

11. The *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* at Leipzig (architect, Bruno Schmitz): *Monumente und Standbilder Europas* (Berlin, 1914)
12. The Tannenberg Memorial (architects, Walter and Johannes Krüger): Preussisches Archiv-Deutscher Kulturbesitz, Göttingen
13. *Thing* Theatre above Heidelberg: photograph by Bruce Finlayson
14. The Sharpshooters' Festival in Munich, 1863: Stadtarchiv, Munich
15. The Munich Workers' Gymnastic Society in 1905: Stadtarchiv, Munich
16. Festival of May 1, 1933, on the Tempelhof Airfield, Berlin, staged by Albert Speer: Rudolf Wolters, *Albert Speer* (Oldenburg, 1943)
17. Hitler Addressing a Party Day Rally at Nuremberg in 1935: Leni Riefenstahl, *Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag Films* (Munich, 1935)
18. Model of the interior of Hitler's Great Hall (architect, Albert Speer): Speer Archiv
19. Model of the Great Hall, centerpiece of Hitler's projected rebuilding of Berlin (architect, Albert Speer): Speer Archiv

THE  
NATIONALIZATION  
OF THE MASSES

## The New Politics

SITTING IN his imposing office in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, Benito Mussolini, now eight years in power, contemplated the nature of his revolution: each revolution created new political forms, new myths and cults; it was necessary now to use old traditions and to adapt them to a new purpose. Festivals, gestures, and forms had to be newly created which, in turn, would themselves become traditional.<sup>1</sup> Karlheinz Schmeer has told us only recently that the invention of a new political style was the chief innovation of National Socialism; political acts became the dramatization of the new myths and cults.<sup>2</sup> We are still familiar with the huge mass meetings, the serried ranks, and the colorful flags so typical of European fascism. Though many of the sites where they took place were destroyed by the Second World War, enough fascist architecture remains intact to give us a feeling of the political style they symbolized.

Yet this political style was not new, and Mussolini was quite correct when he talked of adapting old traditions to new purposes. For what we call the fascist style was in reality the climax of a "new politics" based upon the emerging eighteenth-century idea of popular sovereignty. A common substance of citizenship was said to exist, of which all could partake. No longer would royal or princely dynasties take the place of popular self-expression. This concept of popular sovereignty was given precision by the "general will," as Rousseau had expressed it, by the belief that only when all are

acting together as an assembled people does man's nature as a citizen come into active existence.<sup>3</sup> The general will became a secular religion, the people worshipping themselves, and the new politics sought to guide and formalize this worship. The unity of the people was not merely cemented by the idea of common citizenship; rather, a newly awakened national consciousness performed this function. This national consciousness had grown up alongside the ideal of popular sovereignty in many European nations. The nation in the eighteenth century was now said to be based upon the people themselves, on their general will, and was no longer symbolized solely by allegiance to established royal dynasties. The worship of the people thus became the worship of the nation, and the new politics sought to express this unity through the creation of a political style which became, in reality, a secularized religion.

How was this done? From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, through the use of national myths and symbols and the development of a liturgy which would enable the people themselves to participate in such worship. The concept of the general will lent itself to the creation of myths and their symbols. The new politics attempted to draw the people into active participation in the national mystique through rites and festivals, myths and symbols which gave a concrete expression to the general will. The chaotic crowd of the "people" became a mass movement which shared a belief in popular unity through a national mystique. The new politics provided an objectification of the general will; it transformed political action into a drama supposedly shared by the people themselves.

Parliamentary, representative government seemed to many men to contradict the concept of the general will, atomizing men and politics rather than creating unity. But the new politics was, from the beginning, part of the anti-parliamentary movement in Europe, advocating a secular religion as the political cement of the nation. Historians have stressed parliamentarianism as being decisive in the political formation of

that age, the most important development of the past as well as the great hope for the future. As a result of the domination of this point of view, the study of the growth of a new political style connected with nationalism, mass movements, and mass politics has been neglected, not only so far as the nineteenth century is concerned but also as a necessary background to fascism.

