

alism has made racism a reality, and we must recognize that it is all too easily infected. Coming to understand the relationship between racism and nationalism should lead us to try and humanize nationalism which, as patriotism, has at times managed to resist the racist temptation.

Fascism and the French Revolution

REEXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP between two cataclysmic events of modern history, fascism and the French Revolution, can throw new light upon the changing concept of the nation and its political style. The French Revolution as a historical event did not play a crucial role in fascist thought or imagination. It was not considered as an ancestor which had influenced the movement, and if fascists thought about the French Revolution at all, it was for the most part either to oppose it as a symbol of materialism and liberalism, or to contrast it to their own true revolution. The French fascists, to be sure, had greater difficulty in coming to terms with a revolution that was part of their own national history and that had provided France with some of her most important military victories. And yet, for all such denial and ambivalence, the French Revolution did provide an important background for the fascist conception of politics. The French Revolution put its stamp on a novel view of the sacred: it created a full-blown civic religion that modern nationalism made its own, and fascism, whatever its variety, was, above all, a nationalist movement. Moreover, some fascisms, almost in spite of themselves, did show some continuity of mind with the French Revolution.

At this point in research, it may well be impossible to prove any direct connection between the French Revolution and fascist political practice or ideology. Fascist leaders were conscious of the Revolution and its leadership within a polemical rather than historical context. The relationship between fascism and the Revolution involved a general reorientation of post-revolutionary European politics, rather than specific points of contact—a reorientation adopted at first by modern European nationalism, but subsequently by many other political movements as well. The basis of this reorientation was Rousseau's concept of the general will, that only when men act together as an assembled people can the individual be a citizen.¹ The general will became a secular religion under the Jacobin dictatorship—the people worshiping themselves—while the political leadership sought to guide and formalize this worship. Fascism saw the French Revolution as a whole through the eyes of the Jacobin dictatorship, and it was this aspect of the Revolution that exercised its influence upon it. The parliamentary phase of the French Revolution was nonexistent as far as the fascists were concerned, and it is of interest only for contrast in any comparison between the two movements, providing the opposite pole of the political spectrum. But one would learn little from such a comparison about either fascism or the French Revolution. During the Jacobin dictatorship, the unity of the people was cemented by common citizenship, by the worship of a supreme being, but also through appeals to an awakening national consciousness. The nation was no longer in the custody of a dynasty, but belonged to all of the people. The worship of the people thus became the worship of the nation, and the Jacobins sought to express this unity through the creation of a new political style based upon a civic religion.

This new politics attempted to draw the people into active participation in the new order and to discipline them at the same time through rites and festivals, myths and symbols, that gave concrete expression to the general will. The festivals of the Revolution, which reached their fullest expression under the Jacobins, had their own

sacred space, such as the Champs-de-Mars or the Tuileries, and they contained processions, competitions, songs, dances, and speaking choruses. Symbolic gestures were also important, as at times people fell into each other's arms in order to document the overriding theme of revolutionary and national unity. The *mise-en-scène* mattered as well: allegories of fraternity taken from the classics might surround the crowd, as well as temples and pyramids. There was joy in color and form while even nature was far from forgotten; the Revolution endowed the early rays of the sun with symbolic and political meaning.² The general will became a new religion expressed through an aesthetic of politics. Though revolutionary festivals took a variety of forms, they pointed to the new age of mass politics.

The chaotic crowd of the "people" became a disciplined mass movement during the Revolution, participating in the orchestrated drama of politics. But apart from political rites and festivals during the Jacobin dictatorship, an increasing conformity saw to it that the new order would not degenerate into chaos: dress, comportment, and even songs were enlisted to support that effort, and so were a multitude of organizations to which people were supposed to belong. Eventually, the revolutionary armies further strengthened the authority of the revolutionary state. Such conformity was placed in the service of the passion for liberty, closely associated with patriotism and the cult of reason.³ This new politics attempted the politicization of the masses, which, for the first time in modern history, functioned as a pressure group and not just through episodic uprisings or short-lived riots. The age of modern mass politics had begun.

Stressing this aspect of the French Revolution should clarify its importance for fascism, especially as nationalism took up the new politics with its carefully organized festivals, rites, myths, and symbols. Modern nationalism from the very beginning presented itself as a democratic movement through which the general will of the nation would be put into practice. The drama of politics was meant to awaken the passion of the people for their nation. Just as some Frenchmen bewailed the decline of republican passion in the fourth

year of the Revolution, so democratic nationalism thought itself dependent upon a continuing revolutionary spirit. This nationalism was largely tamed after the lost revolutions of 1848, co-opted by established states and dynasties. Yet some of the revolutionary impetus of nationalism survived, in the form of a democratic nationalism based not on hierarchy and privilege but upon the general will of the people. This nationalism provides the link between the French Revolution and fascism: the nationalization of the masses was a common bond between the French and the fascist revolutions.

