

ship was reminiscent of the popular excesses of medieval Christianity. In 1933, for example, the City of Düsseldorf created a veritable cult of relics around Albert Leo Schlageter, who had been executed for supposed sabotage by the French during their occupation of the Ruhr Valley. The bed in which he had slept was reconstructed and Hitler was presented with a silver reliquary which contained the bullet said to have pierced his heart.<sup>69</sup> The veneration of relics was not to last, however, for the ever-present "flag of martyrs" offered a more acceptable symbol.

But even the "hours of worship" became ever more elaborate in their symbolism, at times reaching an exaggerated form similar to the worship of relics. The Nazi substitute for baptism, "consecrating the name," was held in a special room in the center of which stood an altar. Hitler's picture replaced that of Christ on the altar, and three SS men stood behind it, symbolizing by their very presence the new type of man the régime was supposed to produce. The altar was flanked by vessels holding fires and "trees of life."<sup>70</sup> This ceremony summarizes much of the symbolism whose development we have covered—the ideal type of beauty objectified in the human form, the sacred flame, and the symbol of the tree.<sup>71</sup> Hitler's picture was an integral part of this symbolism, as was his person throughout the Third Reich. Only a reliquary is missing to complete the analogy between the Christian and the secular religion. The ceremony shows how far the party had moved from earlier times when, at some meetings, a simple band playing marches had sufficed to keep the crowd in the proper mood.

The rhythm of national worship served to define politics as a democratic faith meant to penetrate all human activity. Hitler's taste not only heightened every aspect of the national cult; it also, through his conservatism, integrated itself with this historical development as it had grown for nearly a century before his birth.

## The Political Cult

IT WAS Hitler's strongest belief that the education of the masses to nationalism could only take place through "social uplift," meaning that the people would partake of the cultural benefits of the nation, and that a new human type would be created through the correct cultural environment based upon the Aryan race.<sup>1</sup> The political cult exemplified this environment, and called itself the true self-representation of the people. But the Nazi mass meetings as we see them in films or pictures today have lost their force: the flames on the sides of the Nuremberg stadium, the huge overwhelming flags, the marches and speaking choruses, present a spectacle to modern audiences not unlike those American musicals of the 1920's and 1930's which Hitler himself was so fond of watching each evening. It was not always so. For participants, it was the symbolic content which took priority, the ritual expression of a shared worship that was so crucial to their sense of belonging. A written description or even a view of these ceremonials cannot capture the uplift which came from actual participation. Mass ceremonial, public festivals, and the "hours of worship" provided by the party were the concise realization of a new political religion.

This "new" politics, as we have called it, did adapt much of the traditional Christian liturgy, and it also went back into pagan times for some of its associations. Moreover, classical influence was of crucial importance; indeed, the ideals of beauty and form were dominated by it.

We return again to the Christian liturgical forms—of prime importance in determining the whole secular cult—for the concept and use of space. The idea of the “sacred space,” a place which could be filled only with symbolic activity, dates back to primitive times and pagan worship, later taken over by Christians. Such space was considered, throughout history, as a necessary prerequisite to liturgical action. The new politics can be regarded as one successful way in which this sacred space was filled: with parades, marches, gymnastic exercises, and dances, as well as ritual speeches. Adopted and used in Germany from the celebration of the Battle of Leipzig in 1815 to the Nuremberg party rallies, this kind of space had to be clearly defined and distinct from its surroundings. The attempt to provide this runs from the “festival meadow” on which the gymnasts first performed outside Berlin, through the siting of national monuments, to Hitler’s Great Hall (Plate 19). Whatever the change in content or differing conceptions of politics, we are confronted with a consistent development of the whole nationalist liturgy which makes the new politics basic to modern history.