Theories about fascism itself have tended to ignore the importance of those myths and cults which eventually provided the essence of fascist politics. For those who thought of themselves as liberals or as belonging to the left, fascism often presented an aberration of history, an "occupation" of the country by a barbaric minority. The people were held captive and when left to determine their own destiny would return either to a renewed liberalism or to Socialist ideals. Such a concept of fascism was particularly widespread among those forced to emigrate as opponents of the fascist régimes.<sup>4</sup> But despite the fact that some who fervently held such views in the past changed their mind,<sup>5</sup> this concept of fascism is still widespread. Even a more sophisticated recent historian of the movement, like Ernst Nolte, believes that the bourgeoisie turned to fascism only during a crisis, returning to their traditional liberalism once the crisis had run its course.<sup>6</sup>

Fascism as an actual historical movement was the product of the First World War, and this fact has been used either to deny or to underestimate its connections with a prewar past. Without the war and the peace that followed, there would have been no fascist movement and therefore, so it is argued, the prewar period did not really matter very much. Fascism thus becomes closely linked to its "epoch": the Europe between the wars. This point of view is not meant to provide an apologia for fascism, but it does endow the movement with a certain uniqueness and views it as an immediate response to a particular historical situation.

There is a large measure of truth to such an analysis, for the collapse of Europe after the war was an essential ingredient of

fascism and provided much of its popular appeal. Yet, all these historians ignore fascism as a mass movement, and also mass democracy, both of which developments had a long history before Nazis and other fascists made good use of them. Indeed, the concept of totalitarianism has been misleading in this connection. For this implies terror over the population (a new version of the older occupation theory) and a confrontation of leader and people. It is based upon the presupposition that only representative government can be democratic, a historical fallacy which not only nineteenth-century mass politics but even the Greek polity should have laid to rest. For it was precisely the myths and cults of the earlier mass movements which gave fascism a base from which to work and which enabled it to present an alternative to parliamentary democracy. Millions saw in the traditions of which Mussolini spoke an expression of political participation more vital and meaningful than the "bourgeois" idea of parliamentary democracy. This could happen only because of a long previous tradition, exemplified not only by nationalist mass movements but by the workers' mass movements as well.

Though the new politics touched all of Europe, we are concerned with its growth and effect upon Germany. Within this disunited nation, the exaltation of the general will as the supreme good was stimulated by two factors once the nineteenth century opened: by the rise of nationalism, which based itself upon the Volk as an entity held together by its historical myths and symbols; and by the rise of mass movements and mass politics. Such mass movements demanded a new political style which would transform the crowd into a coherent political force, and nationalism in its use of the new politics provided the cult and liturgy which could accomplish this purpose.

The rise of nationalism and of mass democracy, the two factors which stimulated the worship of the people as a secular religion, joined hands in Germany during the nineteenth century. Nationalism defined itself as a movement of the people

as it succeeded in obtaining a mass base. The masses which concern us cannot be equated with a mob. Contemporaries who witnessed the rise of nationalist mass movements by the middle of the nineteenth century believed that the mob was taking over the politics of their time. The liberal German historian Georg Gottfried Gervinus wrote with icy disapproval that the political movements of his age were supported by the instinct of the masses. At roughly the same time, in France, Comte Arthur de Gobineau attempted to analyze his own civilization, and recoiled in horror from the confrontation of élite and mass which he saw taking place everywhere.<sup>7</sup> The liberal and the conservative agreed on this point.

The word "mob" is usually used for men and women who stand outside society, or for those who through chaotic violence try to change it. Gobineau and many of his contemporaries perceived the masses in this way. George Rudé has attempted to show that mobs in the eighteenth century did have a purpose which informed their action, even if this purpose was not always rationally expressed.<sup>8</sup> The German masses with whom we are presently concerned also constituted a movement with definite goals and presuppositions. To be sure, at times such a movement lasted only for a few years or even days, but despite this, the masses always reconstituted themselves within a definite framework and according to lasting goals. Many people drifted in and out of the festivals and rituals of the nationalist movement, but its framework remained intact.

