatisfactory. Although Aron increasingly understands the secular religions as ‘superstition and pseudo-religion’<sup>117</sup> the criteria for this characterisation are lacking, as is the counter that a precisely formed concept of ‘transcendent’ religiosity might have been provided.

Thus, Aron’s concept of ‘political religions’ is deficient on the level of religious history. He does not reach the important distinction that is made by Voegelin: the insight that the secular religions are a phenomenon specific to the ‘belated nations’ of Europe – nations in which the public culture is no longer situated within the Christian tradition, as that of the Anglo-Saxon countries is.<sup>118</sup> With the ‘belated nations’, the connection between Christianity and culture has been shattered or forgotten.<sup>119</sup> Further, it also escapes Aron that the divorce between religion and politics is a principle rooted within Christianity itself. Also unfortunate, because blind to tradition, is his polemical use of the ‘scholastic’ concept when he refers to the genesis of Marxism-Leninism.

A further defect is that Aron does not crystallise his concept of secular religions in religious-phenomenological terms, even though his own descriptions provided him enough starting-points: the devouring of fascination by fear and the faith in ideologies, for example. Such fascination might have been interpreted as a perversion of the religious simultaneity of the *tremendum* and *fascinosum*; for the devouring of fascination by fear gained its reception precisely through the disenchantment of modernity and the critical distillation of faith into a ‘religion within pure reason’<sup>120</sup> or a religious ‘as if’ with a solely ethical intent. Or the exclusive, esoteric character of the new religions together with their simultaneous tendency to become mass movements<sup>121</sup> – all these and other elements are noted, but not worked into the concept. Conversely, though, this might be why Aron’s talk of ‘political religions’ remains free of exaggeration and retains an openness that Eric Voegelin’s thesis of Gnosticism does not possess.<sup>122</sup>

Yet it is probably the religious-philosophical defect of Aron’s concept that blunts his approach the most. Aron uses undifferentiated concepts of faith

and Church and applies them to the communities of soteriological religions and adherents of secular religion alike. This defect causes him to understand faith to be a mere attitude. This leads to such unsuccessful formulations as the one stating that the true nature of the Soviet system is revealed if, in Marx's slogan that religion is the opium of the people, 'religion' is replaced with 'Marxism-Leninism'.<sup>123</sup> But Marx's statement itself resonates with the Pauline idea of the 'sighing creature' in Romans 8: 18. Thus, the concept pertains to the need for salvation of pre-conscious, not spiritual, life.<sup>124</sup> Aron does not know to distinguish two kinds of faith: the faith in immanence from the faith in transcendence, the fanaticism – describable in anthropological categories – of intoxication by ideology from the openness of the faithful to a possible mystery.<sup>125</sup> Thus does his contrast remain flat and unjustified. The same problem repeats itself with respect to the concept of Church: secularly bureaucratised coercive structure on the one hand, the community of the saints as *mysterium salutis*<sup>126</sup> on the other. On the one hand, there is the violent establishment of identification of Party, 'Führer' and people, on the other, the *communio sanctorum* as the temporal representative of the eternal body of Christ – unity in the multiplicity and multiplicity in the unity.<sup>127</sup> I would like to emphasise that this kind of distinction – the opposing of the temporally all-too-temporal to the possible, at least conceivable entirely Other – can also be formulated from an agnostic standpoint. In his memoirs, Aron considered in various passages whether he was forced to leave the important matter unsaid and unthought in concentrating on the secular religions.<sup>128</sup> This forgotten dimension shimmers through very nicely in a passage of his *Plaidoyer for a Decadent Europe* in which Aron explains that the maxim of vehemently opposing the secular religions does not mean that the talk of the Absolute of the 'réligions de salut' must also be rejected. To be sure, he endows this Absoluteness with a secular form, as it were, with his image of the 'mystérieuse fraternité' that could unite human beings before God; yet the concession here still remains.

That Aron's relevant studies on 'political religions' possess so few differentiations might have an even more subtle ground, however: his dissatisfaction with the sociology of Durkheim. This dissatisfaction had come to light already in his student days. In Aron's view, the implicit goal of Durkheim's sociology was to outline a secular morality that would supplement 'Catholic morality, which is in decline'.<sup>129</sup> In doing so, however, it remained blind to the revolutionary and usurpatorial upheavals of the thirties. In light of the daily experience of Aron, who observed his era from the eye of the storm, such an approach rankled:

In light of the catastrophe that was brewing in the beer cellars or the *Sportpalast*, how misplaced must have appeared to me a sociology that had been created to provide the foundation for the education of citizens in teachers' seminars?<sup>130</sup>

Nonetheless, Aron found one Durkheimian idea to have been proven correct: namely, the origin of religious faith in the collectivity's fears – in the glow of the torches of Nuremberg.<sup>131</sup> Yet what a tragic irony it was that the salvation expected from Durkheim's theory fell flat, powerless, before this reality! Together with an explicit reliance on Max Weber's postulate of 'value-freedom', this may have moved Aron to provide no counter-images with his analyses when his concept of political religions took shape some years later. Because his strict methodological self-restriction left essential questions open, it is only the memoirs that ask such questions as: 'would Max Weber have refused to place Hitler in the same category as Buddha? Would I myself have at that time resisted the refusal to distinguish between values and persons? I am not sure.'<sup>132</sup>

One positive aspect of Aron's unreflected concept of faith ought not to be denied, however: its polemic potential. Its net was wide enough to impress the attractive power of the totalitarian upon such intellectuals as Sartre and the early Merleau-Ponty too.<sup>133</sup> Briefly: it caught the intoxicating effects of the 'opium for intellectuals'. We now turn to this sphere of questions.

### **Further depth (1): the philosophical opium of holy families: on Aron's confrontation with Althusser and Sartre**

#### *I*

In the 1960s and 1970s, Aron's point of departure – the analysis of political religions in terms of a critique of ideologies – led him to exemplify this kind of religion on two Western variants of Marxism. One of them was Louis Althusser's systemic interpretation of Marx. Beginning with such abstractions as exchange, surplus, production and distribution rather than with the empirical description of reality, Althusser's interpretation seeks to attain an 'organic totality' of society through the supposed bracketing out of the subject of cognition.<sup>134</sup> And the second variant was the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* by the 'petit camerade', Sartre. Superficially, the two seem to be exact opposites. As Aron notes, however, both Sartre and Althusser represent totalitarisation. A totality is created by an act of self-assertion, one that gathers the things scattered in the world (with Fichte, the 'non-ego') via the ego's projection of itself into the external world; it absorbs other social beings into itself – without losing itself in them, of course. Beginning with this entirely self-transparent moment of 'being-for-itself', the ego then designs itself into the future.<sup>135</sup> A logically necessary consequence of Sartre's thought is that this freedom in engagement manifests itself in a voluntary subjection of oneself to the revolutionary multitude. Aron's critique applies above all to this line of argument. He perceptively recognises that Sartre's reflection of 'free engagement' is thought to occur without dialogue and careful self-explanation. The autonomous consciousness of the individual is abruptly (and without dispute) transformed 'into a kind of community

consciousness'.<sup>136</sup> A philosophy of violence suggests itself here, one that is formed, not through utopianism and the 'negation of reality' as with vulgar Marxism, but through the 'collective up-surge'.<sup>137</sup> Thus, this philosophy culminates in a myth of the oath as a 'means, to a certain extent magic, of prohibiting one's own freedom to be able to retract the decision from one day to the next'.<sup>138</sup> In the event of revolt, the oath becomes a totalitarian tie. Breach of the oath justifies punishment; the flipside of the revolutionary fraternity advertised is the potential terror of all against all.

Aron, the historical thinker, finds a second weak point of Sartre's concept of absolute freedom to be its lack of history and origin. The unconditional self-transparency of the decisive moment forbids any kind of identification with the past. Yet here, Sartre only enlists the radical conclusion of a total revolution like the French one; such a revolution often displays a proclivity to understand itself as the establishment of a new calendar. Yet to the same extent that consciousness is free of the past, it is also absolutely free and unconnected with respect to the present. In precisely this passage, Sartre's philosophy of the collectivity ultimately joins the tradition of a radical utopianism; and as such, it must succumb to the criticism of Aron's theory of history. Freedom can never be total, he had already countered to Sartre in their youth: 'an individual's past limits the range within which personal initiative can develop'.<sup>139</sup> Thus, the continuity of one's personal historical existence must always also be considered.

Against Sartre, then, Aron offers his own conception of freedom. Its foundation is the basic insight that freedom should always be understood as a 'progressive liberation' constituted by two things: on the one hand, fidelity to one's own origins and those of one's nation, community of values and culture, on the other, fidelity to the conscience, which admonishes us to correct and modify our own orientation towards the world.<sup>140</sup> Thus understood, 'liberation' is a decidedly counter-utopian relationship to the world. It is a consciousness that recognises the world as it is and does not think it up as an unconditioned child's dream capable of being constructed *ex nihilo*.

## 2

In the context of the discussion surrounding the new holy families of Western Marxism, Aron's position is part of the momentous confrontation of the French intelligentsia with the shadows of the Gulag. These emerged through the life-experience and personality of Solzhenitsyn, who resided in Paris in early 1975. This became the Damascine experience of a young, Maoistic elite and the birth-hour of the 'nouveaux philosophes', whose political analyses Aron – for all his esteem of their personal worth, of that of André Glucksmann above all – never completely trusted.<sup>141</sup> For his part, Solzhenitsyn countered his conversation partners thus: 'if you accept the large Gulag, then why do you become so virtuously outraged about the little ones? Camps remain camps, whether they are brown or red.'<sup>142</sup> Taking this



as his cue, Aron argued against Jean Daniel,<sup>143</sup> editor-in-chief of the *Nouvel Observateur*, when the latter compared his own engagement against a diffusely understood American imperialism to Solzhenitsyn's life-struggle. In Aron's view, lives that were disparate to such an extent could not be compared; a bureaucrat has had the audacity here to seek to enter into a dispute among equals with a Dostoevsky returned from the houses of the dead.<sup>144</sup>

These French debates, Aron remarks in his autobiography, reminded him of the confrontations in Germany during the final phase of the Weimar Republic.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, though, they prompted him to modify his concept of 'ideology'. The problem was now shifted to the question as to a correct use of ideologies. For the first time, Aron determined that the activity of the social scientist within the open society is also 'ideological'.<sup>146</sup> What might have motivated the terminological and analytical transformation was his later recognition of many mixed and distorted forms arrayed between the two great ideal types – between the unification of being and duty and the utopian establishment of a goal of history on the one hand and the probabilistic undertaking of weighing different strategies of solving problems on the other. Further: he had by this time seen manifestly ideological positions assumed by the anti-Communist side as well.