But the form and content of the new politics only partially explain its success. The longing for national unity, for the kind of community this politics represented, was linked to the social factors of the age. Too little is known about them. However, it seems clear that the perimeter of the new politics cannot be confined to those fringe classes which at the grass-roots level are sometimes said to provide the dynamic of the European right: marginal farmers, small shopkeepers, self-employed artisans, underemployed professionals, white-collar workers, and underpaid civil servants. Nor was it limited to those who depended for survival and advancement upon government subsidies, tariffs, and contracts.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the formation of a right transcended these classes in most parts of Europe. France, for example, contained at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a large working-class movement which was directed by the political right.<sup>3</sup> We

cannot accept the presupposition that the very alienation of the proletariat kept it from meaningful involvement with the counterrevolution. From this point of view, a great many European workers showed a misguided consciousness. The dynamics of the right were never as marginal as those classes upon which it was wrongly said to be based.

We have shown that the workers were also drawn into the new politics; that these politics were in fact largely (but not always) cross-class, and the ideal of national unification was spread downward, the lower classes being drawn into it, for example, through their sports organizations and male choirs. Just how many were drawn in is impossible to say. We do know that their numbers were not small, though they did not encompass the majority of the working class. Eventually, to be sure, workers were underrepresented in the Nazi Party. In 1930 they comprised some 21 per cent of the membership.<sup>4</sup> But of greater significance than electoral statistics is the fact that toward the end of the Weimar Republic the Socialist parties themselves were forced to take the nationalist atmosphere into account.

The Communists now actively competed with the right for nationalist votes, and even the Social Democratic Party saw itself forced to make concessions to the prevailing nationalist and anti-Semitic atmosphere. The key factor in this situation was the ability of the National Socialists to force even their enemies to argue from within a framework which they themselves had created.<sup>5</sup> That the Nazis so successfully defined the terrain of political debate shows not only their own success in making themselves felt but also the magnetism of a nationalist appeal. Surely, the tradition behind the new politics had contributed to this depth; we have seen how in their own ceremonial the workers, in 1925, anchored the Republic which they supported in the blond Germanic past.

For all that, we can still hold that the masses “remained mute, uncomprehending witnesses to the great achievements of the age of élite politics,”<sup>6</sup> especially during the process of

German unification. Such a statement, however, need not imply a denial that the new politics provided a meaningful involvement for many of these "mute" masses. They did not affect the immediate course of German politics; that was directed by men like Bismarck or Hitler. But they also simply could not be ignored. As such, the new politics did crystallize what is sometimes vaguely called public opinion, usually conveyed only through discussion of what the newspapers printed, though these of course were always controlled by individuals or small groups. Through the new politics many people were formed in this way into an organized political force which certainly expressed their shared longings for order, happiness, and national unity.

In the search for social origins we must not forget the attraction of the spiritual dimension. Men's isolation was heightened by industrial society, but this did not mean that its outlets had to be logically determined by the social and economic factors which produced it. The formalization of emotions was as important for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it was for the fifteenth century when, according to Huizinga, "having attributed a real existence to an idea the mind wants to see it alive, and can effect this only by personalizing it."<sup>7</sup> Throughout history, the mere presence of a visible image of things holy has served to establish its truth to believers. The apparently cross-class attraction of the new politics, though it varied in content, might be explained by such permanent and timeless longings. "Mythical symbolism leads to an objectification of feelings; myth objectifies and organizes human hopes and fears and metamorphoses them into persistent and durable works."<sup>8</sup>

Such works were the essence of the new political style. Anthropology can be useful here; in a sense, national monuments were the totem poles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Claude Lévi-Strauss was no doubt correct when he asserted that the great manifestations of society originate at the level of unconscious existence.<sup>9</sup> Men do form such mani-

festations—which are themselves only a further, though physical, abstraction of an idea—into a system which explains the world and promises to solve its dilemmas. Form is imposed upon and informs content. Myth and symbol become an explanation for social life, a fact which functionally does not, however, rob life itself of importance. The "objective reality," as Marx would have called it, provides the setting and defines the limitations within which myth and symbols can operate. The actual political situation of Germany was in fact crucial in determining the content of myth and symbol and its linkage to nationalism. The workers' movement, while accepting much of the form of the new politics and even some of the nationalism involved, infused it with concepts of freedom which were directly relevant to the condition of the proletariat.