This movement had taken on the form of a secular religion long before the First World War. While mass movements and mass democracy were opposed to representative institutions as the mediating element between government and governed, they could not, in fact, dispense with such devices. "Totalitarianism" was never a system of government in which a charismatic leader beguiled his followers like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. To be sure, the official party of the one-party state could and did act as mediator between leader and followers.

But this was never satisfactory enough. New and different institutions came to the fore as part of a secular religion which bound leader and people together, while at the same time providing an instrument of social control over the masses. The secular religion which grew up in the nineteenth century has often been analyzed in terms of men and movements whose influence was confined to an intellectual élite: for example, Saint Simonism (influential in France and Germany). Our concern must be that secular and nationalist religion which became operative in German political life as part of mass movements, and which accompanied the entrance of the masses of the German population into the politics of their time.

This religion relied upon a variety of myths and symbols which were based on the longing to escape from the consequences of industrialization. The atomization of traditional world views and the destruction of traditional and personal bonds were penetrating into the consciousness of a large element of the population. The myths, which formed the basis of the new national consciousness whether of a Germanic or classical past, stood outside the present flow of history. They were meant to make the world whole again and to restore a sense of community to the fragmented nation. The "longing for myth" in Germany was noticed by many contemporaries from the French Revolution to the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Its roots lay deeply embedded in history. We shall illustrate once again those characteristics which Huizinga thought were typical of the fifteenth century: "having once attributed a real existence to an idea, the mind wants to see it alive and can effect this only by personalizing it."<sup>10</sup> If, in that bygone age, "the mere presence of a visible image of things holy sufficed to establish their truth,"<sup>11</sup> this would remain the appeal of modern German national symbolism as well. Such myths had ties with religious and Christian world views, but they became secularized both through the heathen past to which they re-

ferred and through the instant happiness they promised to those who accepted them.

These myths did not stand in isolation, but were made operative through the use of symbols. Symbols were visible, concrete objectifications of the myths in which people could participate. "The community lays hold of some part of its world, apprehends the totality in it, and derives from it and through it that totality and its content."<sup>12</sup> This world view expressed in a specific way the mythology of a people; a mythology which, as Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling put it in 1802-3, was the "universe in a festive garb, in its primeval state, the true universe itself . . . already become poetry." Symbolism was the only adequate way to express this universe, and such symbolism must incorporate the aesthetic and artistic, for not only was this universe poetic, it was also the very font of creativity.<sup>13</sup>

The urge toward symbols which Schelling exemplified was typical of German romanticism. Symbols, the objectification of popular myths, give a people their identity. Gershom Scholem has told us how the Star of David as a Jewish symbol became disseminated only in the nineteenth century. He is, no doubt, correct when he explains this new urge as the search for identification with a Judaism which, after emancipation in the early nineteenth century, had become merely an "Israelite persuasion." The "Symbol of Judaism" must match the "Symbol of Christianity."<sup>14</sup> But Jews may have felt the same urge for symbolism as the Romantic movement did. They reflected, at times, the culture in which they lived. Nationalism, which at its beginning coincided with romanticism, made symbols the essence of its style of politics. These had always played a cardinal role in Christianity and now in a secularized form they become part and parcel of German national worship.

Public festivals had become cultic rites during the French Revolution and this tradition foreshadowed German concern

with the new politics a few decades later. Various groups within Germany created their own festive and liturgical forms within a political context; the most important of these, the male choir societies, the sharpshooting societies, and the gymnasts, were to add significant elements to the new politics. These groups, important and widespread in Germany, provided the pillars for the most significant early public festivals. And permanent symbols helped to condition the population to the new politics: not only holy flames, flags, and songs but, above all, national monuments in stone and mortar. The national monument as a means of self-expression served to anchor the national myths and symbols in the consciousness of the people, and some have retained their effectiveness to the present day.