In itself, the terminological transformation is not too convincing insofar as it compares entirely disparate things: total doctrine and plural research practice, a partial sphere in the open society. Nor did it accomplish what it sought to: namely, a rationalisation of the description of totalitarian regimes. Indeed, the new term served much more to erode Aron's typological framework.<sup>147</sup> On a different level, however, it redeemed itself. Through it, a polemic could be conducted not merely against the secular utopianism of the 'political religions', but also against the probabilistics of social engineering. Now, Aron could also campaign against the expectation of a progressive improvement – accomplished through scientific methods – of the human order. That the human order will always be imperfect and that the progressivist expectation is a dangerous illusion was recognisable following the mid-1970s (oil crisis) at the latest.<sup>148</sup>

## **Further depth (2): 'industrial society': typology and *epoché***

### *I*

Yet a self-correction also resonates in the altered 'ideology' concept: it is reflected in Aron's assumption of the Saint-Simonian and Comtian concept of 'industrial society'. For a time, he sees this concept to provide a comparative instrument by which to capture – in a way complementing the totalitarianism analysis – structural similarities between Communism and Western capitalism. In both cases, industrial societies are characterised by the application of scientific methods to economic production and, in both cases, the large enterprise is the characteristic unit of the organisation of work.<sup>149</sup>

Aron's comparison yields not a thesis of convergence, but a conception of the connection between economy and political system – under the relative primacy of politics, but with repercussions from the economy as well.<sup>150</sup> Aron stresses this interaction even more strongly: thus does he comprehend the conflicts of interests within an industrial society to be proof of the viability of a political system. A system's competence is demonstrated not the least by how it solves this problem. And in these terms, the ideal-typical distinction between 'constitutionally plural regimes' and 'one-party regimes' – a distinction for which non-comparability in comparing is again invoked – can be gained.<sup>151</sup>

Beginning here, Aron can compare four different opposites: competition and monopoly, constitution and revolution, pluralism of groups and bureaucratic absolutism, party and one-party state. His result here is that the Western democracies represent the 'best or, if one will, the least bad solution', and this due to their exercise of power in a way that is both temporally and constitutionally limited, to the possibilities of political participation and economic well-being for everyone during periods of economic boom.<sup>152</sup> This is why the Western democracies are to be preferred in all cases, although Aron does understand their decadence to be a structural problem: one conditioned by hedonistic life-attitudes, the decline of birth-rates and the necessity to make to the electorate concessions that kill long-term social and political concepts.<sup>153</sup>

## 2

The comparison of the economic and political, therefore, leads to a soberly sceptical plea. It is soberly sceptical because Aron has analysed in clear terms ('*Les Désillusions du progrès*') the immanent contradictions of Western democracies since 1964. Their three projects are increasingly vulnerable. The striving for equality breaks on the reality of social differentiation, the abolition of which is neither possible nor desirable in the context of a liberal-democratic constitution. Second, social roles work against the promise of the democratic 'pursuit of happiness' through which one can realise one's individuality and self.<sup>154</sup> And above all, the democratic dream of universalisation, the idea of a unified humanity, contradicts the real system of states and the demands of political prudence. Nonetheless, Aron refuses to enter into a pessimistic, apocalyptic scenario like the one he finds offered in the first Meadows Report of the 'Club of Rome'.<sup>155</sup> Like Helmut Schmidt, he too sees the 'end of the flagpole', the limits to growth, to have been reached in the mid-1970s. Yet he does not for this reason retract his fundamental affirmation of Western industrial society as an indispensable component of liberal democracy. He casts a distanced glance, as it were, on his earlier analyses of the 1950s and 1960s: these too seem to him to be in part the children of the astronomic growth-rates of the past years. And it is precisely in the horizon of this self-explanation that his modified concept of ideology has its place.<sup>156</sup>

Certainly, Aron remains with his doctrine of the three prosperous decades of the post-war era: 'that economic progress and the elevation of work-productivity might improve the living conditions of all'. Yet he now sees more clearly than before that 'growth does not eliminate inequalities; indeed, it does not even necessarily reduce them. And it does reconcile individual human beings, let alone nations and their ideologies, to one other'.<sup>157</sup> In addition, the social structure of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union assumes darker colours for him than it did earlier, when the announcements of a 'thaw' were still young.

As his memoirs illuminate, the late Aron regarded his earlier reflection on the two camps of the contemporary world-order<sup>158</sup> as still valid in a certain respect. It retains its significance as counterpoint to the neo-Marxist attitude of total refusal of outcome of terror. Aron finds this attitude represented supremely in the work of Herbert Marcuse. On the one hand, Marcuse drafts the panorama of a Communist world that is said to have created the infrastructure for human needs through total socialisation. On the other hand, however, he explains that the Western world provides the individual with better guarantees – even if it leaves him at the mercy of 'the irrationality of artificially created needs'.<sup>159</sup>

In a very groping and conjectural way, Aron had wagered that the era of a global civil war of the ideologies might perhaps come to an end in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>160</sup> In the case of the Soviet Union, he saw this expectation disproved after only a few years, when de-Stalinisation progressed according to such tried and true Stalinist patterns as the self-critique.<sup>161</sup> That he later changed his own concept of ideology with his gaze directed at the Western world indicates that he by no means understood social optimism as an immunisation against the ideological poison.

## **Aron's scientific politics and ethics on nuclear peace**

### *Basic features*

#### *I*

'Impossible peace – improbable war'. This is the formulation of the dilemma provided by Aron's book *Le grand Schisme* in 1948. The formula marks the beginning of a sustained analysis of the new weapon's categorically new character – a character that forces political actors into an aporetic role.<sup>162</sup> Generally speaking, these actors are forced to bring their own civilisation, the Western world, into the role of a hostage of the Eastern hemisphere. Hypothetically, they have before their eyes the ghastly certainty that 'if deterrence fails, defence and destruction collapse into the final absurdity'.<sup>163</sup> Europe, the divided continent, had assumed the role of a hostage opposite the totalitarian Soviet Union – since 1945, in any case.<sup>164</sup> Aron shares with Karl Jaspers his understanding of the pincer-like situation between a double hell,<sup>165</sup> the totalitarian and the nuclear; yet he draws from this understanding

an immeasurably harder conclusion. The focus of his reflections is not the free republican mission of the hostage that might serve as the spokesperson of a new world-ethos. Rather, it is the loss of real political power – one also recognised by Jaspers in its outlines – due to a polarisation of the parts of the globe. His concern, therefore, is a potentially global foreign policy that thereby becomes total.<sup>166</sup> 'There is no longer a European concert, but only a world concert', Aron argues.<sup>167</sup>

This is why he attempts to encircle this problem sphere – which had been seismographically reflected in multiple commentaries in *Figaro* – in a large study entitled *Paix et Guerre*. Proceeding in a probabilistic way, the first part of this work adopts many perspectives; through certain fundamental distinctions, the global atomic situation takes shape here as a dialectic dilemma. On the one hand, a dialectic relation of the bipolar and multipolar character of inter-state relations is outlined: multipolarity assumes a world of states – like the monarchies in the *jus publicum europaeum* – in which a balanced distribution of power and internal political order obtains. Bipolarity has always entailed a disruption of the polyphonic concert: the share of power of two states dominates the others.<sup>168</sup> The loss of the old order, which Aron comprehends with a degree of clarity similar to that of Carl Schmitt, culminates in the nuclear age of global politics.<sup>169</sup> (Schmitt, by the way, was one of the most engaged and intensive readers of Aron's studies in nuclear philosophy.<sup>170</sup>)

Besides this, with a heterogeneous state structure, there is a tendency to support rebels and dissidents from the other side. This is different from a context in which the states are homogeneous. Thus do subversion, terror and partisanship become potential instruments of politics.<sup>171</sup>

In the global nuclear situation, war and peace move into a close, indissoluble dialectic relationship. Aron therefore sees that none of the old forms of peace – attained through balance, unilateral hegemonial position or the amalgamation of multiple states – is valid or even desirable any more in an empire of the 1950s.<sup>172</sup> Much more does the technique of thermonuclear destruction produce a warlike peace (terror-peace) defined by the reality that, potentially, each unit has the capacity to hit the other one fatally.<sup>173</sup> In no case, therefore, does terror-peace presuppose a nuclear stalemate. Aron recognises that this situation makes it necessary to amalgamate strategy and politics. It is an insight that will lead him in the long term to his study of Clausewitzian thought.

At the same time, the relationship of war and peace intensifies to become an aporia – Carl Schmitt perceived this with similar acumen. Precisely through its anathematisation by international law, war 'has turned over every element of peace' and now threatens to return under the spectre of the potential extermination of entire peoples.<sup>174</sup> In the new context of the age of nuclear weapons, therefore, a rational calculus that might curb this development should be sought.<sup>175</sup> Of course, the search for a calculus of this kind must begin with the givens. Thus will the relationship between strategy

and diplomacy be tense to a high degree if the latter still thinks, as before, in categories of alliance and national interests and the former is exposed to a hyperbolic global situation which repeatedly makes these ties appear as anachronisms.<sup>176</sup> Thus does Aron present the relationship between the Soviet power and America as one between hostile brothers. For all their enmity, they still have a common interest in not mutually destroying one another. On the part of America, this has already often led to a failure to represent to the utmost the interests of allies or participants in its own basic values; the full intensity of this dilemma was revealed in the dual crises of 1956 – over Suez and in the defeat of the Hungarian rebellion.<sup>177</sup>

Yet a further dilemma, one that Aron had already profiled very early on, also results. In the global nuclear situation too, the difference between the free Western world and the totalitarian Soviet power must remain recognisable. Thus, the taking of one's enemy, for example, cannot occur. Not to destroy the one who wants to destroy us must remain the supreme Western maxim.<sup>178</sup> Aron bundles this asymmetrical configuration of problems in the third part of his book – a 'praxeology' that can be formulated only anti-nomically. The guiding principle is the insight that, in the nuclear age, 'survival means victory'. It is an ambivalent formula because it must be reversible, thereby indicating that the West must always pursue a double goal: not to be defeated and to avoid a thermonuclear war.<sup>179</sup> In light of the 'terror-peace', this means – as Aron sees with crystalline clarity – that the strategy of the West must bank not on defence, but on deterrence. During the 1970s, a peculiar dialectic arose from this policy: one between the modernisation of weapons systems and – not infrequently – disarmament negotiations that would already anticipate the next technological steps. This was the logic of the NATO double resolution that Michael Stürmer, a brief 30 years later, brilliantly articulates as a concept immediately before the end of the old East-West confrontation. Although 'nuclear weapons would have to be minimized' and this process would have to proceed in a politically controlled way, they can nonetheless not be forgotten. '[F]ollowing a balanced build-down', the remainder would remain 'all the more life-important for the strategic context of the Atlantic system'.<sup>180</sup> In its basic features, Aron had already reached this insight in 1962.<sup>181</sup>

It is under this condition that he formulates his maxim for a nuclear-apocalyptic chess game:

both diplomatic-strategic action and technical acting can be rational only if they are calculating . . . . For lack of strict criteria, neither can say what the rational reaction of the other will be. They can and must only hope that this reaction will be rational.<sup>182</sup>

## 2

This facet of *Frieden und Kriegen* seems ambivalent: on the one hand, Aron shows incomparably more clearly than Karl Jaspers that it is absolutely

indispensable to recognise and survive the aporia of the nuclear situation.<sup>183</sup> For this reason, morality in the global nuclear age must be Janus-faced. It is necessary to negotiate according to the 'requirements of today' 'without contradicting the hopes of the future' – that is, to look the paradox between the violence of history and the peaceful ideal in the eye.<sup>184</sup> More still: the requirement that is imagined to be desirable tomorrow, that of creating a international, legally binding way to curb nuclear programmes or to regulate a world-state, likewise proves impossible from the perspective of today. Following the collapse of the 'jus publicum europaeum', the legalistic path has become illusory. The world-state would be conceivable for post-totalitarian times at best; even then, however, it would be conceivable only as a federal structure that retains the political form of the state and its sovereignty.<sup>185</sup>

In accordance with his ethical theory of history, Aron seems to hint that this great aporia of the present remains closely intertwined with the ambivalence of the *conditio humana*:

let us leave the privilege of being moved to thoughts about the end of the adventure to others who are more susceptible to illusions. Further, let us attempt to neglect neither the one duty that is laid upon each of us nor the other: let us not steal away from a war-like history, but let us also not betray the ideal. Let us think and act in the firm conviction that the absence of war should be preserved until peace becomes possible – to the extent that it will ever become possible at all.<sup>186</sup>

Yet this is only the one facet of Aron's analyses. In another way, they attempt to make a plausible argument that the presence of the thermo-nuclear weapons system does not change the essence of the morality of diplomatic strategic negotiations. This is thesis for which – in light of Aron's own insights and those of another great book on the theme, Kissinger's *Kernwaffen und auswärtige Politik* (first appearing in 1957)<sup>187</sup> – it was possible to have justified doubts. Thus did the goal of incorporating nuclear weapons into the customary conduct of external affairs and the factual achievement of a work that was for Golo Mann the most magnificent treatment of defence politics since Clausewitz<sup>188</sup> yawn visibly apart; indeed, they relate almost as an anachronism. Without it having been expressly formulated, the basic running dissensus between Aron and the American 'think tanks' of the late 1950s probably related to this central point. Specifically, the fight took shape around the objection that Aron still thinks in inter-state categories, but blends away the transnational structural net of modern international relationships – in particular, the world economy.<sup>189</sup>

In just the same way, it would have had to seem a simplification that, although Aron understood the political bearers of decisions as freely acting historical subjects, he did not yet appear to know the problem field of decision-making. Discovered by the American political science of the 1950s,

this area of problems sways between rationality and material constraint, between the factor of political subjectivity and that of the interaction of various advising instances.<sup>190</sup>

### ***Open questions: the philosopher in the 'grand débat'***

#### *I*

It is these filiations to which Aron devotes himself in his essay, *Le Grand Débat* (1963, 1964). The 'great debate' is that decisive discussion about a future nuclear strategy<sup>191</sup> that surrounds the paradigm shift from the strategy of 'massive retaliation' to that of 'flexible response'. Henceforth, the West had claimed a monopoly on the first use of the apocalyptic weapon. These weapons were an absolute *ultima ratio* of politics, not a supreme strategic potential that could possibly decide a war.

