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1

Introduction: The Evolutions and Convolutions of Political Religion

Roger Griffin

Joined at the hip

Johann Goethe once claimed that ‘great events throw their shadow before them’. Perhaps it is the instinct of scholars in the human sciences to work where the light is strongest that explains why some of the major, formative processes of modern history have been added so belatedly and hurriedly to the repertoire of legitimate research topics. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that the pioneers of sociology engaged intelligently with the impact of industrialisation and what has come to be known as ‘modernity’, long after countless writers and artists had started investigating its ominous spiritual fallout with visionary clarity. Subsequently, such epoch-forming phenomena as the rise of socialism and ‘the masses’, nationalism, Bolshevism, fascism, anti-colonialism, the counter-culture of the 1960s, and ecologism have entered the West’s historical consciousness by stealth rather than in the full glare of academic analysis.

‘Political religion’ (PR) seems destined to be regarded one day as yet another phenomenon which should have engaged the collective attention of the Western human sciences more promptly and urgently. Perhaps some of the intellectual resources needed for this could have diverted from what was, for decades, too often a sterile, unimaginative, and highly politicised preoccupation with ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘extremism’ – both of which ironically turn out to be fully intelligible only once their relationship to PR has been grasped. The latter’s continued neglect by many mainstream historians, political scientists, and sociologists may have been encouraged by the difficulty Western academia has experienced in breaking out of centuries of Enlightenment rationalism that underestimated the power of the irrational and mythic.

2 Introduction

Its grasp on the concept of religion may also have been weakened by even more centuries of Eurocentrism, which made the sophisticated parallel universes of cognition and human science bound up with the world's major non-Judeo-Christian religions – notably the rich intellectual traditions of Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu thought – practically invisible except to specialists in 'Oriental Studies'.

The genesis of this book lies in the conference 'Political Religions in the Modern Era', held in May 2004 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in honour of Professor Stanley Payne's retirement. It is here that most of the chapters collected in this volume were first presented in embryonic form.¹ The three that constitute Part I 'problematise' the concept political religion and underline the need for definitional and taxonomic clarity in applying it to particular ideological phenomena. At the same time, they demonstrate how much the understanding of the modern world would be impoverished if it – or some close equivalent – was not used. Part II then offers four examples of the sacralisation of politics under secular political regimes of the right and left, while Part III consists of three case studies in what at first sight may appear the politicisation of religious cosmologies. However, it turns out to deal with considerably more complex compounds of 'this worldly' and suprahistorical, metaphysical constructions of reality. Overall, the book reveals the multifaceted, heterogeneous nature of PR in the modern world, as well as its power literally to change the course of history.

The term 'political religion' is, of course, only one of several with which academics have sought to capture and interpret the presence of the 'sacred in politics', a phenomenon first engaged with in a systematic way by Eric Voegelin and Raymond Aron in the late 1930s, even though the 'religious' aspect of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Nazism had been widely commented on before their groundbreaking works. Since 1945, the subject has occupied some formidable – sometimes impenetrable – minds and, by the dawn of the twenty-first century, had developed a sizable specialist literature,² as well as its own dedicated academic journal in English.³ Since 9/11 it now finds itself a fashionable topic, much as nationalism became suddenly 'in' as a theme for book proposals and conferences after the collapse of the Soviet Union caused repressed nationalisms to spring out of the ground like mushrooms.

This book joins a stream of would-be major contributions to the task of understanding how far the religious can be disentangled from the political in the modern age, and how far attempts to do so reveal them in some cases to be as organically inseparable as Siamese twins. Yet the renaissance of PR as a concept has not been welcomed by all historians. Ian Kershaw, for

example, had occasion – in the course of his reflections on the uniqueness of Nazism – to dismiss its renaissance as a field of studies ‘as the “vaguish revamping of an age-old notion”’ which could contribute nothing to the understanding of the Third Reich.⁴ Hopefully this book, dedicated to one of the most eminent modern historians of the Anglophone world, will give other historians pause if they are tempted to echo such summary dismissals of the term’s value. On the other hand, those already predisposed to recognise PR’s heuristic potential should have no difficulty identifying several features that make this volume a particularly valuable contribution to fostering the maturation of a specialism which, though well out of its infancy, is still undergoing a somewhat turbulent adolescence. It is a specialism, moreover, that finds itself having to grow up fast against the background of a political and social world being daily reshaped by the very forces with which it is grappling in a Laocoon-like embrace.

The first ‘special feature’ is that in several of the essays the author emphasises the thorny taxonomic problems raised by the concept of ‘the sacred in politics’ and suggests ways of resolving them in a way that invites intelligent debate and a process of convergence rather than ghettoisation into hostile ‘camps’ of thought. Second, the case studies range from the well-trod territory of the two interwar fascist regimes, Soviet communism, and the US ‘religious right’ to several phenomena with which few readers are likely to have more than a nodding acquaintance: Maoism, Castroism, ‘democratic’ Islam in Turkey, and Hindutva. Third, taken together the chapters demonstrate the powerful contribution that this field of studies can make to understanding major episodes in the unfolding of modern and contemporary political history when an equilibrium is achieved between two dynamic ‘moments’ of analysis: the first subsumes the particular ‘nomothetically’ within generic concepts associated with PR; the second is an ‘idiographic’ concern with the uniqueness of particular movements in all their complexity and individual ‘personality’.