However much fascist movements and democratic nationalism differed from nation to nation, the instruments of self-representation and the need for popular participation were common to both. Moreover, all fascisms shared the utopianism which was said to have inspired the masses during the French Revolution: the longing to create a new man or a new nation.⁴ Many other comparisons will be made in this essay, such as the fascination with death and the use of martyrs, or the preoccupation with youth, beauty, and war. But all such specifics are part of the general reorientation of European politics that we have mentioned already, and that began with the French Revolution. The Revolution, as it were, set the tone and the example for a new mass politics whose real triumph came only after the First World War. This was not a consciously adopted example, and many who took it up after the Revolution in order to organize the masses hated the Revolution, and saw the rites and ceremonies of the Jacobins only as a part of the Terror. This makes tracing any continuity difficult indeed, and yet, as a matter of fact, Jacobin politics were adapted to quite different ends. Early German nationalists, for example, who stressed the importance of festivals, of a political liturgy which centered upon the myths and symbols of the nation—using processions, folk dances, speaking choruses, and the singing of hymns—seemed to have few ideological contacts with the Jacobins, and yet the democratic impetus, and the means through which it expressed itself, constituted a bond between the two movements.

Nationalism was the inheritor of Jacobin politics, a modern, demo-

cratic, and, at first, revolutionary nationalism as opposed to the nationalism that supported the existing political and social order. This democratic nationalism which fought against the *ancien régime* for a more meaningful national unity was perhaps the most important single link between the French Revolution and fascism. Popular sovereignty was affirmed and controlled through giving the people a means of participation in the political process—not in reality, but through a feeling of participating, of belonging to a true and meaningful community. Whether in fascist mass meetings or the great festivals of the Revolution, men and women considered themselves active participants, and for many of them this was to prove a more important involvement than representative government could provide, removed as it was from any direct contact with the people. Revolutionary ardor or ideological commitment needed to express itself in a more direct manner. But such enthusiasm—an often messianic political faith—grips masses of men and women mostly in times of crisis, and this inheritance of the Revolution was operative mostly in turbulent times, as the Jacobin dictatorship and fascism itself demonstrate.

For all that, this inheritance is difficult to disentangle from others, not in its ideal of “the people” or the organization of festivals, but as a source for the aesthetic of politics. Italy was a Catholic country and Adolf Hitler grew up in Catholic Austria, and Catholic in this context meant the Baroque with its theatricality, its love of symbols and gestures. Hitler was much influenced by the revival of the Viennese Baroque at the end of the nineteenth century, with its grandiose buildings, its festivals, and the royal parades on the famous Ringstrasse.⁵ Gabriele D’Annunzio’s use of Christian themes in his festivals during his rule over the city of Fiume was obviously indebted to the Catholicism of the Baroque, creating rites taken over by Italian fascism.

Some of the festivals of the French Revolution had themselves borrowed from Christian liturgy, and modern, democratic nationalism depended on it to an even greater extent. Thus the holy flame, so common in nationalist festivals, derived from the holy flame above

the altar in Catholic churches, while declarations of faith were made, not to God, but to the nation. The dialogue between leader and crowd was in its stylized responses indebted to that between the priest and the congregation. Such borrowing from the Christian liturgy was especially important in Germany, where the new national consciousness was set upon pietistic foundations, and where practically all the early leaders of the nationalist movement came from a pietistic Lutheran background. For example, Ernst Moritz Arndt, the poet of German national unity, held in 1814 that prayers must accompany national festivals.⁶

German nationalism used Christian terminology to express itself, a trend which was to reach its climax in national socialism. There was (as we mentioned in the introduction) reference to the "resurrection of the Greater German Reich," "the blood of the martyrs," and constant appeals to providence. Hitler, at one point, called the martyrs of the movement his apostles.⁷ The French Revolution had also created a new language for itself, but this had no effect in Germany. People were familiar with Christian terminology, and this was co-opted by the Nazis. Furthermore, the Nazis imitated the interiors of churches as appropriate for their own kind of worship. The Jacobins had done the same, holding one of their important festivals in the Cathedral of Notre Dame.⁸ No takeover of churches took place in Nazi Germany; instead, Christian forms were consciously used in order to construct a rival religion.

The so-called "sacred chambers" (*Weiberäume*) in factories and big businesses that were reserved for party festivities were often arranged like a church: where the altar stood Hitler's bust was substituted, placed between banners of eagles decorated with swastikas, as the symbol of unity between the nation and the Nazi movement. And yet, all this overt borrowing from Christianity must not obliterate the basic importance of the French Revolution even here: for the concept of the general will, of the people worshiping themselves, was the presupposition upon which all this borrowing rested. Popular sovereignty was not merely appealed to in Nazi speeches, but in one cere-

mony during the party day at Nuremberg, Hitler advanced toward the holy flame as one of a crowd, emerging only at the last moment.⁹ The creation of a political liturgy based upon the aesthetic of politics was a consequence of the belief in the artificial construct of "the people": they had to be mobilized, shaped, and disciplined, and the way in which this was done was influenced—if not directly determined—by the French Revolution. The Revolution signaled the break between the old politics of dynasty and privilege, and the new democratic politics supposedly based on the will of the people.