Further, the strategy of 'flexible response' implied the possibility of a step-wise escalation for which the most extreme step was always visible, to be sure, but remained banned. It was only with these new basic maxims that the dialectic of 'fear and reason' tending towards relaxation was established. This counterpart to 'deterrence' and 'détente' was committed to paper in the Harmel Report of 1967.<sup>192</sup> Certainly, it might be said with a certain amount of correctness that this strategy of 'containment' – the hemming in of the Soviet sphere of influence that had already replaced the 'roll-back' of the first years of the Cold War over a decade before – was more moderate than the old paradigm. (Insofar as it is thought abstractly, of course, it would run counter to the relation of all Aron's nuclear-strategic reflections to particular situations.) The change of strategy became acute only when a nuclear stalemate between the superpowers manifested itself in several stages, and it indicated a clear conventional superiority for the Soviets. In August 1949, the USSR tested the atom bomb. Four years later, it tested the hydrogen bomb. On 4 October 1957, the launch of the satellite Sputnik I into the earth's orbit shook the Western world, for it thereby became apparent that Soviet power was capable of firing intercontinental missiles. For the first time, America was vulnerable to nuclear attack. And with that, the alliance question was also raised completely anew: would the USA guarantee the security of the hostage, Europe – in particular, of Germany – 'and guarantee the price of its own total destruction?'<sup>193</sup>

Just how acute this question was was revealed when the Soviet Union began to translate its newly acquired nuclear weight into a real projection of power during the Cuban Missile Crisis. And just how close the apocalypse had become was unmistakable with the confrontation of Soviet and American tanks at Checkpoint Charlie after the building of the Berlin Wall in the autumn of 1961. So much had been shown: the 'relationship of hostile brothers' described by Aron had to be balanced entirely afresh. The 'flexible response' was produced by yet another source besides the precept of political

prudence: namely, by the circumstance that the reduction of nuclear weapons in the middle of the 1950s had moved real use of them into greater proximity. In the words of the American general Maxwell Taylor, 'massive retaliation' had become an 'uncertain trumpet'.<sup>194</sup>

Essentially, the 'great debate' was sparked by the fact that it remained contested as to whether the new scenario in fact signified the best kind of deterrence. 'Do the Western powers possess sufficient conventional weapons to be able to withstand a longer defence without the deployment of tactical atomic weapons? Would these weapons, stored in depots, not be destroyed before they could be used?' And would the Soviet side not understand the new strategy as a sign of faltering determination?<sup>195</sup> These were burning questions, and they were above all European ones. One answer to them was that realisation of 'flexible response' with the McNamara doctrine included a strengthening of conventional defences in Europe with a simultaneous sharpening of the delineation of the border between nuclear and conventional means of defence. For the first department of the US Army, Eisenhower had still foreseen the double option of fighting with both conventional weapons and the deployment of tactical atomic ones. Kennedy rescinded this decision. It was telling sign, insofar as the young president had recruited his staff of defence advisors from the professorial avant-garde of the new strategy. Among these was the former Harvard professor, Henry Kissinger.<sup>196</sup>

2

Aron's philosophical strategic theory of these years struck at the heart of precisely this defensive configuration. From this theory, a dual core of questions can be extracted. First, the French had exploded their first atomic bomb in 1960. They therefore required, as Aron formulated it, a doctrine 'that would justify the development of a small nuclear power alongside a large one'.<sup>197</sup> Yet such a doctrine could only have been based on the fundamental axiom of a deterrence of the strong by the weak; it could not enter into the various difficult calculi of the 'flexible response'. This is why the French *dissuasion nationale* also remained oriented towards 'massive retaliation'. On this ambivalence, Aron assumes – in his *Grand Débat* and more explicitly still in his *Figaro* commentaries – a position that was as nuanced as it was determined. In his eyes, French nuclear power is not a *strategic* option, but it may very well prove to be a *political* option on the path to European integration. A European defence community led by France would be inconceivable without nuclear power. Certainly, Aron considers this option, but he does so in a way that differs from that which the public opinion of his day would approve of. The option seems to him to merit serious consideration only if such a defence community can be supported by the protective power of the United States.<sup>198</sup> As a sceptical commentator on the European Defence Community negotiations and their



failure,<sup>199</sup> Aron succumbs to no illusions about the possibilities and narrow limits of the European security idea during the ‘great debate’ either. Again, it is the ‘incertitudes allemandes’, the furore surrounding the German squint towards the East, that makes his mood more sceptical from the long-term, historical standpoint. Balancing Gaullism with an Atlantic orientation, he sketches a remarkable intermediate position in this dilemma – one that does not get mired in any of the illusory alternatives.

Second, a problem that had remained bracketed out in *Peace and War* now becomes concrete: to what extent are nuclear strategy and politics the normal case? Or are they by definition without rules – ‘la guerre sauvage’, as Schmitt’s pupil, Rüdiger Altmann, believes? In *Le Grand Débat* and its concluding disputes with McNamara, Aron broaches this problem from the perspective of the ambiguous character of relationships between opponents. He understands the ‘bluff’ to be an integral aspect of this kind of contact, especially in crises, whereas McNamara speaks of an ideal-typical context of negotiations and deterrence following the pattern of a strategic ballet – ‘not undangerous, but following firm rules, each step delineated, unpredictability taboo’.<sup>200</sup>

In the midst of such attempts to examine the logic of the nuclear extreme case, a broad field of philosophical questions opens up: the problem as to whether the serious case demands a state of emergency or a particular form of practical reason instead. The former is the answer of Carl Schmitt and his pupils.<sup>201</sup> The latter is indisputably that of Aron.<sup>202</sup> Of course, the apriorist Aron no longer has the confidence – confidence, that is, that the democratic state must necessarily transform itself into an ethical, republican polity – that resonates in the Kantian postulate. His demand of reason is harder and more sober. A liberal democratic constitutional state can stand firm against a nuclear ‘ultima ratio’ only if it remains itself and if all means of the art of political leadership are applied to achieve this partial goal. In the *goal* not to surrender the liberal constitutional state, politics merges into one with morality. The *means* of its realisation, however, require considerations by which morality is broadened and decentralised – considerations that by no means always coincide with the precepts that apply in closer ethical relations.<sup>203</sup> From this might follow, as Aron concedes in a confrontation with Solzhenitsyn that is heavily laden with pangs of conscience, the necessity of a ‘partial and unavoidable amorality of external relations’. ‘A democracy cannot and is not permitted to ignore the internal regimes of the states with which it maintains ties, but it also cannot and is not permitted to lead any crusades in order [to assert] its own institutions.’<sup>204</sup> To be sure, this dilemma arises not only from the dangers of the nuclear age, but equally from the character of Western democracies in facing the totalitarian threat. This is why the formulation of the same asymmetry provided in *Peace and War* should be recalled once again: ‘we do not seek to destroy the one who seeks to destroy us’.<sup>205</sup>

The amorality must remain partial; otherwise, the democratic polity could no longer justify and maintain itself. For Aron, the indispensable

pillars of the self-understanding on which it stands and falls are human rights and a state form that guarantees the 'freedoms' of the individual.<sup>206</sup> Indirectly and discretely, these pillars should continually be affirmed in international relations – as with the KSZE trial, for example.<sup>207</sup>

This is why Aron continues his basic thesis as follows: 'we do not want to destroy the one who wants to destroy us, but rather to convert him to tolerance and peace'.<sup>208</sup> In a non-dialectical reading, this would be an unacceptable, abstractly pacifistic principle in the style of Alain. Read according to the dialectic that Aron sets at its base, however, the statement becomes a moral orientation in the moratorium of nuclear peace.

### *The clarity of historical depth in modernity: Clausewitz*

#### 1

The nuclear problem in historical perspective is newly illuminated in the book on Clausewitz.<sup>209</sup> To think war with Clausewitz means to place oneself more explicitly than before in its new character in the thermonuclear age. This also means for Aron that the question as to whether atomic weapons 'would not put the historical phase of total war at an end'<sup>210</sup> should be taken up anew and intensified. The dialectic for which the absolute negation of the opponent seems a precondition of dictated peace has characterised international relations since Napoleon's era. At the same time, though, to think war also means for Aron to consider its chameleon-like character in the nuclear sphere. As a further novelty of the late twentieth century, from terrorist act to blanket bombing, 'never did war have so varied forms, never was it so omnipresent. The period of revolution and of the Napoleonic Wars is only a tired image of a spectacular horror show, if one compares it to the twentieth century.'<sup>211</sup>

Aron approaches this double horizon of questions in a subtle, philologically historical critique of Clausewitz in which he upholds precisely the same ambivalences and breaches that infuse Clausewitz's own work. Clausewitz's gaze was native to the *ancien régime*. As such, it alternates between the limited cabinet wars of the eighteenth century and the *levée en masse* – both of which fascinated him. On the one hand, Clausewitz learned during the Russian campaign that the defensive is superior to the offensive.<sup>212</sup> As Aron shows, however, this conclusion is continually thwarted by his belief in the strategy that the sword is preferable to the floret, that an absolute war with the goal of smashing the enemy is preferable to the merely relative war aiming at conquests of restricted areas.<sup>213</sup> In Aron's reading, it becomes clear that these contradictions are concentrated on the central theme of the link between military and political spheres. He reads the great formula stating that war is the continuation of politics by other means precisely in this vein. Certainly, war has a *grammar* of its own – thus does he brilliantly reformulate the relationship: it has a grammar of escalation to the most

extreme limit and of the omnipresence of violence. About this, politics cannot surrender itself to any illusions.<sup>214</sup> Yet war possesses no internal *logic*. It can be imprinted with one only by politics. Translated into a maxim of military strategy, this means that military victory can be only a means to the goal of peace.<sup>215</sup> What leads Aron to penetrate so perceptively to this core? It may have been, as I would suspect with Ralf Dahrendorf, the synthetic power that he sensed in Clausewitz's reflections.<sup>216</sup> A strange 'trio of passion' flows together in his description of the phenomenon of war; this is embodied by the people's role in the *levée en masse* of the early nineteenth century, by the free flow of emotion as crystallised in the war-leader, and by understanding politics as a personified intelligence of the state. The crux, therefore, is that Clausewitz thinks the freedom of action of the individual together with the coercion of the event.<sup>217</sup> This trio is noteworthy in another respect: the free flow of emotion does not signify a temporary total freedom of the military, but much more a capacity of mediating between the poles of reason and passion.

The history of Clausewitz's influence can then be interpreted as a history of misunderstandings: of the caricaturing one-sidedness of the Schlieffen plan and Ludendorff's writings.<sup>218</sup> Depending on the case, Aron illustrates that the dialectical trio has been rent apart differently: in Maoism, through accentuation of only the first member of the trio, in the Soviet perception, through an emphasis solely on the third. Aron also sees Clausewitz' classification as a precursor of the destructive First World War battles described by the British military historian, Liddell Hart<sup>219</sup> in the context of distorted images of this kind.