Fourth, rather than implicitly condemning the ‘extremism’ and ‘fanaticism’ of PR in the name of democracy, reason, and moderation, these essays cumulatively call into question simplistic equations of the intrusion of the sacred into politics regarded as extremist. Instead they invite a more sober, more forensic examination of the phenomenon. This means carrying out research ‘in depth’ in a way that subsumes not just more attention to empirical detail, but a more methodologically and culturally self-questioning examination of the irrational, and – from a liberal humanist perspective – dangerous ‘religious’ forces that can embed themselves not just in movements openly opposed to democracy,

but within democracy itself. When hosted by democratic processes, PR can set about corroding even the best entrenched ‘liberal’ systems from within. These general points can be grasped more fully if we briefly consider the chapters in sequence.

Part I: Conceptualising political religion

Stanley Payne’s article, written shortly after the 2004 Madison conference and first published in an issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, sets the analytical, exploratory tone of much of the book by considering the problems of refining ‘political religion’ as an ideal type to the point where it becomes of significant heuristic value to historians. Having highlighted crucial ambiguities in the core term ‘religion’, it proceeds to use the distinction proposed in Emilio Gentile’s groundbreaking *Politics as Religion* between ‘political’ and ‘civic’ religion in considering the interpenetration of religious and political projects under Christianity, Islam, the French Revolution, and American democracy. The scope of the discussion is then widened by considering the religious component intrinsic to revolutionary movements and regimes of the left and right, notably Anarchism, Marxism–Leninism, Fascism, and Nazism.

The vast remit of the topic is further highlighted when Payne dwells on the importance of the *Juche* cult (originally an offspring of Marxism–Leninism and the specific political situation of North Korea), the charismatic politics of new African states, Islamism, Basque nationalism, and ‘multiculturally diverse political correctness’, which he dubs ‘MDPC’ to indicate that it has assumed traits of a civic religion. What emerges from such a panoramic vista is the indispensability of the concept ‘political religion’ in order to make sense of a wide range of diverse political phenomena that have arisen as a response to a globalising and secularising modernity. Yet it also throws into relief the considerable pragmatic difficulties involved in extricating the sacred from the secular, let alone mapping their respective zones of competence. It also demonstrates the need for comparative studies in this area of the human sciences to cast their empirical net as widely as possible to avoid the risk of generalising from a handful of familiar Western paradigms of both politics and religion – thereby falling back into the trap of Eurocentrism.

Werner Ustorf adds a fresh angle to understanding the religious dimension of PR with his presentation of the sophisticated response to sacralised politics formulated in interwar Europe by two Christian intellectuals acutely conscious of the gulf between the metaphysical foundations of their religious belief and their commitment to any worldly

creed, above all Nazism. It is noteworthy that both Paul Schütz and Hans Ehrenberg – in tune with an existentialist theological reading suspicious of the institutionalisation and external trappings of Christianity – sanctioned the application of the term ‘religion’ to political ideologies so long as it was not confused with the *faith* that sustains a metaphysical and genuinely redemptive, ‘soteriological’ worldview. The particular interest of Schütz’s thesis today is that it was formulated partly as the reaction of a Christian missionary to his encounter with Islam outside the haven of European religious constructions.

Even greater heuristic mileage for contemporary historians is implicit in Ehrenberg’s theory, however. It held that the increasingly global crisis provoked by modernity in the interwar period was leading some forms of ultranationalism to promote a symbolic return to a largely mythic and artificially constituted ‘original religion’ in order to satisfy the primordial human need for roots and meaning. At the same time, he recognised that the resulting PR also embraced technological advance in a resolutely anti-reactionary, anti-conservative spirit, producing a ‘post-religious’ situation whose complexity defies crude categories of ‘modern’ and ‘anti-modern’, ‘religious’ or ‘secular’. This is a model with considerable potential for understanding not only a number of the most powerful ‘totalitarian’ regimes of the twentieth century, but contemporary forms of religious politics as well. Indeed, the relevance of this theory to Frykenberg’s later essay on Hindutva is particularly striking. In short, Ustorf’s essay underlines the value of looking beyond the pioneering work of Voegelin or Aron to analyse the role played by *theological* thinkers, past and present, in pioneering political religious studies when contemporary academics first set out to refine their understanding of the key concepts and phenomena involved. (Perhaps the voices of non-Christian theologians and clerics on such matters could also prove illuminating.)