The overt attitude of National Socialists toward the French Revolution was one of hatred: it symbolized all that had gone wrong with Germany. Historians used to explain what they regarded as the aggressive nature of German nationalism, and therefore of National Socialism, through the fact that Germany had been untouched by the ideals of the French Revolution, and that subsequently it had missed the benign influence of the Enlightenment. Thus Germany came to differ from Western Europe. Such a view of German history can no longer be upheld. German nationalism, even as it fought against Napoleon, at first internalized ideas of freedom and humanity which the French Revolution projected. Love of fatherland and freedom were the slogans under which the German Wars of Liberation against France were fought, and freedom for many of those involved meant freedom both within the nation itself and for other nations wanting independence.¹⁰ To be sure, as the struggle became more intense, opposition to the French Revolution and what it stood for increased, and proclamations of freedom rang increasingly hollow, or meant merely national independence; now only the fatherland counted. But just as the ideal of liberty exemplified by the French Revolution was repudiated, its influence reasserted itself through the idea of popular sovereignty and its consequences, which German nationalism, embattled against the reaction, accepted.

German nationalism, like all modern nationalism, involved the mobilizing and control of the masses. To achieve this, it constructed a world of illusion which in its content bore no resemblance to the

French Revolution. This world, which the Nazis adopted as their own, was a rural, not an urban world (like that of the Revolution), one in which a mythical German past had remained alive, pointing to a better future. Most nations represented themselves through preindustrial symbols like the native landscape, projecting a feeling of continuity and harmony in contrast to the modern age. Hitler boasted that with the rise of National Socialism "the nervous nineteenth century had come to an end."¹¹ The images and the rhetoric of nationalism were opposed to that which the Jacobins had projected. The storming of the Bastille was made into a metaphor symbolizing the perils of modernity.

All nationalism claimed to provide stability in a restless world, seeing itself as a civic religion with a claim to timelessness. National symbols looked backward rather than forward; these were no Goddesses of Reason who lacked a past.¹² While the Festivals of Revolution had a short memory, honoring the death of Marat or of the revolutionary martyrs, the martyrs of movements like National Socialism were immediately assimilated to heroes who had fought for the fatherland in the medieval past or during the Wars of National Liberation. Nationalism had a different sense of history than the French Revolution; it looked to conventional, non-Enlightenment sources for its inspiration. And though the revolutionary festivals in the countryside also built upon ancient peasant traditions,¹³ the thrust of these festivals was not directed toward recapturing the past in order to control the future.

The content of most nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism was different from that of the French Revolution, but its method of politics and self-representation was similar. For example, Robespierre might have felt at home in Nazi mass meetings, except for their huge dimensions and the kind of precedent and imagery used. He would have recognized the rhythms of such meetings, their songs and speaking choruses, as a political statement, and their play upon light and shadow would not have been strange, for the Revolution was fond of annexing to its own festivals sunrises, sunsets, and dawns.

The Nazis were particularly disturbed by the Revolution's break with the past, its repudiation of history, which seemed to them a logical consequence of the Enlightenment. Indeed, the triumphant Revolution had forgotten history; for example, the Pantheon, which was at first opened to great men of all nations and ages, was finally restricted only to those who had followed the turns and twists of the Revolution.¹⁴ The Nazis and the fascists in general saw socialist and Bolshevik revolutions as the logical consequence of such a break with history: rootless and opportunistic, devoid of principles. All these revolutions were, so they claimed, controlled by the Jews, eternal strangers and anti-nationals. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* criticized just such a revolution. A revolution that is a true blessing, he wrote, will not be ashamed to make use of already existing truths. After all, human culture and man himself are merely the end-products of a long historical development for which each generation has furnished the building blocks. The purpose of a revolution is not to tear down the whole building, but to remove what is unsuitable and to build again upon the space thus vacated. Here was the model of a revolution that was pitted against that which France had provided. Such was Hitler's most consistent position toward the Revolution, even if, at times, he admired its destructive power, which had served to put an end to the old order and had led to a new beginning.¹⁵ This was, after all, what he himself wanted to achieve. But, in the last resort, the French Revolution, manipulated by the Jews, according to Hitler, had produced evil rather than good.

Nervousness was the disease most feared in the nineteenth century as leading to a general degeneration, not only of individuals, but of the state. The fascists were haunted by fear of degeneration, a word they applied liberally to their enemies. The answer to such fears, in their eyes, was the maintenance of respectability and racial purity. Keeping control over one's sexuality was vital to Adolf Hitler, who was obsessed with the spread of syphilis.¹⁶ A clear division of functions between the sexes was basic to moral and physical health. The accusation that the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg in his *Der Mythos des*

20. *Jahrbunderts* (1930) leveled against the French Revolution was telling in this context. The collapse of the *ancien régime*, he wrote, had as its necessary and natural consequence the establishment of the overbearing influence of women, many of whom took on functions that had been the preserve of men. Had the ideals of that Revolution not included the liberation of women, whose forerunners, according to Rosenberg, were two demimondaines, Olympe de Gouges and Theroigne de Mericourt:¹⁷ Rosenberg linked women's liberation to prostitution, and this within the framework of a confusion of sexes. The accusation of immorality leveled by the nationalist right against the French Revolution in most of Europe was more than just the reaction of prudes. It symbolized the destruction of the social and political order.