## 2

Aron may have been attracted not the least by Clausewitz's method – evinced from the very first chapter of *On War*. Clausewitz developed his concept of war in terms of an ideal type, as 'intensification to the utmost' of the duel, which for its part is the lowest common denominator of the 'test of will by application of physical force'.<sup>220</sup> The duel is the skeleton upon which the historical wealth of phenomena surrounding the event of war is at first arrayed. In order to attain a pure, uncontaminated concept of war, the skeleton is fleshed out little by little: the temporal element, the retarding elements of the war-event due to the 'asymmetry of attack and defence', the perception of hostile intent and, finally, the political nature of the grammar of war.<sup>221</sup>

## 3

For Aron's reflection upon the global nuclear situation, something was to be gained from Clausewitz in several respects. Using Clausewitz, Aron logically thinks through the motif of the primacy of politics above military action.

Against the factual background in the 1970s of the dialectic of 'deterrence' and 'détente', pacifistic dreams of any kind lead *ad absurdum*.<sup>222</sup> Now, more clearly than ever, either a crusade for a peace of the kind that Wilson envisaged or the idea that a permanently peaceful state might be established by eliminating the aggressor appear to him to be the flipside of 'absolute war'. Part of this illusion is the pacifist assumption that the elimination of all weapons – particularly of the new apocalyptic ones – means the securing of freedom. In light of Clausewitz's thought, Aron now conceives the logic of deterrence as 'exchange without cash payment'.<sup>223</sup> It is a threat, the political logic of which consists *per se* in its goal 'to anticipate the translation of it into reality'.<sup>224</sup> That this constellation might secure a lasting stability is the great wager of prudence that Aron reveals to be an element of his dialogue with Clausewitz.<sup>225</sup> Many examples support this: the Korean War remained uninfluenced by the nuclear weapons of the United States. Even though it possessed neither nuclear weapons nor a powerful defence, China intervened regardless.<sup>226</sup> The chances of containing a nuclear war *after* the 'first strike' has occurred, by contrast, Aron deems to be low. This is shown in a concrete example *via negationis*: although the bombarding of North Vietnam was applied as a threat of intensification to the extreme limit, that threat was not perceived as credible. Only the actual deployment of nuclear weapons designates the point of no return and thereby an absolute threshold of escalation.<sup>227</sup>

From this point on, the moral ambivalence of *Peace and War* deepens. Aron establishes that atomic weapons push both 'absolute war' and absolute peace *ad absurdum* and that, to this extent, these weapons change inter-state relations. Regarded from another perspective, however, inter-state relations do not change. By no means, for example, has the nuclear element prompted the genesis of binding international law agreements.<sup>228</sup> The United Nations – this Aron recognises in 1976 – is by no means in a position to serve as an instrument of control or even of legislation for the global thermonuclear situation. Calling the United Nations a 'pseudo-parliament' composed of a highly disparate states that are only for the smallest part liberal constitutional democracies,<sup>229</sup> he forecasts that 'the global community will remain anarchic'. Indeed, it will become increasingly anarchic 'the more the American republic, for lack of means or lack of will, decreases its presence and lets the others play'.<sup>230</sup> This idea is significant (and remains so for the future as well) insofar as it declares the idea of a legal, binding system of 'collective security' to be a *trompe l'oeil*. In the nuclear era as before, this kind of security system can be understood only as a transcendental concept, as a horizon that concrete political action sketches for itself. In doing so, however, such action is still forced to work within the more complex structure of checks and balances among states and alliances.

The maxims that appeared to Clausewitz as urgent maxims of German foreign relations – maxims forgotten repeatedly after Bismarck and Caprivi – become guiding principles of international politics in general. To the extent

that Clausewitz's theses can be related to the atomic age, it again becomes necessary above all to prevent the formation of coalitions. And politics, moreover, is not permitted to seek salvation in attack.

At the end of Aron's studies on the global nuclear situation, a paradox looms – one that can by no means be converted into such soothing legal guarantees as a treaty of 'no first use'. As Aron knows very well, treaty language is too indirect, too formal and thus too open to interpretation to be capable of establishing guarantees that go beyond the establishment of shared maximum limits – and even these were by no means in sight in 1976. 'He who reflects on wars and strategies today erects a barrier between his intelligence and his humanity'.<sup>231</sup> By whatever means, such a thinker must incorporate into his calculus an idea of the utmost immorality: the destruction of millions of human beings.<sup>232</sup> Because it is absolutely necessary to investigate the global nuclear situation with a cold and clear eye, a concrete ethos, a passion authenticated by one's own life-experience is required all the more to prevent the investigator from succumbing to the brazen amorality of strategic scenarios. For Aron, the memory of the book-burning of May 1933 is his guarantee of this 'pathos of distance'.<sup>233</sup> At other times and in other world-situations, he adds, it will be other passions; and he thereby characterises his perspective as only one among other possible ones.<sup>234</sup> In any case, however, global politics would require such an ethos: one that takes its leave from the purely conceptual equilibrium that is attained by strategic games and models that are removed from the historical material.<sup>235</sup>

This ethical view of the problem ultimately brings Aron to understand Clausewitz's guiding formula, 'war as the continuation of politics by other means', to be irreversible. Reversal is unacceptable because the event of war is characterised *eo ipso* by the omnipresence of power. That this maxim also applies latently in the 'nuclear peace' is obvious to Aron. Without succumbing to an illusion about the absence of war in fact, he nonetheless has a different form of peace in mind: peace understood as an orientation of global-political action. This form of peace is to be defined independently of war. If a peace of this type were not assumed, then the thesis of the precedence of politics over military action – of the 'logic' over the 'grammar' – would revoke itself.

### **Again: what remains? or, thinking Aron anew**

#### *I*

What remains of Aron's sustained, life-long reflection today – in the midst of the 'years of decision' to which his final book applied? Following the disappearance of the confrontation of East and West in 1989, the face of the world has changed entirely. The global political tectonic plates were shaken in a way that not even Aron could have foreseen. That said, the theme of

the hour is not the American dream of 'the end of history',<sup>236</sup> one more utopianism of the type that Aron dismantled without mercy. It is instead the 'clash of civilisations', the erosion of the Western civilisations and return of history.<sup>237</sup>

To be sure, many of Aron's questions are still relevant to us. Yet they are so in a changed form, to the extent that the 'status quo' of the Cold War – cursed by the threat of the nuclear weapon – was nonetheless a hard-won element of order, as little desirable as it may have seemed. The contemporary global situation, by contrast, is fraught with disorder and uncertainty; not even a status quo is in sight.<sup>238</sup> The crisis of progress that Aron saw emerging beginning in the mid-1960s at the latest is more apparent at the end of the 'East vs. West' confrontation than ever before. Following the collapse of the totalitarian opponent, the open societies find their own weaknesses exposed and unprotected; the erosion of internal bonds and the over-extension of freedom in the name of freedom can no longer be ignored.<sup>239</sup> Aron saw these tendencies in his time already. He knew of the deficiencies of decadent Europe, yet by no means assumed that Europe could maintain its pre-eminence only through the black foil of the one-party dictatorships. As he himself emphasised, however – and particularly after 1968 – the survival of the West requires that freedom be limited both by civic virtue and by a pluralism of the type acquired through the knowledge of one's own culture and the capacity and will for dialogue with the other.

As an historical thinker, Aron also knows that things of this kind do not come about as a matter of course:

the multiplicity of cultures is comparable to the multiplicity of the arts. One should admire the multiplicity and not complain about the anarchy. We in the West are challenged. More than all the other cultures, we have gained an awareness of this multiplicity and strive for universal truths or values. This contradiction works upon our historical consciousness and rends it, but we are entirely capable of overcoming it and at very least of bearing it.<sup>240</sup>

The question raised by this is how the right of existence of all cultures is to be reconciled with a clear sense of belonging to one's own culture. This question might be understood as a guiding motif of Aron's reflections on global politics, whether applied to the global nuclear situation or to the totalitarian experience.<sup>241</sup>

In this sense, too, Aron has taught that the global situation of international relations has transnational components. The nation-states and national interests by no means lose all their significance, however.<sup>242</sup> This is to be recalled in light of the new world-order, especially in the nation that does not want to be one (Christian Meier). But accompanying this is an understanding of the state as a political form that is not infinitely versatile, as an indispensable plane of integration on the one hand and of federalisation on the other.<sup>243</sup>

Aron pointed to Clausewitz and, with him, to the indispensability of the difficult relationship between diplomacy and strategy. Following the end of the East-West conflict and in light of the streams of blood running in the former Yugoslavia, this idea seems most acute today. In addition, Aron's expectation that the threshold of nuclear escalation might be bypassed might have better prospects now than in his time.<sup>244</sup> However urgently Aron emphasises his point that the goal of all political action is a global order of common interest and cooperation in which wars become unthinkable, he nonetheless warns against a kind of political action and existence based upon the illusion that this order has already arrived.<sup>245</sup> We would do well to remind ourselves of this warning today too.

Yet not only should we retain elements of Aron's larger and multi-perspectival reconstruction of the Cold War; we should also retain the conclusions that he drew from his initial experience in 1933. Above all, we should learn from his perceptive insight into totalitarianism. In light of the uncertain future development of the former satellite states, this insight should perhaps now be combined with the maxim of Michael Stürmer: 'what matters is the question whether the West will continue to exist in political, strategic and economic [one would also have to add here, 'ethical-cultural'] concepts and whether it will include a part of the former East'.<sup>246</sup>

## 2

Thus, as close as Aron is to the most pressing questions of contemporary world politics, so much of what he thought must be thought anew and differently today.

Although the descriptive power of his theory of totalitarianism should be preserved, its conceptual power must be sharpened and its historical element deepened. As we have seen, as clear as Aron's conception of the 'political religions' is, it still requires correction on many points. Perhaps more acute still – because it is not so much a question of scholarly research as of the future political orientation of the world – his reflections on the global nuclear situation should be taken further. Dieter Heinrich has impressively continued with the restrained Kantianism of Aron's description of a morality that can temporarily suggest thinking the immoral and incorporating it into one's plans. After Jaspers, Heinrich's idea – expressed in his *Ethik zum nuklearen Frieden* – of an intensification of the primary rules of the moral good marks the second great contribution of German philosophy to the problem of nuclear weapons.<sup>247</sup> Yet his draft appeared in the summer of 1990, shortly before the end of the old East-West configuration. Today, nuclear weapons have become questionable in an entirely different way. With the bipolar spell broken, the world will see nuclear proliferation and perhaps even nuclear weapons in the hands of Islamic theocrats before the end of this century and millennium.<sup>248</sup>

This is why it is necessary to reconsider the ethical and political discussion of the role of the new weapons in contemporary international politics. This role will be difficult to define, however – if, indeed, it can be defined at all. Potential nuclear powers no longer fit into the chess-game dialectic of the Cold War; they have become an untamed threat to the world and are no longer the extreme strategic limit of equilibrium.<sup>249</sup>

Also to be examined in a diagnosis of the contemporary world are questions surrounding that other serious case: ecological endangerment. Although Aron himself simply does not take up the question, reflection on it would require the sobriety of his gaze.<sup>250</sup>

### 3

Above all, however, Aron's intellectual existence itself – an authentic counter to totalitarian seduction – remains as a topic for reflection. He was a responsible advisor who had no ambitions for political power himself, a free spirit who was loyal to the state rather than a faction, a publicist and university teacher who understood how to translate his own passion and burning fundamental political experiences into a cold capacity for judgement. Never relinquishing his basic convictions, he nonetheless exposed them to constant self-testing.<sup>251</sup>

He possessed a character trait that he emphasised in a late lecture on Jaspers: namely, the capacity to understand all reflection as an implicit call to reason, as an 'expression of a faith that does not despair in the human being, but does not subject itself to any illusions either'.<sup>252</sup> With Jaspers, it was also important in his own thought that the idea of freedom is to be loved for its own sake.<sup>253</sup> Incomparably more restrained than Jaspers, Aron denied himself a philosophical belief in the 'comprehensive'. And in light of the dangerous global situation, he maintained a conscious silence (arcane discipline) on an entirely different path. If, for Jasper, the 'religious dimension' is introduced by prayer, then for Aron, it is introduced by the contemplation of human imperfection.

In the 'madness of the century' (H. D. Zimmermann),<sup>254</sup> in times characterised by the 'treason of the intellectuals' (Julien Benda), an intellectual profile such as this is a rare phenomenon. Part of it is also the experience of the philosopher who speaks in the market-place but nonetheless remains alone: this experience typified Aron as scarcely another of his time. 'To be right with Aron is worse than to be wrong with Sartre' – thus went a stereotypic bon mot in the intellectual Paris of 1970. Its opposite might be a precept of reason and of the hour.