These were tangible expressions of a new political style. But "style" in this context denotes more than a political device destined to replace the liberal concept of parliamentary government or to illustrate the reality of myth. Such "style" was based upon artistic presuppositions, on an aesthetic essential to the unity of the symbolism. Friedrich Nietzsche aptly described what was involved here:

X To think objectively . . . of history is the work of the dramatist: to think one thing with another and weave the elements into a single whole, with the presumption that the unity of plan must be put into the objects if it be not already there. So man veils and subdues the past, and expresses his impulse to art—but not his impulse to truth and justice.<sup>25</sup>

This veiling and subduing of the past was accomplished through myth and symbol, and the artistic thus became essential to such a view of the world. So did the dramatic, which will preoccupy us constantly throughout this study, for the idea of the new politics was to transform political action into a drama.

Aesthetic criteria not only informed the festivals already mentioned, but also determined the form and structure of national monuments. The direct involvement of masses of

people forced politics to become a drama based upon myths and their symbols, a drama that was given coherence by means of a predetermined ideal of beauty. Political acts were often described as particularly effective because they were beautiful, and this whether German nationalists were describing their festivals and monuments, or German workers were talking about their own May Day parades.

The religious tradition played a large role here, the idea that acts of devotion must take place within a "beautiful" context. Here we are close to the theatrical and dramatic tradition of the Baroque as exemplified by the Baroque churches, though this tradition was rejected by nineteenth-century nationalists as frivolous. For the beauty which unified politics could not be playful; it had to symbolize order, hierarchy, and the restoration of a "world made whole again."

These, then, were the traditions which National Socialism eventually adopted and, in fact, changed but little in practice. As a mass movement, National Socialism successfully adapted a tradition which had presented an alternative to parliamentary democracy for over a century before the fascist movements themselves became a political reality.

X Fascist and National Socialist political thought cannot be judged in terms of traditional political theory. It has little in common with rational, logically constructed systems such as those of Hegel or Marx. This fact has bothered many commentators who have looked at fascist political thought and condemned its vagueness and ambiguities. But the fascists themselves described their political thought as an "attitude" rather than a system; it was, in fact, a theology which provided the framework for national worship. As such, its rites and liturgies were central, an integral part of a political theory which was not dependent on the appeal of the written word. Nazi and other fascist leaders stressed the spoken word, but even here, speeches fulfilled a liturgical function rather than presenting a didactic exposition of the ideology. The spoken word itself was integrated into the cultic rites, and what was

actually said was, in the end, of less importance than the setting and the rites which surrounded such speeches.

To be sure, Hitler and Mussolini wrote theoretical works. Within the Nazi movement Alfred Rosenberg's standing depended to a large extent upon books like *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.) But in practice it was different. No doubt millions read these works, yet even among them the importance of the spoken over the written expression of the ideology was emphasized. As in any traditional cult, the cultic action itself took the place of theoretical works. Even *Mein Kampf* never became a bible for the Nazi movement in the same sense that the writings of Marx and Engels became fundamental to the Socialist world. There was no need for this, for the ideas of *Mein Kampf* had been translated into liturgical forms and left the printed page to become mass rites of national, Aryan worship.

To term such dissemination "propaganda" is singularly inappropriate here, for it denotes something artificially created, attempting to capture the minds of men by means of deliberate "selling" techniques. This is to misunderstand the organic development of the Nazi cult and its essentially religious nature. Typically enough, even as acute an observer as Theodor Heuss, who was to become the first president of the German Federal Republic, believed in 1932 that the dissemination of Nazi propaganda was influenced solely by considerations of success or failure. It was the results which counted.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, such pragmatism was considered proven by the fact that this propaganda excluded discussion with its enemies and their point of view. There is some truth in this observation, for no deeply held religious faith is open to rational dialogue. But the very success of the propaganda which Heuss acknowledged should have given him pause. It was not, after all, created for a specific political purpose only in 1932, but constituted the adoption of a political style which in Germany had already passed through its necessary stages of organic growth. The "religious instruction" given by the party was for Heuss

merely an example of bad taste. While he realized that Hitler valued the written less than the spoken word, this understanding did not lead him to connect this fact with the cultic nature of the Nazi movement. Instead, he ascribed Hitler's preference for the spoken word to the Führer's insight into his own limitations.<sup>17</sup> Heuss's attitude is typical of civilized and liberal people when they are faced with the phenomenon of the new politics. Many historians who now have the advantage of hindsight have followed in these footsteps.