But here, once again, bitter opposition should not disguise certain similarities that point back to that general reorientation of European politics I have mentioned before. The Jacobins also insisted on clear and unambiguous distinctions between morality and immorality. Those who supported the Revolution and those who opposed it should be clearly distinguished. Robespierre loved to divide the enemies of the Revolution into various groups,¹⁸ and to create order even among those destined for execution.

The uncompromising distinction between enemy and friend, supporters and those who must be eliminated, was drawn in the name of the general will of the people. Even as the guillotine was kept busy, it was claimed that the people themselves wanted the Terror put on their daily agenda.¹⁹ Hitler made the same claim somewhat more theoretically: the people themselves saw in a ruthless attack against the enemy proof of a just cause, and in the refusal to exterminate him a sign of weakness.²⁰ He made these remarks in the context of the nationalization of the masses, as he called it, crucial to the reawakening of Germany. The emphasis upon unambiguous distinctions, in politics as well as social life, formed a common bond between Jacobins and fascists. The either/or cast of mind, which put a premium upon

decisiveness, was a means to impose a new and untraditional leadership upon the nation. Such leadership was dependent upon the successful nationalization of the masses, and this meant decisiveness, clarity, and conformity, projected in action as well as through the revolutionary or national cult.

The general will of the people, if not mediated through representative government, needed coherence, and political as well as personal conformity were essential to the existence of such a direct democracy. The myths and symbols—the whole of the civic religion with its cult as the objectification of the general will—focused and directed the faith of the people. Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself had recommended to the government of Poland the institution of games, festivities, and ceremonies in order to create republican habits of mind which would be impossible to uproot.²¹ But what about the leader himself as focusing and directing the faith of the people? Here the legacy the French Revolution left to fascism was at best ambivalent.

During the Jacobin dictatorship, the public leadership function was exercised through speeches and proclamations. Robespierre and other members of the Committee of Public Safety were compelling speakers, but they were never the center of a cult or an integral part of the myths and symbols of the civic religion. They were closer to Rousseau's original concept of the general will, which foresaw a legislator but no charismatic leader as the object of popular adoration and enthusiasm. The deeds of the Revolution were carried out in the name of abstract principles, such as freedom or reason, and not in the name of one man. To be sure, martyred leaders became part of the revolutionary pantheon. Jacques-Louis David cast his painting of the assassinated Marat in the form of a timeless monument.²² However, David never painted a living leader of the Revolution; for example, no such monument was erected to Robespierre. Jacobins were willing to celebrate collective deeds, but accepted individual heroes only when they were dead.²³ Leadership during the Revolution was, after all, collective leadership; the ideal of equality was maintained in theory and not

yet objectified by one leader acting on behalf of the nation. Napoleon would change all that in a direction leading, not forward to future fascist leaders, but backward to monarchy and empire.

Fascist ideals of leadership could find no comfort here. The only connection between these ideas and the Revolution was, once again, the political liturgy, which could serve to support and to frame the leader, even if at times, as we have mentioned, it was used to demonstrate that the leader was one among equals. The theory of democratic leadership adopted by Hitler and Mussolini emerged as a consequence of the growth of urban and industrial society. Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1889) was a milestone on the road to modern dictatorship—a work, as I have mentioned before, known by and important to both Hitler and Mussolini.²⁴ Here it is necessary to say more about that book which was inspired by the crowds mobilized by General Boulanger between 1886 and 1889 in his bid for dictatorship, one of the first modern mass movements with a truly cross-class appeal. The Boulangist movement sparked a concern with the role of the masses in politics, illustrated by a spate of works dealing with collective psychology.²⁵ Le Bon stressed the effect of what he called “theatrical representations” upon the crowd, but also the necessity of providing a leader through whom the crowd attains its identity.²⁶ Such a leader must himself be hypnotized by the idea whose apostle he has become. Here Le Bon refers to the men of the French Revolution, together with Savonarola, Luther, and Peter the Hermit, as having exercised their fascination over the crowd only after having themselves been fascinated by a creed.²⁷ Le Bon had observed well. This was the kind of leadership needed in an age when the mobilized masses could sway politics in a manner which had not been possible earlier—with the exception of the French Revolution. Here again the Revolution prefigures a reorientation of European politics that, properly speaking, became effective only in industrialized Europe.

The use which the fascist leaders themselves made of a political liturgy, and the appeal of democratic leadership, varied from nation to nation. While Hitler made thorough use of this manner of self-

representation, Mussolini seemed to have greater difficulty grasping its importance for the integration of the masses into the fascist movement. However, this was a matter of degree, for fascism also wanted to become a civic religion. Though much was borrowed from D'Annunzio's rule over Fiume, Mussolini was also influenced by the political cult of the Revolution and the educational and integrative function it had served. Moreover, unlike Hitler, he borrowed from the Revolution the idea of a new calendar, in which the year One was the year of the final attainment of power.²⁸ What better signal could be devised to show that the old order was finished and a new age about to commence? The civic religion of nationalism, wherever it took roots, had little choice but to draw, however indirectly, on the only serviceable past within reach: the example of the Jacobins, with their attempt to unite, through mass rituals and easily understood symbols, the people, the state, and the nation. Mussolini would let the development of a speech depend upon the eyes and voices of the thousands who packed the piazza.²⁹ He posed for a photograph beside a statue of Augustus, and on another occasion was presented with a Roman sword; but such episodes are only part of a fully fledged political cult, with festivals like those celebrated by the Revolution, or like Nazi mass meetings.