### Notes

- 1 In keeping with this essay's perspectival approach to Aron's work – at a time when that work is nowhere near as present in the German-language literature,



particularly in philosophy and contemporary history, as its rank would merit – only the most important supporting evidence will be introduced here. The editions cited were selected according to criteria of easy accessibility, not philological incontestability.

- 2 Thus in Raymond Aron, *Le spectateur engagé. Entretiens avec Jean-Louis Miskis und Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 300. The German edition, which appeared in Stuttgart in 1983, will always be cited in the following.
- 3 Compare on this Aron, *Der engagierte Beobachter*, op. cit. (German edn), 21ff. Also Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung. Lebenserinnerungen* (Munich, 1985), 112. The much larger French original edition appeared in Paris in 1983 under the title *Mémoires – 50 ans de réflexion politique*.
- 4 Aron has provided a particularly concise analysis of the global situation in his book, *Die imperiale Republik. Die Vereinigten Staat von Amerika und die übrige Welt seit 1945* (Stuttgart and Zurich, 1975). See in particular, 49ff.
- 5 R. Aron, *Les guerres en chaîne* (Paris, 1951). This book appeared in German translation under the title, *Der Permanente Krieg* (Frankfurt, 1953).
- 6 Aron often considered this element. The spectrum of these reflections is refracted by his essays on the events of his time. Compare Ursel Hoppe's master's thesis, *Raymond Aron. Europa nach dem 'Dreißigjährigen Krieg' des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Erlangen, 1987). Hoppe offers the only German-language contribution to date that does not remain within the cage of the social sciences. Instead, she tries to interpret Aron in the light of his world-political and world-historical reflections. See here also the informative collection of essays on Aron: *Commentaire*, no. 28/29 (winter, 1985), special edition on Raymond Aron, *Textes, études et témoignages* (Paris, 1985).
- 7 This series of research papers (compare here the sixth section further below) is published together with the 18 lectures on industrial society (Frankfurt, 1964). In a Collège de France lecture of the academic year 1973/74, Aron formulates a retraction, initially under the title, 'Die postindustrielle Gesellschaft'. These reflections are later expanded into *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa* (Berlin and Frankfurt, 1978) (*Plaidoyer pour l'europe décadente* (Paris, 1977)).
- 8 On this methodological talk of 'sociology', compare Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, 5th edn (Berlin, 1990), 49ff. See also G. L. Ulmen, *Politischer Mehrwert. Eine Studie über Max Weber und Carl Schmitt* (Weinheim, 1991) – especially 91–131.
- 9 I refer here to the Hegelian topos that philosophy 'is its time captured in ideas'. This can be found in the preamble to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). For the context of this statement, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Theorie-Werkausgabe*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt, 1970), 33ff.
- 10 Thus Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 502.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 499.
- 12 Compare here *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., 9ff. And far more impressive still is the magnificent, albeit fragmentary sketch: R. Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1986), original edition: *Les dernières années du siècle* (Paris, 1984).
- 13 Compare here R. Aron, *Die imperiale Republik*, op. cit., 49ff.
- 14 Thus Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 442.
- 15 Admittedly, he does not cite the bon mot himself; I have Michael Stürmer to thank for having informed me of it. See here also Ursel Hoppe, *Raymond Aron*, op. cit., 106ff.
- 16 Compare Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 438ff. See also Aron, *Der engagierte Beobachter*, op. cit., 217ff.
- 17 Compare here the significant drafts of Europe in K. Jaspers, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen* (Munich, 1983 edn) – especially 95ff. I have

- presented a detailed portrayal of the Jasperian options and have illuminated them in their intellectual-historical context in H. Seubert, 'Das Abendland und Europa. Diskurs über Nähe und Ferne einiger jüngst vergangener Denkbilder', P. Delvaux and J. Papiór (eds), *Eurovisionen. Vorstellungen von Europa in Literatur und Philosophie* (Amsterdam-Atlanta GA, 1996), 107–33.
- 18 Compare here, for example, R. Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 124–65 ('Das Wesen des Sowjetregimes').
  - 19 Compare *ibid.*, 99ff. This work contains some sublimely perceptive analyses of the German peace movement at the beginning of the 1980s and its tendency, protected by the veil of innocence, to occupy the moral higher ground. See also *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 500ff.
  - 20 Thus *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 501.
  - 21 Compare here the chapter on May 1968 in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 331ff.
  - 22 Thus *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, 342 and often. Compare also the concept of the state of the essay, *Über die Freiheiten*, (Stuttgart, 1981) (French 1st edn: *Essai sur les libertés* (Paris, 1965)) – in particular 88–122, 'Politische Freiheit in der technisierten Gesellschaft'.
  - 23 Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Raymond Aron. Theorie und Praxis', *Liberale und andere. Portraits* (Stuttgart, 1994), 113–131.
  - 24 This sentence occurs in the context of a great European colloquium of the inter-war period, which surrounded the future of the cape of Europe as displaced upon Asia Minor and its crisis. Contributors, among others, were Husserl and Valéry. Valéry is cited by Aron in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 103.
  - 25 The treatise, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, may well abundantly redeem the desideratum that was mentioned by Dahrendorf. Compare also the printed version of the two speeches in *Goethepreis 1979* (Frankfurt, 1980) edited by the Department of Culture and Leisure Activities of the City of Frankfurt.
  - 26 Compare *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 201–21. One finds here the answer to a lecture by Kennan before the 'Council on Foreign Relations'. The lecture was published in both *Encounter* (March 1978) and *Commentaire*, no. 2 (summer 1978) – first, under the title, 'Mr X Reconsiders – a Current Assessment of Soviet-American Relations' and second, under the heading 'Où en sont les relations américano-soviétiques?'
  - 27 These characterisations can be found in Aron, *Die letzten Jahre*, op. cit., 219ff. The piece contains constant ironic references to Kennan's legendary 'containment policy' article in *Foreign Affairs* (summer 1947): 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct'.
  - 28 Aron, op. cit., 219.
  - 29 Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 63.
  - 30 *Ibid.*, 65. Compare too the biographical approach, which is not terribly illuminating, of Brigitte Gess: *Liberales Denken und intellektuelles Engagement. Die Grundzüge der philosophisch-politischen Reflexionen Raymond Arons* (Munich, 1988), 200–51. Why the author, a doctoral student of Kurt Sontheimer, attempts a biographical sketch only at the end of her work is unfathomable. A first large Aron biography from the pen of Nicolas Baverez promises also to 'analyse and evaluate for the first time Aron's extensive correspondence with other personalities of contemporary history'. Baverez's work is soon to be published by Flammarion in Paris. For this tip, I must thank the highly commendable edition by Joachim Stark (ed.) *Raymond Aron: Über Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus. Frühe politische Schriften 1930–1939* (Opladen, 1993), introduction, 1.
  - 31 Compare here, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, 55ff.
  - 32 *Ibid.*, 39 and 45ff. Although Aron's own approach to a 'critique of historical reason' understood itself entirely along Kantian lines, the universalism that he

- had learned from Brunschvicgian Kantianism increasingly seemed to him to be mistaken. On the systematic problem, see Manfred Riedel, 'Menschenrechtsuniversalismus und Patriotismus. Kants politisches Vermächtnis an unsere Zeit', *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 18, 1 (1993), 1–23.
- 33 Thus Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 60.
- 34 With reference to Simone de Beauvoir's memories, compare here Aron, *ibid.*, 59.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 105. See here also the interview with Raymond Aron in the study by Joachim Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer. Geschichte, Gesellschaft und Politik im Werk Raymond Arons* (Würzburg, 1986), 245–71; also *Der engagierte Beobachter*, op. cit., 134ff.
- 36 As a first posthumous edition, these texts are first presented – supported by other important essays by Aron on the totalitarianism problem – in a German edition. See the supporting material in note 30. See too the utterly circumspect introduction from the pen of the editor, Joachim Stark in *Über Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus*, op. cit., 7–22. It seems to me that Stark does not give enough weight here to Aron's self-commentary.
- 37 Compare here Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 41–72. An interesting comparative perspective might arise from the memoir of another 'engaged observer', Theodor Eschenburg, *Also hören Sie mal zu. Geschichte und Geschichten* (Berlin, 1995), 190ff.
- 38 Compare Aron's report, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 57ff. See here also text numbers 21–23 in R. Aron, *Über Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus*, op. cit., 126–55.
- 39 R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 69ff.
- 40 From the very sporadic remarks about Simone Weil, there emerges an impression of a great foreignness between the believer and Aron. Perhaps it was she who prevented him from choosing the knowledge of a religious life as the foil to his analysis of political religions (compare on this sub-section V, 3).
- 41 Cited according to the French original edition of the *Spectateur engagé*, (Paris, 1983), 28. See here also Brigitte Gess, *Liberales Denken und intellektuelles Engagement*, op. cit., 205.
- 42 On the background of this argument, see *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 358–75. See also his polemic, R. Aron, *De Gaulle, Israel et les Juifs* (Paris, 1968), *passim*.
- 43 Thus *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 370.
- 44 In a manner more sober than that of Heidegger, Aron also theorises the way in which the human being comes to understand himself within the tension of thrownness and self-design. The phenomenological studies of Klaus Held render this form of thought easier to understand. See above all Held, 'Europa und die interkulturelle Verständigung. Ein Entwurf im Anschluß an Heideggers Phänomenologie der Grundstimmungen', H.-H. Gander (ed.), *Europa und die Philosophie* (Frankfurt, 1993), 87–105.
- 45 R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 316.
- 46 Compare here Sartre, *Betrachtungen zur Judenfrage* (Zurich, 1948), *passim*.
- 47 Compare here above all his essay, *Über die Freiheiten*, op. cit., 13–46.
- 48 Compare here Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 149ff.
- 49 See *ibid.*, also the memories and reflections of Jean Laloy, Jean-Marie Soutou and Henri Froment-Meurice in *Commentaire*, special edition on Raymond Aron (winter 1985), 36–38; 38–42; 42–45.
- 50 Compare here the impressive concluding chapter in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 449–80. Aron suffered for a long time from the fact that he was able to reply with only a haltingly presented acceptance speech when he was granted the Goethe Prize in 1979.

- 51 Aron provides the reference in *Die Letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 11. A further pretext for him – at least as much as a caveat as a role model – was Oswald Spengler, *Jahre der Entscheidung. Deutschland und die weltgeschichtliche Entwicklung* (Munich, 1933). Indeed, whenever he refers to Spengler, Aron speaks mostly with great esteem and always out of an authentic knowledge of his work.
- 52 This was essentially due to the reception of his masterful intellectual autobiography. See here B. Gess, *Liberales Denken und intellektuelles Engagement*, op. cit., 230ff.; also Joachim Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 7ff.
- 53 Thus the nice formulation in Dahrendorf's laudatio on the granting of the Goethe Prize. Compare the same, *Liberale und andere*, op. cit., 115.
- 54 Compare *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 308.
- 55 Thus *ibid.*, 308.
- 56 Compare *ibid.*, 306.
- 57 *Ibid.* To be sure, a generational problem may well have been in play at base of this deep dissension.
- 58 Compare *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 310.
- 59 On de Gaulle's secret dreams, see André Malraux, *Antimemoiren* (Frankfurt, 1968); also the brilliant investigation by Eckart Conze, *Die gaullistische Herausforderung. Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen in der amerikanischen Europapolitik 1958–1963* (Munich, 1995), 63–66.
- 60 Aron does not have in mind a theory of self-determined freedom that ends in political action (Sartre). Much more does his theory of freedom focus on a subjective sense of freedom out of responsible self-scrutiny on the one hand and the possibility of legal codification of freedoms on the other. Compare here R. Aron, *Über die Freiheiten*, op. cit., *passim*.
- 61 The milieu of the polemic is easily accessible in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Mai '68 und die Folgen. Reden, Interviews, Aufsätze*, vol. 2 (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1975).
- 62 Compare Aron's report in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 466ff. See also Aron's obituary for Sartre, 'Sartre face à son époque', *L'Express*, no. 1502 (summer 1980), 62ff.
- 63 Compare Aron's report in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 481ff. Nonetheless, Kojève became one of the most original and powerful interpreters of Hegel. Compare Alexander Kojève, *Hegel. Kommentar zur Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt, 1975).
- 64 Compare the two monographs: R. Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire. Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris, 1938) and *La philosophie critique de l'histoire. Essai sur une théorie allemande de l'histoire* (Paris, 1938). The best depiction of the problem is that of Sylvie Mesure, *Raymond Aron et la raison historique* (Paris, 1984).
- 65 Compare *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 94ff.
- 66 Compare Marc Bloch's foundational essay, *Apologie der Geschichte oder der Beruf des Historikers*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart, 1992); edited from the archives of the great Annales historian and resistance fighter who was shot just north of Lyon in July 1944. Compare on this also the detailed investigation by Ulrich Raulff, *Ein Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert: Marc Bloch* (Frankfurt, 1995). Raulff is able to reveal the entire richness of the Blochian world of ideas.
- 67 Compare on this Aron, *Introduction*, op. cit., 60ff. and often.
- 68 Similar approaches opening up the theory of history to the questions of practical philosophy can also be found in Dilthey's attempts at a critique of historical reason. Compare here Manfred Riedel, *Verstehen oder erklären? Zur Theorie und Geschichte der hermeneutischen Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1982), 113ff.
- 69 Compare R. Aron, *Introduction*, op. cit., 135ff.