The essay by Eusebio Mujal-León and Eric Langenbacher has been included in the section on ‘Conceptualising Political Religion’ because of the sustained methodological concern they demonstrate with the task of constructing a taxonomic framework appropriate to answering the question ‘Is Castroism a political religion?’ Their reflections cause them to propose their own typological schema based on the intersection of two axes, running from ideology to PR and from traditional to non-traditional religion. They also lead to the identification of a cluster of criteria by which to assess the strength of a PR in a given regime. Castroism is then evaluated according to these criteria, principally totalitarianism, the leader principle, the aspiration to create a ‘new man’ as the embodiment of Cuba’s moral regeneration, the creation of a new

calendar and a new political liturgy, as well as extreme nationalism. This points to a growing pocket of consensus within the human sciences, for their approach has an obvious resonance with the taxonomic scheme illuminating the linkages between PR, totalitarianism, and palingenetic myth proposed in *Politics as Religion* – the scheme that also forms the starting point to Stanley Payne’s chapter.

What Mujal-León and Langenbacher’s chapter indirectly highlights is not only the irreconcilable tension between political and revealed religion, but the way propaganda and coercion are born to varying degrees from the totalising thrust of all fully fledged political religions, however idealistic and benign the original ‘cause’. It also shows that putative PR ‘isms’ like Castroism are to be approached as complex developmental processes and continually mutating phenomena rather than static, homogeneous entities easily lending themselves to straightforward classification within rigid categories.

Part II: The sacralisation of politics

The analysis of Castroism serves as a suitable prelude to Part II of this book, which is concerned with the ‘sacralisation of politics’. This part opens with Robert Mallett’s analysis of the attempted Fascistisation of Italy under Mussolini as a sustained attempt to infuse a nebulous sense of the ‘sacred’ into all aspects of social existence and consciousness. The strategies it employed to achieve this end shows that it clearly operated – in terms of a distinction later applied in Vondung’s chapter – simultaneously as a *Ersatzreligion*, a substitute religion, and a *Religionsersatz* [a substitute for religion], or rather – in Schütz’s terminology – as a *Glaubensersatz* [a substitute for a metaphysical faith], despite the National Fascist Party’s (PNF) sustained attempt to paper over the cracks between the regime and the Vatican. Rather than adopting the conventional tack of seeking evidence for this in written texts, Mallett uses a series of images drawn from painting, posters, and media art to project the Fascist vision of the leader, the new man, the nation, the Militia, *Romanità* (‘Romanness’), the new Empire, and the new Europe. It is clear that the ‘spirituality’ underpinning the vision of aviation, war, and the new Italy they convey was neither Christian nor ‘pagan’, but rooted in a cultic reverence towards the transformative, redemptive power of the modern state itself. In other words, they are products of what Ehrenberg implies should be seen as a ‘post-Christian’ religion which combines the cult of an imagined past with the embrace of technology in a spirit that is to be seen as fundamentally *modernist* instead of reactionary.

Klaus Vondung's consideration of the value in seeing Nazism as a form of PR focuses on a point reinforcing the groundbreaking analyses of the Third Reich put forward by Voegelin, Raymond, Mosse, and Vondung himself, notably his study of the 'ideological cult and political religion of Nazism'.⁵ In their different ways, they all stress the importance of recognising a genuine element of belief in a suprapersonal – but not suprahistorical – 'immortality' as crucial to explaining events in Germany between 1933 and 1945. The first of three important inferences to be drawn from this chapter is the conviction that Nazism's mission was to intensify the spirituality of the 'eternal' German *Volk*, one not coterminous with the direct transposition of a Christian cosmology, soteriology, and philosophy of history into secular terms in the way suggested by Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch. Nor does it vindicate Richard Steigmann-Gall's thesis propounded in *The Holy Reich*⁶ that Nazism represented the 'positive Christianity' claimed by Nazi propaganda. Instead, we are dealing with a sacralisation of politics clothed in a blend of Christian and pagan religiosity which is ultimately an attempt to apotheosise the nation and wean Christians from their 'true' faith.

Second, Vondung attaches considerable weight to the value of 'apocalypticism' as a generic historical narrative of imminent renewal from decadence or societal collapse. He suggests that the radicalisation of the Nazis' 'holy' war to achieve racial purity and historical redemption – a war which culminated in genocide on an unparalleled scale – is unintelligible without appreciating the central role played by the eschatological master narrative embedded in the Nazi understanding of the crisis of contemporary society. It is an approach which highlights the importance of its readiness to demonise the Jews and other alleged racial enemies to the point of seeing their destruction as a cathartic event, the precondition for national rebirth. The third point implicit in Vondung's analysis is that Nazism actually involved elements of the two processes that purists would like to keep apart: the politicisation of religion and the sacralisation of politics, another reminder of the ideal typical – and hence necessarily *utopian* – nature of water-tight taxonomic categories in this area of study.