While Italy was well on the road to a civic religion in the first ten years of fascism, later the cult of the Duce became more personal, as it came to be projected upon one man and the state, rather than upon the leader as a symbol of the ideology of his movement—an ideology now supposedly shared by all the people. Indeed, the cult of the Duce was kept almost separate from the Fascist party.³⁰ Hitler, on the other hand, in the long term, attempted to restrict the impact of a single individual upon the ritual. The ceremony itself should have an independent life, he believed, because this would ensure the continuity of the Third Reich even after his death; for his successor would not possess his own magic and the use of the liturgy would disguise this fact.³¹ Mussolini never exalted a political liturgy in this manner,³² nor did he have the illusion that it might function to keep the leader all-

powerful through giving him the appearance of a priest at the altar of a Baroque church.

Politics as a theater filled with passion had come into its own in Italy with Gabriele D'Annunzio's rule over the city of Fiume. The succession of festivals in which D'Annunzio played a leading role was supposed to abolish the distance between leader and led, and the speeches from the balcony of the town hall to the crowd below (accompanied by trumpets) were to accomplish the same purpose.³³ D'Annunzio used secular and religious symbols side by side in order to create a civic religion. His was a fully worked-out political liturgy intended to keep Fiume in a state of continual excitement and euphoria, uniting the city against its enemies and projecting it as a symbol for a new Italy. The French Revolution was involved in such a political theater only in a most indirect way. D'Annunzio's rule over Fiume was the first time in the post-revolutionary age that the aesthetics of politics had been used once again as a principal means of governance. But the immediate inspiration for such politics was the poet's own fertile imagination, inspired by the artistic movements of his age.

Mussolini did take from Fiume some of his way of doing politics and many of the fascist rites and ceremonials through which the collectivity fused with the leader.³⁴ However, eventually the Duce was at the center of such politics, becoming less the symbol of some transcendent principle—such as the Volk's soul or the race—than a political leader, the living creator of a new state. Nationalism in Italy had retained a liberal core and until the 1930s had avoided fusing with racism, or with that mysticism of the Volk which was to bedevil Germany. The state, not the Volk, played a dominant role in Italian nationalism, and here important groups such as the army saw the nation as symbolized by the king rather than by Mussolini. The Mirabeaus, Andre Chéniers, and Davids, who helped to shape the festivals of revolutionary France, would have found no peers in fascist Italy, where the political liturgy did not excite such attention, and the names of those who organized fascist rites—men like Italo Balbo, Augusto Turati, or Achille Starace—were noted for other services

rendered to the Fascist state. Germany, on the other hand, had its Albert Speer and Joseph Goebbels, who managed the aesthetic of politics.

We have found links and differences between the French and the fascist revolutions, not by examining specific attitudes, but through more general principles. The political liturgy, the aesthetic of politics, forms the core of continuity between the two revolutions, together with the quest for totality and the either/or mentality as the spur to decisiveness in politics. Basic to all of these links was the democratization of politics, the rule of the general will, that informed the nationalism upon which fascism was built. Fascism and the French Revolution, each in its own way, saw themselves as democratic movements directed against the establishment. Fascism as a movement had a revolutionary thrust, and even in power—having itself become the establishment—made full use of an anti-establishment rhetoric directed against the bourgeoisie.

There are two further connections between the French Revolution and fascism that bear mention: the preoccupations with death and youth. Funeral symbolism played a large role in revolutionary festivals, often acted out around an empty tomb.³⁵ These were the tombs of the martyrs of the Revolution, whose actual funerals were grandiose *mise-en-scènes*, at whose end stood the Pantheon. The Revolution attempted to redesign cemeteries as places of eternal sleep rather than Christian resurrection. Architects experimented with tombs containing the ashes of great men to be placed at the center of such cemeteries.³⁶ The cult of the martyred dead, or of those who had played an important role in the Revolution, was celebrated during Jacobin rule and the Directory. Fascism celebrated a similar cult of the dead. Italo Balbo first organized fascist funerals in Italy as mass events combining religious with patriotic ceremony.³⁷ Such funerals organized by Balbo, provide a continuation of the fascist ceremonial once displayed by D'Annunzio.

The fascist cult of the dead was not confined to the martyrs of the movement, but included the fallen of the First World War. Both Ital-

ian fascism and National Socialism regarded themselves as the true inheritors of the war experience, guardians of the cult of the fallen soldier. Fascist Italy built some of the most spectacular war cemeteries—such as that at Redipuglia in the Alps—using Christian symbolism, as, for example, the three crosses of Calvary, to proclaim the resurrection of those who gave their life for the fatherland. All nations who had been at war gave singular honor to their war dead, but in fascism such remembrance was close to the center of its political ritual, never to be lost from sight. The martyrs of the movement were assimilated to the fallen soldier of the First World War; both had sacrificed their lives for the nation. Italian fascism's cult of the dead in contrast to that of Nazi Germany, has up to now not received much attention, and therefore statements about it must be tentative. But in a movement which saw itself in the light of the First World War, and which was pledged to continue the fight for Italy's victory, sacrificial death was bound to occupy an important place in the rhetoric and ceremonial of the party.