The accusation that through propaganda the Nazis attempted to erect a terrorist world of illusions can be upheld only in part. No one would deny the presence of terror, but enough evidence has accumulated to account for the genuine popularity of Nazi literature and art which did not need the stimulus of terrorism to become effective.<sup>18</sup> This is true for the Nazi political style as well; it was popular because it was built upon a familiar and congenial tradition.

For those of the left, even today, the fascist appeal to irrationality was due to the supposed fact that late capitalist society could only defend itself by such a regression.<sup>19</sup> But if the Nazi political style was a specific phenomenon of late monopoly capitalism, then such capitalism must be read back into the time of the French Revolution and the early nineteenth century. For it was at that point that the new politics really began and was developed as an act of mass participation. But for Karl Marx that age was precisely the time when capitalism made its positive contribution to society. As we shall see, the German workers' movement itself attempted, however reluctantly, to adopt and, in fact, contribute to the new political style. Recently, however, some Marxist analyses of fascism have no longer seen that movement as merely an instrument of capitalism, but instead as a spontaneous mass movement exploiting crisis conditions. The emphasis on spontaneity still disconnects fascism from the course of history and endows it with unique qualities. In the final analysis, the left's concept of fascism with its emphasis on propaganda and ma-

nipulation is, in this case, similar to the liberal attitudes described above. How misleading these points of view actually are, this book hopes to demonstrate.

As we have stated, German mass politics and mass democracy moved in a world of myth and symbol, and defined political participation by means of cultic rites and settings. The appeal was directed to activating men's emotions, their own subconscious drives. This is hardly a new insight, nor one confined to Germany. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when mass movements came to be more frequent and dominant, both Gustave Le Bon and Georges Sorel in France had already formulated theories similar to those we are discussing, designed to direct and control mass movements.

Le Bon stated as a fact in 1889 that the "substitution of the unconscious actions of crowds for the conscious activities of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age."<sup>20</sup> After observing the masses in action during the movement headed by General Boulanger, Le Bon said that he was impressed with what he called the "conservatism of crowds," and the importance inherited ideas seemed to have for them. These ideas he believed were expressed through myths, and his contemporary, Georges Sorel, held that workers could not be led into a general strike without appealing to the ancient myth of heroism in battle.<sup>21</sup> However ambivalent Le Bon and Sorel may have been about the results of their observations, both believed that political institutions no longer mattered, but that instead a new "magic" determined the nature of politics.

Hitler and Mussolini were both influenced by Le Bon's analysis. However, Le Bon only summarized a trend which already existed before his time, and which was much more complex than the "magical" relationship between leader and led upon which he concentrated. Politics was a drama within which liturgical rites took a place, a concept which has been aptly defined by Erik Erikson: "Ceremonial permits a group to behave in a symbolically ornamental way so that it seems to

present an ordered universe; each particle achieves an identity by its mere interdependence with all the others."<sup>22</sup> But this interdependence is cemented by symbolic action: episodic, as in public festivals; and more permanent, as in the formation of special groups like the gymnasts or in the construction of national monuments.

The French Revolution was the first modern movement where the people sought to worship themselves outside any Christian or dynastic framework. Honoré Gabriel de Mirabeau, one of the leaders of the revolution, summarized the purpose of the revolutionary cult: as in Greece and Rome, civic festivals must lead people step by step to envisage a unity between their faith and the government.<sup>23</sup> The "cult of reason" was supposed to replace Catholic ceremonial. But this cult of reason abandoned rationalism; it tended to substitute the Goddess of Reason for the Virgin Mary and infuse its cult with hymns, prayers, and responses modeled on the Christian liturgy. The festivals of the revolution and their symbols attempted to transform everyone into active participants. The mere creation of a worshipful mood was not considered good enough. Typically, Joseph Chénier's drama, *Triomphe de la République*, brought everyone to the stage: women and infants, old men and young, magistrates and military. Choirs and processions gave Republican ceremonies a religious cast.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Goddesses of Reason replaced the Virgin Mary in churches which themselves were transformed into temples devoted to the cult of the revolution. The Cathedral of Notre Dame became known as the Temple of Reason. Nature, too, was certainly not forgotten; the revolution even endowed the early morning rays of the sun with symbolic and political importance.<sup>25</sup> The "general will" became a new religion.