It might be expected that, in contrast to fascism, Marxism-Leninism represented a refreshingly unambiguous, 'one-way' process of 'the sacralisation of politics'. However, apart from challenging the terminology adopted elsewhere in the book by recommending Aron's concept of 'secular religion' rather than 'political religion' for communism's more comprehensive, totalising implications, Anatoly Khazanov soon disabuses the reader of such naïve assumptions. He shows that Bolshevism 'faithfully' followed the template of Christianity both as a total creed and a social

practice profoundly with respect to a series of phenomena – the ‘sacrality’ of the new political order and historical dispensation, the proselytism and messianism of Marxism–Leninism, the deification of leaders, the treatment of canonical ideological writings as ‘Holy Scriptures’, the pervasive sense of evil, and the expectation of the ‘new Soviet man’. Indeed, readers might infer at times that they are reading about a radically secularised form of religion rather than an extreme example of the sacralisation of politics. Certainly, Khazanov shows that, in functional terms at least, Bolshevism set out to ‘substitute’ the religious role of the Church by offering a source of social cohesion, identity, salvation, rituals, and rites based on an all-embracing cosmology and iconography.

Another feature of Khazanov’s analysis is that it addresses an important aspect of all regimes whose praxis is based on a totalising PR, whether of the right or left, by stressing the utter utopianism of its vision of the ideal society and highlighting the fatal human consequences of the Bolsheviks’ ruthless attempt to realise Marxism–Leninism as a total worldview within a few years of historical time. That said, by the 1980s the Bolshevik system had become a hollow shell, no less devoid of social, affective, and existential substance for the subjugated masses than the Tsarist regime it had replaced.

The far-reaching implications of Khazanov’s analysis for understanding the political history of communism are emphasised when read in conjunction with Rana Mitter’s study of the Maoist Cultural Revolution from the perspective of PR. Demolishing stereotypes of Maoism’s essential ‘Otherness’ forged during the Cold War, the key role played by European modernity in its genesis is thrown into sharp relief. When modernisation started conspicuously devastating the foundations of the millennial feudal system of Imperial China, a new generation of intellectuals became exposed to ‘Western’ brands of utopianism. As a result, the subjective ‘crisis of civilisation’ triggered by the First World War and the ensuing period of anti-liberalism, authoritarianism, and mass movements in Europe were able to have a formative impact on the political climate within which both Kuomintang nationalism and Chinese communism emerged. This provided fertile soil for a tradition of utopian radicalism launched by Maoism that was not abruptly terminated in 1945 as it was in Europe with the defeat of Fascism and Nazism. At its height, the 1960s Cultural Revolution was mass-producing programmatic declarations of the need for cleansing violence that recall the cult of creative destruction promoted by earlier generations of ‘Nietzschean’ revolutionaries such as Mikhail Bakunin, Filippo Marinetti, or Ernst Jünger. Striking too is Maoism’s intrinsically futural

(and modernist) dimension as a radical attempt to create a new nation and a 'new man' on the basis of an agrarian society in order to transcend the social chaos and ideological void of post-imperial China.

Another important point for the comparative study of PR in Mitter's chapter is the largely spontaneous emergence in China of 'religious' forms of political ideology and ritual – notably the 'salvationist' aura of Mao himself as a redeemer figure and the 'scriptural' connotations of his thought for the Red Guard. These are deeply familiar from European history to Western historians, even though Maoist China's proportionally minute intelligentsia had no Christian role models upon which to base its ideas, and despite the profound gulf separating Confucianism and Christianity as belief systems. This implies that the roots of modern PR need to be sought in the more primordial strata of human belief and psychology than is suggested by much existing work on Fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism, whose collective focus rarely extends beyond the Christian millenarianism of early modern Europe. Another intriguing parallel with the Western experience of the sacralisation of politics worth exploring in this context is what Mitter portrays as the ritualisation of the 'Long March' to become a secular pilgrimage – another example of primordial rather than Christian symbology at work. This is highly reminiscent of the re-enactment of the 'Great Trek' by Boer nationalists in 1936, which became such a major feature of their self-invention as a homogeneous 'Volk' within Ossewabrandwag cosmology.

Given the spectacular achievement of communist China in making the transition from the Cultural Revolution to a capitalist boom economy, the staggering percentage of the world's population and economic resources directly involved in this transition, and the causal link between Maoist 'fundamentalism' and the Pol Pot regime, Mitter's chapter underlines the urgent need for comparative PR studies to include Maoism alongside Fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism – all of which are paradigmatic examples of PR's ability to inspire both modern revitalisation movements and totalitarian regimes within the unique conditions of the twentieth century. The lack of an established Church in China, to be replaced or aped by Maoism, also makes it one of the 'purest' examples of PR unaffected or undistorted by the 'Politicisation of Religion', which is the theme of Part III.