There can be no doubt about the pride of place held by the memory of the war dead and martyrs in National Socialism. Some of the most spectacular ceremonies at the Nuremberg rallies were devoted to this cult, including perhaps the central ceremony where Hitler stood alone in front of the eternal flame against the background of massed party formations. Christian symbolism was once again part of this cult: for example, the bullet which killed Albert Leo Schlageter, considered a Nazi martyr, was kept in a silver reliquary.³⁸ State funerals were carefully programmed ceremonies of great splendor. Thus, when the body of the assassinated Nazi leader of Switzerland, Wilhelm Gustloff, was transferred to his home in northern Germany in 1936, the journey took fifteen hours. There was a ceremony at every station on the way, and the partially open coach with the coffin and guard of honor was flanked by two coaches reserved for wreaths.³⁹ State funerals, though infrequent, were an integral part of the cult of the dead which the Nazis practiced.

State funerals were celebrated with great pomp throughout the

nineteenth century, but these were funerals of rulers, generals, and members of the government. The French Revolution and fascism democratized state funerals: not birth or privilege, but service to the cause, warranted such display, regardless of the person's social origin or standing. France took up this revolutionary tradition with the founding of the Third Republic; for example, the funeral of Victor Hugo in 1885 has been called one of the first fruits of the mass age, with its procession past the catafalque standing under the Arch of Triumph and ending at the Pantheon, which was opened for the first time in thirty five years.⁴⁰ The precedents for such a funeral were those of Marat or Mirabeau, and, although Napoleon III had refined and elaborated the practice of state funerals, these did not have the same overall national and educational purpose. Yet here, once more, there was no straight line connecting the two movements, but a gray zone, which complicates the tracing of influence. For example, the actual pomp and circumstance of state funerals began, not with the French Revolution, but with the Baroque. The theatricality of the Baroque, and its fascination with death, led to a surfeit of funeral pomp, with interminable processions and elaborate decorations: the catafalque came into its own as a kind of stage for the corpse. Though fascism, like the French Revolution, preferred a simpler, classical style for its decorations, Baroque funeral pomp remained a fixture in the Catholic regions of Europe. The tradition of the Baroque, familiar to fascist leaders, obscures the influence of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, while Baroque funerals were religious rites without any political purpose, both the French Revolution and the fascists integrated such funerals and the cult of the dead into their political style, as part of their own self-representation.

Why this preoccupation with death by revolutions seeking to usher in a new and dynamic age, be it the Republic of Virtue, the Thousand-Year Reich, or the drive to create a new fascist man who would put everything right? The fascist call to sacrifice made use of the Christian dialectic of death and resurrection. The transcendence of death was closely linked in fascism to the fallen of the First World War, as

documented by the design of military cemeteries with their crosses and frequent representations of soldiers touched by Christ.⁴¹ The Nazis, for example, took the cult of the fallen soldier and applied it to their own martyrs. Death and life were not contraries, but linked to one another. For some Italian fascists, death had to be accepted; it was sober and devoid of sentiment, a test of individual discipline. But, for the most part, fascists held to the traditional idea that sacrifice for the nation transcended death. Thus fascism sought to abolish death, just as it attempted to make time stand still. Such an emphasis in its ideology is hardly astounding in a movement dedicated to perpetual war.

The French Revolution could not make use of the Christian theme of death and resurrection. Instead, death was defined as perpetual sleep. Indeed, the redesign of cemeteries was part of the attempted de-Christianization of France. The cult of the martyrs helped to legitimize the Revolution, and the funerals of so-called "great men" in the Pantheon were seen as a means to educate the public in virtue.⁴² These were men of the past like Rousseau, Voltaire, or Descartes (whom the Revolution could claim as its ancestors), the martyrs of the Revolution, and a few of its leaders. This cult of death was obviously different from that of fascism: it lacked the dialectic of death and resurrection. Only through the preservation of his memory in the minds of his countrymen could the martyr of the Revolution or the "great man" be assured of eternal life. With fascism, on the other hand, the dead return to inspire the living.⁴³ As soldiers fell in the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, there was a slow return to the idea of the sacredness of their last resting-place, as Christianity reasserted itself as a doctrine of consolation.⁴⁴ Though the nature of death was different, both the French Revolution and fascism practiced a cult of death in order to legitimize their revolution through its martyrs, to justify the call for sacrifice now or in the future, and perhaps also because they were under the spell of the apocalyptic vision that the scourges of God had to be overcome before time could be abolished. What Ernst Bloch called the "hidden revolution" was never far below the surface even of those revolutions which rejected it.⁴⁵

The cult of youth is easier to analyze: both revolutions sought to present themselves as youth movements filled with energy, resolve, and beauty. Yet, here also, there were important differences in practice and theory. Fascist movements were youth movements in fact and in theory, but the militants of the French Revolution were often family men, settled in life.⁴⁶ To be sure, young men went off to war, giving rise to songs and poems which extolled their youthful qualities as soldiers of the Revolution. Though the Marseillaise called all citizens to arms, according to the third verse it was "our young heroes" who fell in battle, while the earth stamped out new heroes to take their place. Fascist worship of youth hardly needs underlining. It is documented by the statues surrounding the Forum Mussolini in Rome, or the figures crowning the Führer's rostrum at the Nuremberg party rallies, showing a Goddess of Victory flanked by three figures of naked youths. But here, again, the connection is indirect, indeed even less certain than in the case of the cult of death. The cult of youth was a product of war, not of the French Revolution, while its revival at the *fin de siècle* directly influenced fascism.