Though the cults of the revolution dominated Paris for barely one year, they provided a dress rehearsal for the new politics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany. For the mass movements of modern times also sought to worship the "general will," whether it was that of the people who



formed a nation or those who formed the proletariat. The symbols would change, the concept of a sacred cult become more elaborate, but the example of the revolution was to provide a continuous inspiration. Even the classicism which an artist like Jacques-Louis David annexed to revolutionary propaganda, later, in Germany, determined much of the sense of beauty and form of the new political style.

Within the new politics, however, the de-Christianization of the worship of the people was never to become an accomplished fact. The religious and patriotic ideas of German Pietism had a profound effect upon the development of German nationalism, and therefore upon the cult and liturgy of that movement. Originally, in the seventeenth century, Pietism was a completely inner-directed movement within which state and nation vanished. Only in the eighteenth century did Pietists begin to include visions of the nation within their ideal of the spirit and Christian love. In 1784, for example, Friedrich Carl von Moser connected "Pia Desideria" (true piety) with the sanctification of service on behalf of truth and the fatherland.<sup>26</sup> Pietism managed to forge a unity between religion and patriotism, and fill love of the nation with Christian faith. "He who does not love the fatherland which he can see, how can he love the heavenly Jerusalem which he does not see?" (1774).<sup>27</sup> The nation now was not only a Christian nation, but was filled with a mystical Christianity which was constantly equated with the inner spirit. "The fatherland is within you," a "sacred space" within every man's soul.<sup>28</sup>

This Pietism infused the German heritage with a dynamic and emotional content of great importance in creating the kind of brotherly community, based on love, that Pietists desired. Pietism, for all its inwardness, did not discard liturgical forms. For Count Zinzendorf, a central figure in eighteenth-century German Pietism, Christian liturgy expressed the unity of the Christian community better than mere words. Christianity both through piety and liturgy unified this community, and it is small wonder that in Germany Christian

liturgical form and the national cult were to exist in close proximity. Ernst Moritz Arndt, the poet of German unity, said in 1814 that Christian prayer should accompany national festivals,<sup>29</sup> but even when such obvious linkage vanished the national cult retained not only the forms of Christian liturgy intact, but also the ideal of beauty: the "beauty of holiness" which was exemplified by Christian churches. This tradition, fused with classicism, led to such artistic forms as could inspire political action. Both in the French Revolution and in Pietism, the ideal of inner-directed creative activity had already pushed outward into the political realm.

The artistic and the political had fused. Against the problems of industrialization, German nationalism defined itself as truly creative; the artistic became political. The parallel with Christianity was once again present. Christian art was the visible expression of Christian theology and the beauty of the liturgy aided in disciplining the congregation. Artistic creativity for the German nationalist movement was not merely an expression of man's inner nature, but helped also to give form to the shapeless mass through symbols and public festivals. In the choice of "sacred places" in which festivals and national monuments were set, a similar emphasis was placed upon emotions that were fostered by the proper environment, which was also the function that Church architecture fulfilled in Christianity.

The pragmatism of daily politics lay within this cultic framework and for most people was disguised by it. But "disguise" is perhaps the wrong term in this context, for any disguise which utilizes regular liturgic and cultic forms becomes a "magic" believed by both leaders and people, and it is the reality of this magic with which we are concerned. The politics of German national unification, its economic and social basis, these have often been investigated by historians. But they have forgotten that nationalism was a mass movement and as such embraced many different classes in propagating a fervent belief which became a major force of its own. The

climax of this magic came during the Nazi period, but it was of importance long before that time.