But in spite of the changing content, the form and the basic presuppositions remained intact: the longing for a healthy and happy world, and for a true community exemplified by the aesthetics of politics in which all could join. What Lévi-Strauss calls the "cosmic rhythm," which possesses mankind from the earliest times onward,<sup>10</sup> we would define in a more pedestrian manner as the desire for permanence and fixed reference points in a changing world.

In the age of growing mass movements, the new politics became one way of organizing the masses, of turning a chaotic crowd into a mass movement. This was not just a movement of protest reacting to specific grievances, such as the bread and food riots during the French Revolution—though some of these did become political demonstrations with far-reaching aims<sup>11</sup>—but was rather a form of mass politics which appealed to more permanent longings, and which tried to hypostatize these through myth, symbol, and aesthetic politics. The new political style attempted to take the place of mediating institutions such as representative parliamentary government which link governors and governed.

It is no coincidence that Benito Mussolini spoke of the

myths and rites which every revolution needs, and in the same breath likened the crowd to a herd of sheep until it is organized.<sup>12</sup> But this urge to organize the crowd was a product not only of the reality of mass politics, but also of a preoccupation with history. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and many others believed that festivals must be spontaneous and not enforced, by which they meant that they must be connected to history and tradition, necessary for expressing permanent and timeless desires in an equally eternal symbolic form. Why did this preoccupation with the historical dimension become so urgent just at the beginning of the nineteenth century?

X Time does not move with the same speed in every epoch of history. It speeds up with the improvement of communications and the faster pace of life in an industrializing world. This was the case at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We all have a vague notion that time passes quicker in the city than in the "restful" countryside. How can such a step-up of time avoid chaos? How can permanent forms of art and beauty survive? Goethe considered this problem in the preface to his *Faust*. How can true and lasting poetry, indeed the human imagination, survive when an audience comes into the theatre fresh from reading the fleeting news of the day in their newspapers? Men hurry about absentmindedly; there is no longer any time for concentrated thought.<sup>13</sup> What Goethe castigated between 1790 and 1808 was the new rate of time, of which the newspaper became the symbol throughout the nineteenth century. Those who looked for roots and permanence condemned the newspaper as an evil force opposed to true culture.

Calling to history was one way of organizing time, of coping with its speed. Thus the emphasis upon history was not only necessary for myth and symbol, but also served to preserve order within an ever faster flow of time. The Greek ideal of beauty which Winckelmann had put forward, embedded in history as it was, exemplified the noble simplicity and quiet greatness which contrasted so sharply with the

speed and unrest of the present. The new politics reflected the age of mass politics, the new preoccupation with history and with time.

But we must keep our perspective here as well. The age which witnessed the development of the new politics also believed in representative government. Benedetto Croce, as late as 1931, saw the nineteenth century as the great liberal age, and the very period when the new political style received its first trials (1815-30) as the victory of parliamentary government over absolutism.<sup>14</sup> This is, no doubt, how many perceived the age in which they lived.

Moreover, not all Germans desired national unity. There was a considerable body of opinion which believed in the sovereign existence of each separate German state and which condemned the Prussian efforts at national unity. Such men and women have also stood outside the scope of our analysis. German history as a whole cannot be viewed as taken up solely with the quest for national unity; many liberals, conservatives, and even Socialists were preoccupied with other concerns—the economy, social structure, or regional independence. We have here been concerned with only one strand in the history of modern Germany, something which should have been obvious all along but which needs restating because of a tendency to make "absolute" claims by those who attempt to investigate the origins of things.