It is easier to find general rather than specific links between fascism and the French Revolution and I have tried to sketch some of them here. If they are to be summarized, it might be simplest to state that the French Revolution marked the beginning of a democratization of politics that climaxed in twentieth-century fascism. I have attempted to analyze the legacy of the French Revolution as it applied to both National Socialism and Italian fascism. But this legacy differed, just as the two fascisms were different in many respects. National Socialism was the true inheritor of the aesthetics of politics. Though Mussolini also made use of the new mass politics, his dictatorship was more personal than that of Hitler, who tended to cast his power in symbolic form. But Italian fascism forged its own link to the Revolution, absent in Germany. The French Revolution had regarded itself as a new departure, creating a nation of brothers, while some of its radicals had talked about creating a new man. That was precisely what Mussolini had in mind: that fascism should create a new type of man,

no longer a product of the present order.⁴⁷ He never told us exactly what this new man should look like or how he should behave, though this can be inferred from the new fascist style. The new man proclaimed that fascism must pass beyond the present into a yet uncharted future.

This seems one reason why some Italian fascists did not stop at the usual condemnation of the French Revolution, but called upon fascism to surpass it with a new kind of democracy to be run by producers. The fascist ideal of the new man inherits from the hated Enlightenment the concept that a new man can be created through education and experience.⁴⁸ The Nazis, and especially the SS, also envisaged a new man, but he was to exemplify ancient Germanic virtues, a man from the past unspoilt by the present. The primacy of historical myth in National Socialism could not tolerate a revolutionary concept of man. Their different concepts of a new man was the nearest both Italian fascism and National Socialism came to providing an official guide to utopia. But here, once more, differences between the two fascisms affected their view of the French Revolution. Mussolini, at least nominally, was opposed to utopias, to concepts standing outside history, and in his article on fascism in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* he linked the idea of utopia to Jacobin innovations based upon evil and abstract principles. Fascism was supposed to be a realistic doctrine which wanted to solve problems arising from historical development. For all that, the new man could not be allowed to exist outside the fascist state, but was an integral part of this state on the road to utopia. In spite of the repeated attacks upon utopianism, the fascist state itself tended to become a Republic of Virtue.⁴⁹

The French Revolution was condemned, not only for its utopianism and materialism, but also for its passion for absolutes, as Jacobin thought was characterized by another article in the *Enciclopedia*⁵⁰—surely an odd condemnation from a movement which believed in absolutes, from the myths and symbols of the nation to the infallibility of the Duce. The Jacobins were also attacked by Italian fascists for being too rigid and formalistic, but even this attack focused upon their

love for absolutes. This meant, for one historian writing in the *Enciclopedia*, the attempt to purify France through the shedding of blood on behalf of abstract principles, such as the Supreme Being or the Republic of Virtue.⁵¹ Once more, fascism itself was mirrored in this condemnation—it, too, wanted to enforce public virtue and was not averse to the shedding of blood, if not on behalf of the Republic of Virtue, then on behalf of a virtuous Nation.

Were such accusations due to the fact that fascism could not see the mote in its own eye, or do we see one revolution attacking a rival? While the first hypothesis was certainly true, the latter was of greater consequence. Hitler, as we have seen, constructed his own model of revolution, quite different from that of France; Mussolini, too, claimed originality for his revolution, which wanted to create a new man and a new nation through its own momentum, based upon its peculiar mixture of left- and right-wing doctrine. Perhaps because of the liberal tradition of the Risorgimento, and the syndicalists and futurists who joined with fascism, Mussolini's revolution was closer to the French model than that proclaimed by Nazi Germany. The Nazi condemnation of the French Revolution was on the whole straightforward: it was liberal and materialist, the work of Jews and Masons.

But what did French fascists themselves make of their own national revolution? Many of them had passed through the Action Française, with its exaltation of the *ancien régime* and hatred for the Revolution that had so wantonly destroyed it. We cannot describe here the attitudes of each French fascist movement to the Revolution; in any case, this would mean telling a repetitive tale accusing the Revolution of having begun a process which culminated in the corrupt Third Republic. Nevertheless, we can find ambivalent attitudes toward the Revolution on the part of some French fascists, different from those in Italy or Germany. George Valois, one of the founders of French fascism, saw the French Revolution as the beginning of a movement, both socialist and nationalist, which the fascists would complete.⁵² Unlike George Valois, who never ceased to flirt with the left, the young fascist intellectuals who edited the journal *Je Suis Partout* in the