Part III: The politicisation of religion

11 September 2001 inaugurated a climate of debate in the Western media dominated by ill-conceived talk of 'religious fundamentalism', 'clashes

of civilisation', and 'Islamofascism'. The present book deliberately goes against the grain of populist discourse by offering an essay on political Islam in its democratic rather than extremist guise. This is particularly fitting, given that it has been published in honour of an academic whose life has been dedicated to deepening the historical understanding of modern political extremism by looking, as William Blake puts it, 'not with but through the eye', and has never allowed the intrinsic emotiveness of his subject to overwhelm the intellectual rigour and moderation demanded by the 'Enlightenment project'.

In fact, Kemal Karpat's case study in 'political Islam' becomes an oasis of serenity and hope when set against the subject matter of the other essays. His analysis of the achievement of Turkey's *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP – or Justice and Development Party) in becoming integrated within a pluralist party system demonstrates that it is possible to marry Islamic religion with the commitment to democracy, reformism, gradualism, pluralism, and social radicalism on behalf of poor and marginalised ethnic and faith communities. Its achievement is a reminder of the potential power of *un-spectacular*, *non-charismatic* permutations of radical politics whose cohesion is drawn from a *civic* religion. When the sacred in politics is kept compatible with Enlightenment values the quest for suprapersonal values does not centre on the attempted renewal of an 'organic nation' or the defence of a 'sacred' community of 'true believers', but on the no less mythic, and anti-anomic 'human rights' and respect for the 'sanctity' of individual life promoted by the secular faith of humanism, whether it assumes a liberal or religious rationale.

Karpat's essay offers a glimpse of an alternative to the utopianism, fanaticism, and 'active nihilism' bred by totalising political religions, and to the unstable and unsustainable regimes based on them that are condemned to mass-produce crimes against humanity in order to fulfil unrealisable dreams of national homogeneity, the eradication of decadence, and the creation of a new society and the 'new man'. In a utopian scenario, the quiet voice of moderation audible in this chapter would be heard by all those concerned with bringing about the transition from a world rent by conflicts between anti-democratic and pseudo-democratic forces, to a sustainable, pluralistic world community based on global, interlocking systems of representative government underpinning a humane society.

By contrast, the last two chapters of the book plunge the reader once more into the turbulent world of PR in its dehumanising, racist aspect. Their contrast with the analysis of the AKP is perhaps all the more disturbing because, in both cases, the political religion under examination operates

not in an open 'terroristic' war with liberal democracy, but in a guise that corrupts and destroys it from within. Robert Frykenberg's detailed dissection of Hindutva as a PR reveals a force as social, cultural, and philosophical as it is political. At certain points in its evolution, Hindutva has exhibited remarkable parallels with the *völkisch* movement that emerged in Germany in the late nineteenth century to provide an important precondition for the rise of Nazism. In this respect, the chapter is thus another reminder of the need for PR studies to abandon Eurocentric and Christianity-centric assumptions if it is to move beyond the parochial and culture-specific in order to grapple with *global* responses to globalisation, whose original vehicle in this case was British colonialism.

Frykenberg's analysis may be all the more disconcerting for those who rarely stray from the familiar mountain pastures and deep ravines of European political history. In contrast to Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and Mussolini's Partito Nazione Fascista (PNF), politicised Hindu parties, notably the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP), formed in 1980, have not attempted to establish the totalitarian regime that – in the context of interwar Europe – would have been the natural expression of their profoundly racist equation of Hinduism with 'Indianness'. Instead, an astute blend of fanaticism with pragmatism has allowed them to marry the apocalyptic politics of a totalising PR at the level of mass mobilisation and charismatic politics with the constitutional pluralism of India's axiomatically secular state.

By operating as a form of *civic* religion within the parliamentary process, rather than as a terrorist extra-parliamentary movement, the BJP has been able to become India's governing party *constitutionally*. This is a success unparalleled in Europe, where populist racist parties like Le Pen's Front National, which otherwise display some intriguing parallels with Hinduist parties, have never come close to achieving power, despite the waves of moral panic they regularly trigger among left-wing activists. Yet Frykenberg's analysis adds something new to PR studies in another way. Hinduism turns out, no less than *völkisch* nationalism or the Romanian nationalism of the Legionaries of the Archangel Michael, to be an elaborately *invented* tradition. In fact, it is a modern construction so far removed from the spirit of genuine Hindu religious traditions that it is tempting to reverse the common-sense categorisation and approach Hindutva as a *sacralised* form of secular politics *masquerading* as a religious orthodoxy. As such it is a composite substitute *for* religion rather than a 'genuine' politicised religion.

If this were accepted, then the legions of Hindu clerics, priests, and 'holy men' involved in Hindutva would be the contemporary counterparts

of the many Christian clergy who became ‘clerical Fascists’ under Mussolini or who, like the ‘German Christians’, attempted to create a hybrid of Christianity with Nazism.⁷ In this sense they are ‘believers’, but ones who at a deep level of consciousness have somewhere along the line traded in ‘faith’ for ‘religion’. The open-ended spiritual quest to experience the numinous and metaphysical in their earthly existence has thus been bartered for the false security of a heightened sense of racial and historical belonging and *power* that represents a disturbing travesty of a sacred tradition, one which – for those it designates enemies of Hindu India – is often a lethal travesty.