- 70 Ibid. See also the stimulating explanation by Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 102ff. Here, particular emphasis is placed on the open-ended character of Aron's philosophy of history.
- 71 Compare here too the references to Husserl in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 58ff. and 63.
- 72 There is of course also a very respectable speculative German tradition of the philosophy of history. Remaining with the task of decoding Hegelian texts, it uses them as its starting point in seeking to theorise historical contingency. See here above all, Alois Dempf, *Kritik der historischen Vernunft* (Munich, 1958), and Stephan Otto, *Rekonstruktion der Geschichte*, vol. II (Munich, 1992) *passim*.
- 73 Compare here Jean-Louis Missika and Dominique Wolton, 'Introduction', Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, op. cit., 14. See also a remark of Aron himself, *ibid.*, 165.
- 74 Aron's restrained discretion, the emphatic retreat of the private person from the public, might also have one of its roots in this.
- 75 Elie Halévy's book is presented here according to the new edition: *L'ère des tyrannies. Etudes sur les socialisme et la guerre* (Paris, 1990). Aron's review is easily accessible in the French language, *ibid.*, 251–84. A German translation of this text can be found in Stark (ed.), *Raymond Aron über Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus*, op. cit., 186–209. Aron's text appeared for the first time in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* of May 1939.
- 76 I refer here only to the German version of the essay, op. cit., 191ff.
- 77 Also relevant to these lines of thought are Aron's later contributions to the problem of totalitarianism. See, among others, R. Aron, *Demokratie und Totalitarismus* (Hamburg, 1970), 160ff.; also *Opium für Intellektuelle oder Die Suche nach Weltanschauung* (Berlin, 1957), especially 319ff. I direct my attentions primarily to the Halévy review printed in Stark (ed.), *Raymond Aron*, op. cit., as well as to a supplementary text, *Demokratische Staaten und totalitäre Staaten*, *ibid.*, 209–42. The latter is a lecture by Aron before the Société Française de Philosophie. It was printed for the first time in the Society's April-May 1946 bulletin documenting the meeting of Saturday 17 June 1930. Aron's presentation was the centrepiece of this meeting.
- 78 Compare Aron, *Demokratische Staaten*, op. cit., 211ff.
- 79 Compare the essays cited in notes 75 and 77. It may well have become clear already that, in terms of Aron's philosophy of history, utopianism of all kinds would have had to be destroyed. As a background reference, see also David Bosshart, *Politische Intellektualität und totalitäre Erfahrung. Hauptströmungen der französischen Totalitarismuskritik* (Berlin, 1992), 103ff.
- 80 Cited here according to the print in Hegel, *Frühe Schriften. Theorie-Werkausgabe*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt, 1970), 234–39.
- 81 Compare R. Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, op. cit., 30.
- 82 Compare the comments on Solzhenitsyn in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 394ff. See also the traces of Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov in the analysis of totalitarianism in Aron's *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., *passim* – in particular 66ff.
- 83 Thus R. Aron, *Opium für Intellektuelle*, op. cit., 109 and 368.
- 84 Compare *ibid.*, 33ff. See here too the really clever presentation by Gess, op. cit., 99ff.
- 85 Compare R. Aron, *Opium für Intellektuelle*, op. cit., 15 and 22; see also the presentations – which are parallel in many aspects – in R. Aron, *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., 27–57 and 57–90.
- 86 Helpful here is Aron's essay, *L'homme contre les tyrans* (Paris, 1945), 32ff. and 4ff. are relevant.

- 87 Compare *ibid.*, 39ff. Compare also Aron, *L'avenir des religions séculières, Commentaire* (1985), *op. cit.*, 369–84. From a later perspective see also, 'Noch einmal: Hitler. Wie haltbar ist die Totalitarismus-Theorie?' *Der Monat* 278 (1981, book 1), 42–55.
- 88 Thus Aron, *La lutte de classe. Nouvelles leçons sur les sociétés industrielles* (Paris, 1964), 278.
- 89 Compare Stark (ed.), *Raymond Aron über Deutschland*, *op. cit.*, especially page 202ff.
- 90 Among others, *ibid.*, 194.
- 91 We will not be all that surprised at this ignorance of the young Aron if we regard him against the background of the intellectual situation of the 1930s, especially before the still-booming Moscow tourism of intellectuals like André Gide or Heinrich Mann, who proved unswayed by the Stalinist 'purges'.
- 92 Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, *op. cit.*, 138.
- 93 Compare *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, *op. cit.*, 49ff.
- 94 Compare R. Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, *op. cit.*, 124ff.
- 95 Detailed support for this can be found in Brigitte Gess, *Liberales Denken und intellektuelles Engagement*, *op. cit.*, 87ff.
- 96 *Die letzten Jahre*, *op. cit.*, 139.
- 97 Compare Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* (Munich, 1986), 714. Compare on the context of the problem sphere: Hans Maier, *Politische Religionen. Die totalitären Regime und das Christentum* (Freiburg, 1995), 21–37.
- 98 Compare here primarily Aron, *Demokratie und Totalitarismus*, *op. cit.*, 206.
- 99 *Ibid.* See also Aron, *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, *op. cit.*, 57ff.
- 100 Compare too R. Aron, *Demokratie und Sozialismus*, *op. cit.*, 216. On the tendency towards state intervention in spheres of public life that are not authentically state ones, Carl Schmitt had already referred early in his dialectic movement to the 'total state out of strength' to that 'out of weakness'. Compare here the most important supporting passages: Lutz-Arwed Bentin, *Carl Schmitt. Zur wirtschaftlichen Theorie des totalen Staates in Deutschland* (Munich, 1972), 78ff. The primary text is C. Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung* (Berlin, 1931) *passim* (here according to the third edition, 1985).
- 101 Thus Aron, *Demokratie und Totalitarismus*, *op. cit.*, 216.
- 102 Compare here the extensive review of Arendt's totalitarianism book, R. Aron, 'Das Wesen des Totalitarismus', here in Stark (ed.), *Raymond Aron über Deutschland und den Nationalsozialismus*, *op. cit.*, 275–94; first publication in *Critique* 80 (January 1954), 51–70. Comments on this work can also be found in R. Aron, *Demokratie und Totalitarismus*, *op. cit.*, 210ff.
- 103 Compare among others, *ibid.*, 211ff.
- 104 See *ibid.* (works cited in notes 101 and 102). See also *Opium für Intellektuelle*, *op. cit.*, 10ff. Infinitely stronger than such attempts of differentiation by grades is the concept of totalitarianism appearing in Aron's final works. See here *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, *op. cit.*, 124ff. as well as the memoirs: *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, *op. cit.*, 435ff.
- 105 Compare here, for example, *Demokratie und Totalitarismus*, *op. cit.*, 211.
- 106 See here sub-section V that follows. The foundational Aronian background text is R. Aron, *D'une Sainte Famille à l'autre. Essais sur les marxismes imaginaires* (Paris, 1969) *passim*.
- 107 Thus Aron, *Jahre der Entscheidung*, *op. cit.*, 139. By this caveat, therefore, are covered both the subtle explications reconstructed here and the hard insistence upon the concept of totalitarianism as an appropriate description of Soviet history.
- 108 Compare on this, C. J. Friedrich and Z. K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, 1956). The German edition is entitled *Totalitäre Diktatur* (Stuttgart, 1957).

- 109 In the case of the Soviet state, Aron sees the fanaticism in the intention to create a new human being. In the Nazi state, it is the systematic extermination of supposed 'pseudo-races'. The rationality not only lies in the application of technological instruments for the 'optimisation' of such goals, but it is itself to become part of the ideologies. This occurs in different ways – as self-verifying theory and as race-ideologeme. This is a difference that the early Aron of the Halévy review emphasises more strongly than the later one. It led him to conceive Communism in 1939 as a 'caricature' of a salvation religion, whereas Nazism (and all Fascisms) was a pure negation of one.
- 110 Compare Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*, op. cit., 679ff.
- 111 Ibid., 685. See also the accurate contrast of the Arendtian and the Aronian understandings in Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 229ff.
- 112 Georg Büchner, *Dantons Tod*, III, 3, Büchner, *Werke und Briefe*, Werner R. Lehmann (ed.) (Munich, 1980), 47.
- 113 This is one of the key metaphors that Ernst Jünger coined for totalitarianism – in particular, in his parabolic novel, *Auf den Marmorclippen*.
- 114 Thus the concise formation in Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, op. cit., 184.
- 115 I refer primarily here to Aron's conversation with Stark on 7 and 14 October 1981. See Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 256ff.
- 116 See here primarily Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Vienna, 1939). Compare also Voegelin's inaugural lecture on entering Munich University: *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis* (Munich, 1959). And see, finally, Eric Voegelin, 'Religionsersatz. Die gnostischen Massenbewegungen unserer Zeit', *Wort und Wahrheit* 15 (1960), 5–18.
- 117 On this, see David Bosshart, *Politische Intellektualität und totalitäre Erfahrung*, op. cit., 118.
- 118 This idea can already be found in Voegelin's *Politischen Religionen*. See too Hans Maier's book mentioned in note 97 (32ff.). This work contains a brilliant interpretation of Voegelin's thought.
- 119 Compare here in a systematic respect, Hans Maier, *Nachdenken über das Christentum. Reden und Aufsätze* (Munich, 1992).
- 120 An impetus of this kind – one that increasingly went beyond the transcendental reservation of Kant's religious essays – influenced nineteenth-century liberal Protestant theology. And in the context of the modernist programme, it became one of the most powerful streams of the Catholic discussion of the early twentieth century as well. Yet it should also be considered that the rigidity of dialectic theology cut off the conversation between Christianity and culture and is thereby unsuited to remedying such tendencies. A reappraisal of both connections – so it would seem to me – is urgently required.
- 121 Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*, op. cit., 594ff.
- 122 It is Voegelin's thesis that the total political mass movements of the twentieth century – Communism, Fascism and National Socialism – all display Gnostic features. See Voegelin, *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis*, op. cit., *passim*.
- 123 Thus *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., 57.
- 124 This discrepancy between context of citation and interpretation becomes all the more conspicuous when Aron cites the questionable Marx passage (alongside a citation of Simone Weil) as the motto of his book, *Opium für Intellektuelle*. The gist of the passage aims at the heart of the idealistic philosophy of religion – beginning with Hegel's 'Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe' of 1797–98. See here Hegel, *Theorie-Werkausgabe, Vol. 1*, 239–55. See here also Peter Ehlen's excellent treatment of Marx in the present volume.
- 125 Such an analysis would probably be indispensable to further systematic study: if, as Hans Maier mentioned in the work cited in note 97, the 'secular religions' were analysed using the conceptual tools of the philosophy and phenomenology