1930s and 1940s did not find their roots in the French Revolution, but were ambivalent about its heritage. This *équipe* reveled in their youth, worshiped energy, and cultivated an outrageous polemical style directed against republican France. *Je Suis Partout* published a special issue on the French Revolution in 1939, dedicated to those who had fought against the Revolution, especially the peasants of the Vendée, who were said to have sacrificed their lives for the truth, and to Charlotte Corday, who had assassinated Marat.⁵³ There was nothing ambivalent here, nor about the headline claiming war and inflation to be the driving forces behind the Revolution. The Revolution, so we hear, had opened the door to speculators long before present deputies had demonstrated once more the link between corruption and republican parliaments. And yet there was a certain admiration for Robespierre, “genie inhumain et abstrait,” himself unique in his incorruptibility.⁵⁴

However, once more Robespierre, the Jacobin, is condemned for his passion for absolutes, his “religious passions”—and this from Robert Brasillach, the leader of this *équipe*, who could be said to exemplify just such a passion.⁵⁵ Brasillach, as one of his contemporaries put it, was himself a sentimental romantic, who was attracted to the aesthetic of politics, greatly admiring the Nuremberg party rallies.⁵⁶ This did not prevent him during the Second World War from accusing the Gaullists of possessing the religious spirit of a militant Robespierism, which left no room for open-eyed realism.⁵⁷ These strictures were echoes of Mussolini’s criticism of the Revolution, and in this case what we have called the mirror effect was present as well: the Revolution was accused of attitudes, many of which were, in fact, shared by fascists. Brasillach and his friends had broken with the Action Française precisely because it was too sober and stodgy, not passionate enough, and because it looked to the *ancien régime* rather than to a future revolution. Their revolution meant hatred for capitalism, Jews, and parliamentary democracy, a love of youth, and a fascination with violence.

Speaking about the French Revolution, Brasillach exclaimed that it had set the world on fire and that it had been a beautiful conflagration.⁵⁸ Revolution itself was praised, even if its content was denied. Similarly, Drieu La Rochelle praised the truly virile republicanism manifested by Jacobin authoritarians during the French Revolution.⁵⁹ For these young fascists the French Revolution served as an example of how to bring down the old order, manifesting the beauty of violence and of manliness. But even here they were not consistent. Thus, in the special number of *Je Suis Partout* on the Revolution, Brasillach condemned the Jacobin Terror and called for a general reconciliation—with the Vichy government in mind.⁶⁰ There was always the pull of conservative attitudes toward the Revolution, and it was the historian Pierre Gaxotte of the Action Française who wrote the leading article, claiming war and inflation to be the motors of the Revolution, in the special issue of *Je Suis Partout*. There, he roundly condemned all revolution: a revolution without the guillotine, without looting and denunciation, without dictatorship and prisons, was said to be an impossibility.⁶¹ And this was written in a journal of which Robert Brasillach was the driving force.

The Jacobin lurked close to the surface among these French fascists and, as in the case of Mussolini, mirrored some of their own commitments and practices. The “abstract” was rejected in favor of a greater realism, but what was more abstract than a national mystique which demanded unquestioning loyalty, or a view of men and women through their stereotypes? For was not the so-called new man, after all, an ideal type?

The Jacobin Terror was at least momentarily rehabilitated by Marcel Déat’s Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) when, as the Germans occupied all of France, the collaborationists wanted to show themselves worthy of being trusted by the Nazis. Now a leader of the RNP wrote that, as in Robespierre’s time, terror must be the order of the day. The sworn enemies of the national revolution should pay with their lives for treason or resistance.⁶² But such praise for the

Terror merely grasped a convenient precedent and hardly touched upon the influence the French Revolution itself may have had upon Marcel Déat and his political party.

The rejection of the French Revolution as a model for change was general among fascists, although, as we have seen, this was graduated in the Latin nations rather than one-dimensional as in Germany. But, when all is said and done, the most important influence exercised by the Revolution upon fascism was its inauguration of a new kind of politics designed to mobilize the masses and to integrate them into a political system—through rites and ceremonies in which they could participate, and through an aesthetic of politics which appealed to the longing for community and comradeship in an industrial age. As Adolf Hitler put it, when a man leaves his small workshop, or the big factory where he feels small, and enters a mass meeting where he is surrounded by thousands of people who share his convictions, he becomes convinced of the righteousness of the cause, gaining personal strength through fighting within an all-encompassing confraternity.⁶³ This was a language the members of the Committee of Public Safety might have understood.

Tracing the connection between the French Revolution and fascism means emphasizing degrees of difference, nuances, and inferences. No body of research exists that might encourage more authoritative statements about the link between the two movements, starting with the influence of the Revolution upon important fascist leaders. We would also have to know what, if anything, those who organized fascist rites and ceremonials actually borrowed from the Jacobins: only in the case of Nazi Germany can it be said with some certainty that the earlier movement provided little or no detailed inspiration. For all that, important connections existed, and even the manner in which fascist movements rejected the French Revolution can cast some light upon fascism itself. In the last resort, the political culture of fascism was indebted to the French Revolution in general, as the first modern movement to make use of a new kind of politics in order

to mobilize the masses and to end the alienation of man from his society and his nation.

Every fascism had its own character, and Italian fascism received much of its dynamic and sometimes revolutionary fervor not from the distant past, but more directly from the Futurist movement that was at one and the same time artistic, revolutionary, and political.