Chip Berlet’s final chapter on the influence of messianism, apocalypticism, and PR on US politics, with its dense mesh of theoretical taxonomic considerations and empirical data, is a suitable chapter with which to conclude this foray into the dense jungle of ‘political religion’. It stresses once more the unresolved definitional issues raised by the concept, and locates it within a cluster of other, no less problematic, generic terms such as ‘fascism’, ‘apocalypticism’, and ‘palingenetic myth’. It also adds further elements of methodological refinement, such as the concept of the ‘metaframe’, and the visual metaphor taken from one of Escher’s series of psychedelic drawings to evoke the dynamic relationship between totalitarianism and the sacralisation of politics. The whistle-stop tour which follows of the key ‘totalitarian groups’ characterising US politics, each with its idiosyncratic relationship to Christianity (politicised religion) or secular racism (sacralised politics), again underscores the challenging taxonomic problems posed by particular phenomena in this field of study.

Berlet adds another significant dimension to this multi-layered analysis with his account of the linkage between the Christian Right, neo-conservatism, and George W. Bush’s Republicanism. By this point it is clear that, no less than in contemporary India, the boundaries between civic and PR are fuzzy to say the least. This is a particularly unsettling inference, since it means that the domestic and foreign policies of the world’s only superpower are being partly shaped – especially in times of national or international crisis – by a cosmology which is, however familiar, at bottom no less bizarrely ‘religious’ in its core axioms than is Hindutva.⁸

Work in progress

Political scientists and contemporary historians are living in what the Chinese call ‘interesting times’. If the first 50 years of the twentieth century were a laboratory for new types of authoritarian *regime*

unclassifiable with the political vocabulary of Greek antiquity, then the last 50 have created a habitat breeding ever new permutations of totalitarian *movement*, which are no less challenging to conventional terminology and taxonomy. 'Totalitarian movements' are ones whose ideological principles, if translated into the praxis of a political system, would create an autocratic regime with its full quota of liturgical politics, charismatic energies, propaganda, coercion, and social engineering directed to the creation of a 'new order', a 'new man', and a 'new woman'.

The renaissance in the comparative study of PR is one response to this situation. It has created an academic environment in which no one volume can hope to be truly 'groundbreaking'. However, some inference about fruitful strategies for future research in this area can be drawn from the ten essays collected here. The first is that however much an advance the taxonomic scheme elaborated in Emilio Gentile's *Religion in Politics* may be on many previous ones, it is still in need of considerable refinement, especially in terms of disentangling 'political' from 'civic' forms of PR and of delimiting the sphere of the sacred from the secular. It will soon become clear to the reader that each author is approaching the topic with a different vocabulary and level of terminological self-consciousness. Moreover, the very term 'political religion' is problematic in so far as it can be used to describe the name of the overall subject area, a 'totalising' form of PR that contrasts with civil religion (a distinction central to Gentile's schema), and the ritual, theatrical, aesthetic, spectacular, liturgical style of politics spawned by totalitarian regimes. 'Civic religion' may also be a more limiting term than 'secular religion', though defining 'secular' poses thorny issues of its own.

Second, these chapters emphasise the need to clarify the core notions of 'religion' and the 'sacred', as well as refining the demarcation between what can variously be called established/revealed/scriptural/institutionalised/traditional religion, and religion in a weaker sense that simply (and simplistically) equates it with any belief system that provides social cohesion and communal values. One way of giving focus to this 'cosmic' area of enquiry is perhaps to concentrate on resolving the ambiguities of the concept of 'transcendence'. Leaving aside the idiosyncratic connotations given the concept by Ernst Nolte in his 1965 *Three Faces of Fascism*, which makes it something fascism 'resisted' rather than aspired to provide, it is surely crucial to distinguish between suprahistorical, supratemporal (metaphysical) transcendence, and one which occurs suprapersonally but *within* secular historical time, through the medium of such mythic entities as the nation, the race, or the international proletariat.

Whatever tack is adopted, it is self-evident from the essays collected here that progress in the understanding of PR will be impeded as long as narrow Christian preconceptions about what constitutes religion, faith, immortality, and the ‘end of history’ persist, while the cosmological schemes found in ‘pre-Christian’, ‘primitive’, ‘pre-scientific’ cosmologies – and the primordial human needs they satisfy – are ignored. Certainly terms such as ‘fundamentalism’, ‘salvation’, ‘prophet’, ‘orthodox’, and ‘secular’ acquire new connotations as social scientists extend the focus of their enquiry to include non-Western phenomena. It is also important not to overlook the profound role religion has always played not just in legitimising the overthrow of ‘traditional regimes’ but also in underpinning their stability.