- of religion. See especially, M. Eliade, *Images et Symboles* (Paris, 1952). Also Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Stuttgart, 1961) and R. Caillois, *Der Mensch und das Heilige* (Paris, 1939).
- 126 A systematic clarification of the varying concepts of sacrifice would likely be indispensable to this effort. Compare here Richard Schenk (ed.), *Zur Theorie de Opfers. Ein interdisziplinäres Gespräch* (Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt, 1992).
- 127 It was primarily Carl Schmitt who insisted upon the central significance of the idea of representation. See especially the essay: *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (Stuttgart, 1985).
- 128 Compare the remarks that were already cited from *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 498ff.
- 129 With regard to Durkheim, see *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 60. See here also the posthumously published lecture of March 1983, 'Socialisme et sociologie chez Durkheim et Weber', *Commentaire*, no. 32 (winter, 1985/86), 1040–50.
- 130 *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 62.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Ibid., 62.
- 133 Compare Merleau-Ponty, *Humanismus und Terror* (Frankfurt, 1966) (original French edition, *Humanisme et Terreur* (Paris, 1947). See here also the reminiscence of Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 232ff. Merleau-Ponty's treatise was one of the initial impetuses for Aron's essay, *Opium für Intellektuelle*.
- 134 I freely paraphrase here from the Sartre section of 'D'une Sainte Famille à l'autre', op. cit., 29–69. See also the brilliant paraphrases and self-commentary provided by Aron in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 375ff.
- 135 It suffices here to refer those interested to the two systematic investigations of Sartre's political philosophy that are, in my opinion, the most illuminating. First: Klaus Hartmann, *Sartres Sozialphilosophie. Eine Untersuchung zur Critique de la raison dialectique I*, (Berlin, 1966). And second: Rudolph Berlinger, *Sartre's Existenz Erfahrung. Ein Anlaß zu philosophischer Nachdenklichkeit* (Würzburg, 1982).
- 136 Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 391.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 Ibid.
- 139 Ibid., 393.
- 140 Compare here again Aron's own outline of freedom in the essay, 'Über die Freiheiten', op. cit.
- 141 Compare here Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 394ff.
- 142 Ibid., 396; and 397ff. We find here the report of Aron's contributions to the Solzhenitsyn debate. These were inflamed by a television programme of 18 April 1975 and kept burning by an article by Solzhenitsyn (*Figaro*, 12 June 1975). In this essay, Solzhenitsyn attacked the view that the West had already lost the Third World War before it had begun – because it could not detach itself from its decadence of affluence.
- 143 Compare here Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 394ff. and 397.
- 144 Ibid.
- 145 These reminiscences are expressed at every turn in Aron's recollections of the final years of the Weimar Republic. See, for example, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 112; also the dispute with Heinrich Böll cited in note 21 above.
- 146 A very lucid portrayal of this changed concept of ideology can be found in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 400ff. An intermediate stage, as it were, is marked by the intense confrontation with Sartre. See here R. Aron, *Histoire et dialectique de la violence* (Paris, 1973), *passim*. Considered on the whole, one



- would have to arrive at a very differentiated judgement here. On the one hand, the stringency of Aron's analyses of totalitarianism certainly suffered under the new, expanded concept of ideology – if only he had applied it consistently. This did not occur, however, especially not in the masterful late work, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit. – very much to the benefit of the treatise. On the other hand, Aron's new concept of ideology captured a problem that has become acute in recent discussions: the problem that social technology remains both clueless and helpless with respect to central political problems.
- 147 Compare here Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 234ff.
- 148 See *ibid.* Compare also Aron's inaugural lecture on assuming his position at the Collège de France: 'De la condition historique du sociologue' (Paris, 1970). In German translation, this lecture forms the first part of the important collection of essays, R. Aron, *Zwischen Macht und Ideologie. Politische Kräfte der Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1974), 9–205.
- 149 See on this Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 265ff., 435ff.; also Aron, *Die industrielle Gesellschaft. 18 Vorlesungen*, op. cit., 24ff; also *Fortschritt ohne Ende?* (Gütersloh, 1970), 7ff.
- 150 Compare Aron, *Die industrielle Gesellschaft*, op. cit., 85–112.
- 151 *Ibid.* See also the very subtle portrayal of the theory of his time in R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 274ff.
- 152 *Ibid.* For the context of particular significance that is portrayed here, see also Aron, *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., especially chapters VII ('Das Ende der Wunder') and VIII ('Selbsterstörung der liberalen Demokratie?'), 257–87 and 288–332.
- 153 *Plädoyer*, op. cit., 275ff. and often, also 366ff. See above all 373: 'If affluent society loses its interest in the future, then it issues itself a death sentence!'
- 154 Foundational here is Michael Stürmer, 'Die Suche nach dem Glück: Staatsvernunft und Utopie', Michael Stürmer (ed.), *Dissonanzen des Fortschritts. Essays über Geschichte und Politik in Deutschland* (Munich, 1986), 21–25.
- 155 Compare here Aron, *Plädoyer für das dekadente Europa*, op. cit., 251ff. and 282ff.
- 156 Compare on this, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 398ff.
- 157 Thus Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 282. These analyses come especially close to the subtle findings of Ralf Dahrendorf. I refer here to his speech about Germany held in the state theatre in Weimar on 25 February 1996. MS copy, 1996.
- 158 As is well known, both Theodor Eschenburg and Arnold Bergstraesser used the title of 'scientific politics' for the political sciences. This was done in order to emphasise the proximity of the discipline to an historical approach on the one hand; on the other, they did so in order to emphasise concrete political action and 'decision making' in a way that a political science that refers to structures and institutions does not. It seems to me that this concept could also be very fittingly applied to Aron – with respect to the problem being discussed here, for example.
- 159 On the reference to Marcuse, compare Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 284ff. See also his study – which had a strong influence on the student movement – H. Marcuse, *Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Frankfurt, 1967).
- 160 Compare here the carefully critical portrayal by Joachim Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 147ff. See further the concluding section in R. Aron, *Opium für Intellektuelle*, op. cit., 362–85 as primary text.
- 161 Compare here the subtle analyses of the character of the Soviet regime during the early 1980s in R. Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 124ff.
- 162 Compare R. Aron, *Le Grand Schisme* (Paris, 1968), 47ff. and often. This theme is resumed and modified many times, especially in R. Aron, *Die letzten Jahre*,

- op. cit., 183ff. See also the perceptive analyses in R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg. Eine Theorie der Staatenwelt* (Frankfurt, 1986) (1st edn Paris, 1962), 470ff. A second edition containing supplementary material on the first attempts at arms control never appeared in German translation. Compare here also *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 311ff.
- 163 Compare here Michael Stürmer, 'Nukleare Waffen. Übermacht und Ohnmacht', Michael Salewski (ed.), *Das Zeitalter der Bombe. Die Geschichte der atomaren Bedrohung von Hiroshima bis heute* (Munich, 1995), 299–316. See also Stürmer, 'Nukleare Abschreckung und politische Kultur: Die europäische Erfahrung', Uwe Nerlich and Trutz Rendtorff (eds), *Nukleare Abschreckung – politische und ethische Interpretationen einer neuen Realität* (Baden-Baden, 1989), 173–94. The citation is from *ibid.*, 193. All contributions of this volume, which is unique in both its political and ethical-philosophical analyses, are emphatically recommended. The volume presents the facet of the East-West nuclear confrontation that is relevant to the European discussion. A similar undertaking in times following the demise of this configuration would be urgently needed. Whether such a work is methodologically possible, however, seems questionable. But see Albrecht Zunker (ed.), *Weltordnung oder Chaos? Beiträge zur internationalen Politik* (Baden-Baden, 1993).
- 164 On the definition of the situation, see the masterly article by Uwe Nerlich, 'Die nuklearen Dilemmas der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', *Europa-Archiv* (1965), 637–52. Compare also the analyses of Karl Jaspers, which are close to Aron's observation in some aspects, but do not attain the sharpness of his vision, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen* (Munich, 1983) (1st edn 1958), 95–250.
- 165 The 'two hells' thesis is an apolitical abstraction. Nonetheless, it is shot through the German attempts – of varying quality, and therefore of varying perceptiveness, from Jasper to Jung and Günther Anders – to attain a theory of the nuclear. See here Helmut Fahrenbach, 'Zeitanalyse, Politik und Philosophie der Vernunft im Werk von Karl Jaspers', Dietrich Harth (ed.), *Karl Jaspers. Denken zwischen Wissenschaft, Politik und Philosophie* (Stuttgart, 1989), 139–87.
- 166 On this, R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 189 and 311ff. See also a series of essays in Aron, *Zwischen Macht und Ideologie*, op. cit., especially 207–323.
- 167 R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 216.
- 168 Compare here primarily R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, op. cit., 153ff. The strong emphasis upon the *jus publicum europaeum* may well be due to the influence of Carl Schmitt. See Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*, 3rd edn (Berlin, 1988), *passim*. There was a subtle dialogue between Aron and Schmitt, one sparked primarily by the work on nuclear philosophy and the politics of the former. See here R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 317 and 418.
- 169 Compare here (among others) Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, op. cit., 187ff. See also Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen. Zwischenbemerkungen zum Begriff des Politischen*, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1975), especially 71ff.
- 170 Compare here, beyond the substantive points mentioned in note 168, also the dialogue with Schmitt in Aron's monograph on Clausewitz: R. Aron, *Clausewitz. Den Krieg denken* (Frankfurt, 1980). At 519ff., Aron analyses Schmitt's partisan theory as one approach (speaking through its omissions) to the global nuclear situation.
- 171 Thus *Frieden und Krieg*, op. cit., 200ff.
- 172 In particular, *ibid.*, 183.
- 173 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 174 Compare Aron, 431ff., especially 434. This problem is treated with particular succinctness by Carl Schmitt in the corollaries to his *Begriff des Politischen* (here

- according to Berlin, 1987, 79–116). Of course, the Schmittian texts are also historically situated and, to this extent, they are not unproblematic. On this, however, I hope to be able to express myself in other places.
- 175 The search for a calculus is the theme of the fourth and final section of *Frieden und Krieg*, *ibid.*, 665–887. See also the very illuminating concluding remarks, *ibid.*, 887–913.
- 176 Compare *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 361ff.
- 177 Thus R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, *op. cit.*, 314, part of the precise paraphrases and careful modifications of the *Frieden und Krieg* book.
- 178 See here the particularly differentiated insights of Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, *op. cit.*, 316ff.
- 179 R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 771.
- 180 Stürmer, *Nukleare Abschreckung und politische Kultur*, *op. cit.*, 190ff. (see note 163).
- 181 This insight is all the more noteworthy to the extent that the factors of the invention of technical weapons and of the ballet-like equilibrium that was maintained between arms control and modernisation could not have been predicted in his time.
- 182 R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 732.
- 183 See above all the final sections of the ‘praxeology’ in R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 815ff.
- 184 R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 668.
- 185 On the world-state project, see *ibid.*, 853–87. The utopianism that is probably necessary in order to project world-internal politics escaped Aron’s notice here. As the most significant counter-image offered by later research on peace and conflict, see the writings of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. Compare, for example, von Weizsäcker, ‘Bedingungen des Friedens’, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels. Reden und Würdigungen 1961–1965* (Frankfurt, 1967), 79–95.
- 186 R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 909. Contrast to this K. Jaspers, *Die Atombombe*, *op. cit.*, 251ff. See also Richard Wisser, ‘Politik als Verwirklichung des Menschseins. Karl Jaspers’ Kritik an politischen Fehlhaltungen’, Wisser, *Karl Jaspers: Philosophie in der Bewährung* (Wurzburg, 1995), 299–323.
- 187 Compare *Frieden und Krieg*, *op. cit.*, 733; and Henry A. Kissinger, *Kernwaffen und auswärtige Politik* (Vienna, 1974). On the relationship between Aron and Kissinger, see R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, *op. cit.*, 403–12.
- 188 Thus Golo Mann in a review of 1963. Cited here according to Golo Mann, ‘Der engagierte Wächter. Raymond Aron: Anmerkungen zu einer Geschichte seines Denkens und seiner Haltung’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 95, 24 April 1982 (*Bilder und Zeiten*, weekend supplement).
- 189 Thus too the presentation by R. Aron himself in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, *op. cit.*, 318.
- 190 Compare here, among others, Arnold Kramish, *The Nuclear Motive* (Washington DC, 1982). See also the extensive bibliography in Nerlich and Rendtorff (eds), *Nukleare Abschreckung*, *op. cit.*, 867–79.
- 191 R. Aron, *Le Grand Débat: Initiation à la stratégie atomique* (Paris, 1963). Cited here according to the German edition: R. Aron, *Einführung in die Atomstrategie. Die atlantische Kontroverse* (Cologne, 1964), especially 44ff. For background literature, see also Pierre Hassner, ‘Débat stratégique et débat politique. Bibliographie S.E.D.E.I.S.’, no. 910, supplément: *Le grand débat nucléaire* (10 February 1965), 3–16.
- 192 A particularly perceptive concept about this is offered by Michael Stürmer, ‘Nukleare Waffen: Übermacht und Ohnmacht’, Salewski (ed.), *Das Zeitalter der Bombe*, *op. cit.*, especially 299ff. See also the commentary, ‘Festigkeit, um