We may not agree with the psychologist William McDougall's contention that nationalism, because it exalts character and conduct in a higher degree than any other form of group spirit, is psychologically justified. But nationalism did provide an object for mental activity which McDougall quite correctly saw as a prerequisite for the group spirit.<sup>30</sup> Nationalism proved most successful in creating the new politics in part because it was based on emotion. But this emotion did not produce a "crowd in ecstasy" simply because reason and logic were missing.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the careful efforts of nationalist movements were directed toward disciplining and directing the masses in order to avoid that chaos which defeats the creation of a meaningful mass movement.

Fascists and National Socialists have only been the most recent mass movements to make the theories of men like Le Bon come alive. It would have been more pleasant to describe the new politics as a failure. But tracing its course over so long a period, we cannot do so. Surely, if unfortunately, we have touched upon one of the principal dynamics of politics in a mass age. It would have been much more satisfactory to repeat the dialogue in one of the 1920's plays of the poet Ernst Toller: "The masses, not man himself, are the only effective force. No, the individual is supreme!"<sup>32</sup> Toller believed that both the masses and patriotism were surrogates for naked egoism. They stood in the way of the power which the individual should possess. If only Toller's ideal could have been transformed into historical reality! Instead, the conjunction of masses and nationalism was not manipulated by but in fact shaped much of modern German history. The voices of intellectuals like Ernst Toller were lost in the crowd.

This book is concerned with the growth of a secular religion. As in any religion, the theology expressed itself through a liturgy: festivals, rites, and symbols which remained constant in an ever-changing world. National Socialism, without

doubt, illustrates the climax of the uses of the new politics. Fascist Italy also had its festivals and symbols, but Mussolini did not give them the key importance which Hitler saw in their application. We cannot claim to give a complete history of the growth and development of the new politics in Germany here; we shall merely try to analyze its nature and to demonstrate its development through the use of the most important and significant examples. Nor can we give detailed explanations of the political developments which accompanied the growth of the new politics in Germany. Yet it is useful to sketch the principal periods of German history within which the nationalization of the masses took place.

The first such period stretches from the "wars of liberation" (1813-14) against Napoleon to the attainment of German unity in 1871. The very beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed a feeling of disappointment with the disunity of Germany and the nature of its fragmented government. The German Confederation, founded at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, was unsatisfactory because princes instead of the people continued to rule; and instead of bringing national unity, the Congress created a loose confederation of thirty-nine states. This situation led to a glorification of the past "wars of liberation" against the French, when Germans had fought side by side against the intruders. The systems of government enforced by the reaction which followed the Congress of Vienna and its suspicion of nationalism gave the new politics its starting point: democratic and nationalist, opposed to the Establishment. The revolutions of 1848, important as they were as a part of German history, are of less consequence in the history of myth, symbols, and mass movements. To be sure, the 1860's saw an intensification of nationalism and its use of the new politics. But this took place under the spell of Italian national unification and as a long-range reaction to the failure to gain national unity in 1848.

The Second Reich, 1871-1918, was the fulfillment of many hopes for unity, yet that period was one of crisis for the new

politics. Bismarck dominated Germany until his fall from power in 1890. The "Iron Chancellor" created a Reich in accordance with his view of *Realpolitik*, stressing the power of the state rather than the kind of spiritual unity that nationalists had thought important. The new Germany was unified only to the extent that was absolutely necessary: minorities were left alone, the individual states retained many of their powers,<sup>33</sup> and Bismarck's conservatism seemed unable to check the social divisions which were threatening to divide the nation at a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization. The state attempted to annex the nationalist dynamic and tame it into respectability, thus endangering its dynamic and democratic potential. Emperor William II (1888-1918) from the nationalist point of view continued these conservative policies, in spite of the high hopes first placed in the "people's Emperor." The German Republic, which followed the Second Reich and the lost war, gave the new politics a new impetus. The beginning of the Weimar Republic in 1918 ushered in the true age of sustained mass politics: as an expression of revolutionary ferment, left or right, and as a political necessity in a state based upon the ballot box. The very weakness of the Weimar Republic transformed it into a forum where each group could fight out its own vision of Germany's future, provided it could attract enough following. It was no longer Bismarck's Germany, where the emperor had held most of the threads of government in his own hands. In 1933 the triumph of National Socialism liquidated parliamentary government, but retained those techniques of mass politics that had been developing for over a century before the actual seizure of power.