The chapters also suggest more work needs to be done to illuminate the seemingly obvious distinction between the ‘sacralisation of politics’ by those committed to the secular transformation of society, and the ‘politicisation of religion’ by those who derive a political agenda from their ultra-orthodox faith in a revealed or traditional faith. Such research may reveal that a complex process of hybridisation sometimes takes place that makes the two processes different aspects of the ‘same’ phenomenon, and that politicised and civic religion can also conjoin in ways that defy even complex pigeon-holing.

Finally, the chapters on Maoism and Hindutva in particular offer a tantalising glimpse of another perspective from which to consider the genesis and dynamics of PR – namely as the product of modernity. In turn this opens up the prospect that there may be an as yet largely unrecognised heuristic value in seeing political religions as permutations of socio-political *modernism*.⁹ In other words, such movements embody attempts to counteract the nomic crisis resulting from modernity by erecting a canopy of total meaning to replace the one being gradually worn away by increasingly global processes of modernisation. Much has been understood, but much remains to be done.

The *Festschrift*

Last but not least it is important to stress that the academic analyses contained in this book are not its sole *raison d’être*. As the appendix containing an interview with Stanley Payne as well as his curriculum vitae (CV) to August 2006 make clear, it also serves a celebratory purpose. Given the nature of its subject matter, there is a particular, if benign, irony in the fact that this volume has a subtext of a ritualistic nature, one that points to a transcendent rather than a chronological concept

of time. Of course, any academic publication is an act of defiance in the face of *chronos*, to the extent that its authors and publishers hope it will leave its 'mark' on a specialism or even on an entire discipline. But the conference that served as the genesis of this book was held as a tribute to the 'life-time achievement' of Professor Stanley Payne. The publication of the chapters deriving from the papers given on that occasion (supplemented with two others commissioned to make coverage of the topic more comprehensive) thus constitutes his *Festschrift*. They not only take their place within the growing literature on 'political religion', but partake in what is sometimes known as 'festive time'. As anthropologists will confirm, celebration is itself an act of commemoration, one with echoes of the primordial, *nomos*-generating, 'world-creating' rituals of premodern societies.

At first sight, a book on PR may seem a curious choice for such a purpose. After all, as Stanley Payne's CV eloquently shows, the outstanding achievements of his extraordinarily prolific and influential career have been made firstly as one of the world's most eminent Hispanicists outside Spain, and secondly as a scholar who has, for a quarter of a century, maintained his position as the foremost theorist and historian of generic fascism. Yet in some respects it is singularly appropriate that this volume serves as the testimony, though not the testament, to such an egregious career. This becomes clear if we dwell for a moment on his article exploring the heuristic value of the term 'political religion' opening this volume. It may seem far removed from the first book he published in 1961 on the Spanish Falange, yet its kinship with his established areas of expertise becomes apparent when we consider its historiographical qualities.

Unlike some other well-known historians, Payne has always recognised the need to supplement expert empirical knowledge of a topic with three components. The first is the understanding of the broader historical context of recurrent patterns and kindred phenomena within which every unique set of events can be located. He has instinctively written the history of twentieth-century Spain from the perspective that drove Tim Mason at a 1988 conference to attack the tendency of seeing the history of the Third Reich in isolation from the wider context of interwar history, thus obscuring the fact that Nazism was part of 'something much larger'. There is therefore an organic connection between Payne's study of the Falange in the late 1950s and the work that culminated in his *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism 1931–1939*, published four decades later, that earned him the 2005 Marshall Shulman Prize. It should be noted that this was awarded not by Hispanicists, but by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

The second point is a sustained concern with key generic terms and political science debates pertinent to a given historiographical topic. An interest in the Falange and Franco's regime thus inevitably led Payne to engage proactively in refining the concepts of 'fascism' and 'authoritarianism'. Not only did this lead him to highly productive friendships with major historians in related fields of research who shared this approach – notably Juan Linz, George Mosse, and Emilio Gentile – but to formulate his own taxonomy of fascism, published in 1980 as *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, which eclipsed all other currently available theories of fascism conceptual sophistication and the range of examples covered.

The third is the instinctive grasp of the way not just history but historiography itself is a phenomenon in constant evolution, with new topics and issues coming into view, new theoretical debates forming on the horizon – sometimes evaporating like storm systems as quickly as they appeared – and a steady flow of publications in many languages that incrementally increase the secondary literature on any topic – and hence total wealth of empirical knowledge, only a fraction of which is available to any one researcher. To 'keep up with' a specialism embedded in such a dynamically evolving world of knowledge requires not just an extraordinary industry, but a profound openness and adaptability to an ever-changing academic environment. It was these qualities that have enabled Payne not only to stay in the forefront of the specialist history of Franquism and its many subtopics, but to successfully undertake the history of Spain and Portugal and to update his first book on generic fascism with *A History of Fascism: 1914–1945* (1995). This he did with such consummate skill that it re-established his position at the cutting edge of comparative fascist studies and remains unrivalled as an overview of the subject to this day. It was also these qualities that enabled him to have such a formative influence on shaping the understanding of modern history through his energetic editorial work on numerous journals, notably *The Luso-Brazilian Review* and *The Journal of Contemporary History*.