- Wandel zu ermöglichen. Gesucht: Ein neuer Harmel-Bericht', M. Stürmer, *Deutsche Fragen oder die Suche nach der Staatsräson. Historisch-politische Kolonnen* (Munich and Zurich, 1988), 143ff.
- 193 Thus Ursel Hoppe, *Raymond Aron: Europa nach dem 'Dreißigjährigen Krieg' des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 106.
- 194 Compare Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York, 1959). This publication became relevant after its appearance primarily because the general later occupied a key role in Kennedy's advisory staff and advanced shortly thereafter to become the first Joint Chief of Staff (1962–64).
- 195 Thus did Aron succinctly formulate the points of discussion in his time. See Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 324.
- 196 It must be reminded that Kissinger described Aron as 'my teacher' in a book dedication. He held *Le Grand Débat* above all in very high esteem. See here R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 325 and *ibid.*, 403ff.
- 197 R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 322; on this also Aron, *Einführung in die Atomstrategie*, op. cit., 106–47; and Eckart Conze, *Die gaulistische Herausforderung*, op. cit., 260ff.
- 198 On the *Figaro* commentaries of Aron, compare the presentation with Ursel Hoppe, op. cit., 106–42. A survey of all leading articles by Aron can be found in Joachim Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, op. cit., 281–84.
- 199 Compare here Paul Noack, *Das Scheitern der Europäischen Verteidigungsgemeinschaft. Entscheidungsprozesse vor und nach dem 30. August 1954* (Düsseldorf, 1977).
- 200 Thus Stürmer, 'Nukleare Waffen: Übermacht und Ohnmacht', *Das Zeitalter der Bombe*, op. cit., 304. See also Stürmer, *Die Grenzen der Macht. Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte* (Berlin, 1990), 142ff.
- 201 See here Günter Rohrmoser, *Der Ernstfall. Die Krise unserer liberalen Republik* (Berlin, 1994).
- 202 Not a concrete, utopian fiction is entailed here, but the concept of an 'ethical polity' that is applied as regulating the maxims of daily politics. Compare Jaspers, *Die Atombombe*, op. cit., 365ff. and, on Kant, Friedrich Kaulbach, *Studien zur späten Rechtsphilosophie Kants und ihrer transzendentalen Methode* (Würzburg, 1982).
- 203 Compare here the ethical concept of Dieter Heinrich, *Ethik zum nuklearen Frieden* (Frankfurt, 1990), especially 28–69.
- 204 Thus R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 398.
- 205 *Ibid.*, 318.
- 206 On Carl Schmitt's position on the 'occupied civitas' of Weimar, see in particular the following collection of essays: *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar-Genf-Versailles. 1923–1939* (Berlin, 1988), *passim*. See also C. Schmitt, *Staat, Großraum, Nomos. Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1916–1969*, edited and with a foreword and commentary by Günter Maschke (Berlin, 1995). On Aron's concept of freedom, see Aron, *Über die Freiheiten*, op. cit., especially 139ff.
- 207 With a focus on the contemporary situation, see Gregor Schöllgen, 'Eine andere Welt? Ausblick in die Gegenwart', Helmut Neuhaus (ed.), *Aufbruch aus dem Ancien régime. Beiträge zur Geschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 1993), 289–303.
- 208 Thus R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 317.
- 209 R. Aron, Clausewitz. *Den Kriege denken* (Frankfurt, Berlin *et al.*, 1980). The original edition: *Penser la guerre* appeared in Paris in 1976. Compare also the portrayal of the history of the origin and reception of the Clausewitz book in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 412–26.
- 210 Thus Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 412.
- 211 *Ibid.*, 417.
- 212 *Ibid.*, 415ff., also Clausewitz, op. cit., 55ff. and 226ff.

- 213 Thus *ibid.*, 251ff. and often.
- 214 Compare here above all R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 530ff. and 737ff.
- 215 *Ibid.*, 738 and often.
- 216 Also of interest here is the heated defence of Clausewitz against the scholars among his detractors: namely, against Basil Henry Liddell Hart, op. cit., 339ff.
- 217 Here, I follow Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Raymond Aron. Theorie und Praxis', Dahrendorf, *Liberale und andere*, op. cit., 113–31, especially 123ff. Certainly, it seems to me to be by no means necessary to follow Dahrendorf in situating Aron's Clausewitz as an intermediate figure, as it were, between Marx and Macchiavelli. Much more illuminating appears to me the foil of the history of the Clausewitz reception – masterfully reconstructed by Aron. This appears as a single genealogy of misunderstandings, even distortions. R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 347–453.
- 218 Compare Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 364.
- 219 R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 339 ff; also *ibid.*, 409ff. In the background, compare B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Ghost of Napoleon* (New Haven CT, 1937), 11ff.
- 220 Compare the concise interpretation of this structure of Clausewitzian theory in R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 414ff. More extensively, see also Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 254ff.
- 221 Compare R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 412ff.
- 222 Compare R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 585 and *ibid.*, 589ff.
- 223 Aron used this brilliant formulation as the title for the chapter section in his Clausewitz book that was dedicated to the logic of deterrence. See *ibid.*, 455–96. See also the entire second section, which applies Clausewitz's problem to the atomic age, 'Die Wette mit der Vernunft', *ibid.*, 453–569.)
- 224 Thus *ibid.*, 455.
- 225 Thus *ibid.*, 456ff.
- 226 Thus *ibid.*, 509ff. See, as background, the entire chapter: 'Der Krieg – ein Chamäleon', op. cit., 496–530.
- 227 *Ibid.*, 462ff. and 530ff. See also once again Aron's brilliant essays, 'Kann man im Atomzeitalter den Krieg begrenzen?' (1955) and 'Entwicklung des strategischen Denkens (1945–68)' (February 1969), R. Aron, *Zwischen Macht und Ideologie*, op. cit., 323–41, also 341–74.
- 228 Compare R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 562ff. See also *Frieden und Krieg*, op. cit., 555 ff, and the clear remarks at 423ff. Aron always regarded the United Nations as a highly inadequate global unit. This scepticism now appears to be relevant to the highest degree, although the courage to concede this is, as a rule, lacking.
- 229 Compare R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 583ff.
- 230 Thus *ibid.*, 585.
- 231 Compare *ibid.* See here also Aron's critical confrontation with a politics of human rights that is blessed with the veil of ignorance: Aron, *Die letzten Jahre des Jahrhunderts*, op. cit., 221–34. This refers above all to the human rights politics of Carter.
- 232 R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 585ff. Here, see once again the concept mentioned in note 203, that of a decentralised morality. See Dieter Heinrich, *Ethik zum nuklearen Frieden*, as well as the entire fourth section of Nerlich and Rendtorff (eds), *Nukleare Abschreckung – Politische und ethische Implikationen einer neuen Realität*, op. cit., 715–97.
- 233 'Pathos of distance' is an expression that Nietzsche often used. It seems to me to be a suitable characterisation of the Aronian ethos as well – one located between the cold stare of the contemplation of global politics and an anti-totalitarian fervour.
- 234 R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 586. On this, see once again the text that illuminates the first scene of the book-burning in *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 112ff.

- 235 See here the consistently harsh confrontation with the strategic game playing of the 'neo-Clausewitzians', in R. Aron, *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 453ff. and 532ff.
- 236 The first is the neo-Hegelian thesis of Francis Fukuyama, which has long since been detached from its author and tabled in 1989.
- 237 This is the formulation of Samuel Huntington. Referring primarily to the confrontation between Islam and modernity, this problem might well become increasingly acute – in European metropoli like Paris no less than in the Islamic states.
- 238 Compare here, among others, the important analyses of Dieter Senghass: *Europa 2000. Ein Friedensplan* (Frankfurt, 1990), *Friedensprojekt Europa*, ibid., 1992; and *Wohin driftet die Welt? Über die Zukunft friedlicher Koexistenz*, ibid., 1994. From the German perspective, the following is very informative: Karl Kaiser, Hanns W. Maull (eds), *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik. Band I: Grundlagen* (Munich, 1995), especially the contributions by Stürmer (ibid., 39–63), Haftdorn (129–53) and Nerlich (153–75).
- 239 Compare here the diagnostic concluding chapter of R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 455ff. See also Hans Maier, 'Eine Kultur oder viele? Die neuen Kulturen und Europa', Hans Maier, *Eine Kultur oder viele? Politische Essays* (Stuttgart, 1995), 35–62.
- 240 Thus R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 489. The observation of current events through the analytical lens of Max Weber has recently been taken up again in a brilliant way by Lothar Waas, *Max Weber und die Folgen. Die Krise der Moderne und der moralisch-politische Dualismus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt, 1995), *passim*.
- 241 Ibid., 490.
- 242 Compare R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 480ff. and 503ff.
- 243 Hermann Lübke presents the most carefully crafted and reflective concept here that I know of. See Lübke, *Abschied vom Superstaat. Vereinigte Staaten von Europa wird es nicht geben* (Berlin, 1994), above all 69ff. and 141ff.
- 244 On this, Michael Stürmer, *Die neue Welt-Unordnung. Deutschland im Krisenbogen*, lecture manuscript (1995).
- 245 Thus many times, and with particular emphasis in the concluding sections of *Frieden und Krieg*, op. cit., 853–913, and *Clausewitz*, op. cit., 569–87.
- 246 M. Stürmer, *Die neue Welt-Unordnung*, op. cit., 23.
- 247 Dieter Heinrich, *Ethik zum nuklearen Frieden*, op. cit., *passim*. Compare too one of the previous versions of this text, 'Ethik zum nuklearen Frieden', Nerlich and Rendtorff (eds), *Nukleare Abschreckung – Politische und ethische Interpretationen einer neuen Realität*, op. cit., 689–715.
- 248 Compare Stürmer, *Die neue Welt-Unordnung*, op. cit., 20ff.
- 249 Ibid. See also Stürmer, 'Was ist das Europäische an Europa?' *Matinee im Bayerischen Landtag* (Munich, 1993), 86–104.
- 250 Here is meant primarily the ecological threat. It seems that a 'principle of responsibility' that is also responsible in real-political terms might benefit from the 'roughness' – in many ways, an Anglo-Saxon roughness – of an Aron no less than from the speculative perception of a Hans Jonas. It is part of Aron's thought, of course, that he would not have spoken of a 'principle'.
- 251 Compare here the implicit delimitation of the 'scepticisme aronien' in R. Aron, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung*, op. cit., 94ff.
- 252 Compare R. Aron, 'Karl Jaspers und die Politik', Wilhelm Anz, Jeanne Hersch, Jan Milic Lochman, Reiner Wiehl (eds), *Karl Jaspers. Philosoph, Arzt, politischer Denker. Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag in Basel und Heidelberg* (Munich, 1986), 59–77, citation 75.
- 253 In almost a testamentary tone, ibid., 76ff.
- 254 See here the important book by Hans Dieter Zimmermann, *Der Wahnsinn des Jahrhunderts. Die Verantwortung der Schriftsteller in der Politik* (Stuttgart, 1992).



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