Liberals, Socialists, Positivists, all had different perceptions of the politics of their time. The perception within the reality which has concerned us seems especially important because of its association with nationalism, mass movements, and eventually National Socialism. The men and movements we have analyzed placed themselves in this nationalist context, regardless of what their social base might have been. Historians have been told lately that they should show less concern with culture and more with the economic aims of individual groups and the actual demands and achievements of movements like nationalism.<sup>15</sup> This is a legitimate approach. But as we hope to

have shown, the reality of nationalism and of National Socialism represented itself to many, perhaps most people, through a highly stylized politics, and in this way managed to form them into a movement.

It must also be remembered that cultural experience was a political reality in Central Europe. Hegel's assertion that the universal spirit constitutes the culture of a nation<sup>16</sup> stands within a specific tradition not shared widely in England or in the United States. The spirit, he said, forms the culture, and culture forms the nation. No doubt in Germany this thought reflects the depth of the Pietistic tradition to which we have referred so often, that the "fatherland is within you." This assertion was put forward by men like Arndt and Jahn at the beginning of the nineteenth century and repeated by the playwright Hanns Johst, in his evolution toward National Socialism (1922): "Germany? . . . No one knows where it begins, where it ends. It has no border, O Lord, in this world . . . it exists in one's heart . . . or it will never be found anywhere."<sup>17</sup> Robert Minder has defined this as the German penchant to look behind the scenery and not to appear in front of the curtain.<sup>18</sup> And the Nazi leaders (and Hitler) understood that only through such an attitude could ideas of beauty and of the soul lead to political objectification.

We have been concerned with a cultural phenomenon which cannot be subsumed under the traditional canons of political theory. For it was not constructed as a logical or coherent system that could be understood through a rational analysis of philosophical writings. The phenomenon which has been our concern was a secular religion, the continuation from primitive and Christian times of viewing the world through myth and symbol, acting out one's hopes and fears within ceremonial and liturgical forms.

The new politics filled Germany with national monuments and public festivals, the objectifications of conscious and unconscious wishes in which millions found a home. Again, we are not claiming that the Third Reich could have succeeded

without tangible results in ending unemployment and in foreign policy. The liturgy is one crucial factor among others, though in this case, one which can help us see Nazi politics as it saw itself. Whether a liturgy can be regarded as still more basic than social forces depends upon our view of human nature. A belief in man's inherent goodness and rationality, for instance, would view the new politics as mere propaganda and manipulation.

We have tried to demonstrate that certain very profound currents informed the concept of politics in which so many saw an expression of true democracy. Whether many people in and outside Germany continued to attempt this after the end of the Second World War is difficult to ascertain.<sup>19</sup>

To be sure, many of the national monuments and festivals we have discussed eventually lost their appeal. It is doubtful whether most men still associate timeless beauty with any of the national monuments they may visit. We no longer share many of their political and even aesthetic presuppositions. Particular manifestations of the new politics seem to us time-bound and out of date.

Despite all of these facts, however, large numbers of people today may still share those basic longings for wholeness and the need to objectify which seem an integral part of humanity. There is, even in our own time, a longing for the totality of life which is closely related to myth and symbol. Politics and life must penetrate each other, and this means that all forms of life become politicized. Literature, art, architecture, and even our environment are seen as symbolic of political attitudes. At times when parliamentary government does not seem to be working well, men are apt to return to the idea of culture as a totality which encompasses politics. Under such circumstances, men do not mind that the pressure of the world may grow heavy upon the literary imagination,<sup>20</sup> stifling artistic creativity and transforming it into political documentation. But what is often condemned as the politicization of all aspects of life is in reality a deep stream of history,

which has always condemned pluralism, the division of politics from other aspects of life. When representative government, which symbolizes this division, threatens to break down, men again wish for a fully furnished home where what is beautiful and gives pleasure should not be separated from the useful and the necessary.<sup>21</sup> However removed from a true humanism, the new politics provided one such home.

Past history is always contemporary. The grand spectacle which we have analyzed is not so far removed from our own dilemmas. This book deals with a past which, for most men, seemed to have ended with the Second World War. In reality it is still contemporary history.

## Notes