I would also like to mention a fourth quality which cannot be inferred from the printed page, but which Stanley Payne, again in marked contrast to several eminent contemporary historians, has in abundance. It may even provide the secret mainspring of his glittering career. I am referring to an instinctively passionate, collaborative, and collegial approach to his profession, one that eschews Lorenzian territorial imperatives, seeking instead fruitful points of convergence and synergy rather than conflict and litigation. His blend of modesty with the drive to know

more, learn from others, and share his insights has made him not just an outstanding research academic, but a teacher and colleague of rare distinction. My own laconic testimony must stand for many pages of tributes that could be written by those whose academic careers have been all the richer for his presence in their field.

It is within this context that the opening chapter on the heuristic value of 'political religion' should be read: not just as a contribution to the topic, but also as a sample of Payne's qualities. It displays a concern with comparative frameworks of analysis, an openness to theory, and an urge to find a balance between the idiographic and nomothetic – all hallmarks of his life's work. It subsumes wide-ranging reading in secondary literature, but also concludes with a characteristically original thesis by evoking not the clash between liberalism and Islam, but between religious and cultural exclusiveness and the fanatically 'multi-cultural political correctness', which he construes as a form of civil religion in its own right. His text has been written in a spirit of Enlightenment humanism that will have no truck with wishy-washy sentiments or intellectual laziness. It embraces the concept PR, but only on condition that it is used as an ideal type whose heuristic value is constantly tested by application to properly researched empirical examples.

This book has been published in a spirit of Stanley Payne, and its chapters will hopefully be read in that spirit too. Cumulatively, it encourages historians to turn away from the more extreme contortions of the 'cultural turn', away from 'reading' the past in a way that reduces facts to texts, and the curiously dematerialising effects of 'deconstructing' historical phenomena without the countervailing drive towards interpretive reconstruction. (In political religious studies as elsewhere, explanatory narratives, even grand ones, are not just in order but essential as long as they are reflexive, heuristic and not 'totalising' ones). At the same time it simultaneously appeals to historians to abandon narrow and ultimately sterile conceptions of 'empiricism' that disdains a serious concern with generic concepts, conceptual frameworks, and substrata of irrational motivation. By the same token, it encourages a movement *towards* intelligent engagement with general patterns intrinsic to unique political and historical products of modernity as it continues to globalise itself, spawning events that originate in cosmologies and myths but are all too tragically physical in their real impact on individual human lives.

The conference in Madison upon which this volume is based was, by all accounts, held in a sustained spirit of conviviality. It was a fitting tribute to the life-asserting mode of liberal humanism that for four decades has informed Payne's engagement with some of the most momentous historical events and processes of the twentieth century, many of

which contained a dark core of repression, hatred, and violence. The temperamental reaction to fanaticism implicit in his vast *oeuvre* has been a living expression of a type of humanism that in a utopian scenario would become hegemonic in the new century. Without undermining religious faith, its dissemination would enable prejudice to be replaced by knowledge and fear of the Other would give way to curiosity and respect, dissolving the hatreds and fears that feed the terrorism of secular states as much as that of religious *guerrillas*. However, in the mid-noughties when this book was conceived history was still being decisively shaped by those who bear out the dictum of a poet writing at the height of the Cold War which dominated the second half of the last century: 'And you never ask questions with God on your side.'¹⁰

Notes

1. The exceptions are Stanley Payne's chapter which first appeared as the article 'On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and its Application', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6/2 (September 2005), pp. 163–74, and those of Chip Berlet and Kemel Karpat, which were specially commissioned for this volume.
2. For a bibliographical and historical review of the concept of political religion, see Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). It was first published in Italian in 2001 as *Le religioni della politica* (Bari: Laterza).
3. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* was founded by Robert Mallet and Michael Burleigh in 2000.
4. Ian Kershaw, 'Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39/2 (2004), p. 247.
5. Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 159–71. The thrust of Vondung's argument is summarised in 'Spiritual revolution and magic: speculation and political action in National Socialism', *Modern Age* 23/4 (1979).
6. Richard Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
7. See Matt Feldman and Marius Turda (eds), *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008).
8. A powerful exposure of the crucial role played by Christian faith in shaping the policies of Bush's administration since 9/11 is Emilio Gentile, *La democrazia di Dio: La religione americana nell'era dell'impero e del terrore* (Bari: Laterza, 2006), which appeared in English as *God's Democracy. American religion after September 11* (New York: Praeger, 2008).
9. For a full exposition of this thesis concerning modernism see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Routledge, 2007).
10. Bob Dylan, 'With God on Our Side', *The Times They Are A-Changing* (1964).

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