Within this historical development we can see a certain rhythm which determined the growth of the new politics. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the unification of Germany, it arose for the most part outside the framework of the German states, directed rather against the governments. The urge toward national unity did not find

favor in the eyes of most kings and princes who ruled the nation. But after 1871 and until the birth of the Weimar Republic, the new German state attempted to manipulate the liturgy, to bend it toward an officially sanctioned nationalism. This attempt seemed to stifle the liturgical impulse which had been in the forefront during the earlier period. We shall see this reflected in the development of national monuments, as well as in the fate of those organizations which had proved crucial in the history of the national cult before unification. But protests against this imposition of a liturgy from above became important, and, for example, found their expression in new theatrical forms as well as in the "festivals" devised by Richard Wagner at Bayreuth. Finally, in the Weimar Republic, when all politics became mass politics, something of the earlier dynamic of the national liturgy would be restored.

Though this political style had a force of its own long before National Socialism appeared, it has seemed useful throughout this book to look forward from time to time in order that we may not lose touch with the climax of this political development. For in spite of all the problems which the new politics faced, we can detect a basic continuity that extends from the struggle for national liberation against Napoleon to the political liturgy of the Third Reich. Such continuity is not to be confused with a search for the origins of the Third Reich. Rather, we are concerned with the growth and evolution of a political style which National Socialism perfected. The aesthetics of politics, which is our concern, its objectification in art and architecture, did form Adolf Hitler's mind to a large extent. But this does not mean that it led to National Socialism or that it caused the German dictatorship. Such an assertion would be simplistic, given the complexity of history. The new politics stood on its own two feet; those attracted to it were not only National Socialists, but also members of other movements which found this style attractive and useful for their particular purposes. However attractive this political style proved to be for much of the popula-

tion, however important a function it fulfilled in an age of mass politics, it provided merely one among a great variety of factors which went into the making of the Third Reich.

In analyzing a political style which was eventually used for such ugly ends, it may seem odd to begin with a discussion of beauty. But the "aesthetics of politics" was the force which linked myths, symbols, and the feeling of the masses; it was a sense of beauty and form that determined the nature of the new political style. The ugly ends to which this style was eventually used were masked by the appeal of the new politics for a large section of the population, by its usefulness in capturing their longings and their dreams. A concept of beauty objectified the dream world of happiness and order while it enabled men to contact those supposedly immutable forces which stand outside the flow of daily life.

## The Aesthetics of Politics

A RECENT French writer has coined the phrase, "le snobisme de l'absolu,"<sup>1</sup> describing a literary and intellectual snobbishness that looks for heroes to worship and for the exceptional in life. To be sure, such an attitude had existed in the past and it eventually led many intellectuals into the arms of fascism, where they sought their heroes and a life removed from the ordinary drabness of bourgeois existence. But this kind of snobbery was also basic to the new politics, and appealed to the masses as it did to intellectuals. For the cult of politically charged myths and symbols was based on their exceptionality, on the fact that they stood outside the ordinary course of history and could be truly understood only by those who heroically defended them. The longing for experiences outside daily life, experiences which "uplift," is basic to all religious cults and was continually transferred to the secular religion of politics. Even the bourgeoisie liked to infuse their ordered lives with the extraordinary and the uplifting. An examination of the European novel around the turn of the last century has shown that the mystique of "living life to the full" had become a secularized myth in which domestic or public festivals symbolized the high point of existence.<sup>2</sup> Through such festive occasions the banal was transformed into a closer unity between men and nature, into a community among men.

An occasion was considered festive because, through symbols, it brought to light another world, that of wholeness,